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# IRAQ AT A CROSSROADS: OPTIONS FOR U.S. POLICY

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**Statement for the Record:  
Deputy Assistant Secretary Brett McGurk**

**Senate Foreign Relations Committee Hearing:  
Iraq at a Crossroads: Options for U.S. Policy**

**July 24, 2014**

Chairman Menendez, Ranking Member Corker, and Members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to discuss the U.S. response to the crisis in Iraq. I just returned from Iraq after spending the past seven weeks in Baghdad and Erbil helping to manage our crisis response with Ambassador Beecroft and our diplomatic and military team on the ground, which is serving with courage and dedication. We were assisted by the tireless efforts of Secretary Kerry, including a visit to Iraq at a critical moment, and the entire national security team, including the daily attention of the President and Vice President.

My testimony today will provide a first-hand account of the U.S. response in Iraq to date, and the foundations we are building to protect U.S. interests over the months ahead.

**I. The Fall of Mosul**

I arrived in Erbil, the capital of the Kurdistan Region, on June 7, three days before Mosul fell to militants led by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). We had been concerned about Mosul for the past year, as it had become the primary financial hub for ISIL, generating nearly \$12 million per month in revenues through extortion and smuggling rackets. From all of our contacts in Mosul, including Iraqi security and local officials, the city by day would appear normal, but at night, ISIL controlled the streets.

One of my first meetings in Erbil on the morning of June 8th was with the Governor of Ninewa province, Atheel Nujaifi. His news was alarming. Over the past 72 hours, he told me, hundreds of ISIL gun trucks, carrying fighters and heavy weapons, had crossed the Iraq-Syria border near the town of Rabiya, then passed north of Tal Afar, before staging on the outskirts of west Mosul. The Iraqi Army agreed to provide assistance to Mosul, but Iraqi commanders did not seem to appreciate the urgency of the situation, and stated that reinforcements might not arrive for a week.

We checked this information with sources in western Ninewa near the Syrian border crossings, and confirmed that ISIL appeared to be coming across in force. We also met immediately with Karim Sinjari, the Minister of Interior of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), who confirmed with real-time information that neighborhoods in western Mosul were under immediate threat, as well as reports from the border regions about a steady stream of ISIL reinforcements crossing into Iraq from Syria. During this meeting, Minister Sinjari spoke to President Masoud Barzani and received authorization to deploy Kurdish Peshmerga units into eastern Mosul to help reinforce Iraqi forces and

deter any ISIL advance east across the Tigris. He said the Peshmerga were ready to help, but under the constitution, first required authority from the Government of Iraq.

We sent an immediate and urgent message to Baghdad, including to the acting Minister of Defense, and directly to Prime Minister Maliki through his Chief of Staff. They responded that the situation was under control, and that nine Iraqi army brigades would soon be relocated to Mosul. We questioned that information, and encouraged Baghdad to request assistance from Peshmerga forces immediately, as the Peshmerga was able to reinforce the city rapidly, and there was precedent for their helping to protect Mosul, including many years ago against ISIL's earlier incarnation, al Qaida in Iraq (AQI). The Minister of Defense ultimately agreed, but the Prime Minister asked for a confirmation from Erbil that any deployed Peshmerga units would withdraw after army units arrived.

On June 9th, the situation remained static, and the Government in Iraq expressed confidence that Mosul was not under a serious threat. Throughout the day, however, Mosul's western-most neighborhoods began to fall to ISIL. Its fighters began attacking checkpoints and killing resisters, seeking to establish psychological dominance over Iraqi security units in the city. Together with the United Nations team in Baghdad, we worked to help establish a mechanism whereby Peshmerga units would be authorized to reinforce the eastern half of the city pending the arrival of Iraqi units from the south, and then withdraw after the situation stabilized. Baghdad asked to further review the proposal.

In the early morning hours of June 10, ISIL detonated a suicide truck bomb at a checkpoint across a strategic bridge and began to flow forces into the eastern side of the city. The next few hours would prove fateful. Iraqi units abandoned their posts, and ISIL swept through the city, seizing control of the provincial council building, the airport, and then, ultimately, Iraqi military bases. Nearly 500,000 – out of a total population of 2 million Iraqis – fled, seeking refuge in Kurdish-controlled areas. Around 3 a.m., we received distressed messages from Iraqi officials in Baghdad, requesting the Kurdish Peshmerga to move into Mosul as soon as possible. The Iraqi request came too late.

The fall of Iraq's second largest city to ISIL was combined with a social media campaign indicating that ISIL columns would soon be heading down the Tigris River Valley to Baghdad with no mercy for anyone who resisted. The result was a devastating collapse of the Iraqi Security Forces from Mosul to Tikrit. Nearly five Iraqi Army and Federal Police divisions (out of 18 total) would disintegrate over the next 48 hours. This snowballing effect immediately threatened Baghdad, with serious concern that Iraqi forces guarding its northern approaches might also collapse.

Over the next three days, in meetings with our embassy team and videoconferences with President Obama and the National Security Council, we immediately prepared and executed our crisis response. We also worked closely with Iraqi officials to organize the defenses of Baghdad and restore some of the confidence that had been battered.

## **II. U.S. Response**

Our response to the immediate crisis proceeded along three parallel tracks. First, and most importantly, we worked to ensure the security of our own personnel and facilities. Second, in parallel, we both relocated and surged U.S. diplomatic, intelligence, and military resources to develop strategic options for the President with real-time and accurate information. Third, we worked with Iraqi officials to strengthen their defenses of strategic locations, and set the political process on track, with a focus on forming a new government following national elections.

The key elements of this response plan included the following eight steps, which, taken as a whole, encompassed security, intelligence, political, and diplomatic measures:

### **1) Ensuring the Safety of U.S. Personnel and U.S. Citizens**

Our first priority was ensuring the safety of U.S. personnel. This required relocating some personnel and adding additional security capabilities at the embassy compound and the airport. Additionally, there were a number of American contractors at Balad Air Base working on Foreign Military Sales (FMS) cases. Reports from near Balad, which later proved false, suggested the base faced an imminent ISIL attack. After the contractors encountered delays securing their own charter aircraft, the Iraqi Air Force helped evacuate nearly 500 U.S. citizens and third-country nationals on June 14 aboard Iraqi C-130 aircraft. All contractors left safely, and we are grateful to the Iraqi Government and its pilots, most of whom we trained, for their assistance during this crisis period, particularly given their own competing demands.<sup>1</sup>

At the same time, we took extraordinary measures to ensure the safety of our Baghdad-based personnel. The entire National Security Council team, from the President on down, focused intensively to deploy Department of Defense security assets from elsewhere in the region while the Country Team worked intensively with Washington to relocate some personnel to safer areas. Within 72 hours we brought significant defensive capacity into our facilities and rebalanced staff to help manage the crisis. These early moves proved essential to ensuring that U.S. diplomats could continue to do their jobs and protect U.S. interests.

Today, even as the immediate crisis has passed, we are constantly reviewing our footprint to ensure the safety and security of our personnel and facilities.

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<sup>1</sup> This cooperation is one of many examples of why it remains a vital interest for the United States to maintain our relationships with the Iraqi Security Forces, whether through our foreign military sales programs or training and advisory missions. The Iraqi Security Forces today face an existential threat, yet the quality of units varies widely from the highly proficient and professional to the incompetent and corrupt. The Iraqis recognize the serious work they must do to further professionalize the force, and they have asked for our assistance. It is in our interest to provide such assistance where we assess it can be effective, both to help confront the immediate crisis more effectively, and to build the long-term partnerships that are essential to maintaining strategic influence.

## **2) Improving Intelligence Picture on ISIL**

Another immediate need was to get a better intelligence picture. From Erbil, even before Mosul fell, I was in touch with General Austin who recognized the urgency of the situation and prepared to deploy additional intelligence assets. In the earliest days, however, when asked about the situation, we had to acknowledge that we were operating in a fog. Rumors of ISIL convoys approaching Baghdad could not be discounted and there were tense moments as we sought to separate rumor and propaganda from fact without immediate eyes-on-the-ground. Today, this fog has lifted – quite dramatically – thanks to immediate decisions taken by the President.

In response to these early developments, we dedicated a substantial amount of intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance assets to fly over Iraq. These missions have enhanced our intelligence picture and provided critical information to Iraqi forces defending strategic locations, while at the same time helping to establish a foundation from which the President can assess the merit of additional measures.

## **3) Assessing the Capabilities of the Iraqi Security Forces**

In the early hours of the crisis, we worked quickly to reverse the collapsing morale of Iraqi Security Forces, reconstitute key units, and ensure the units deployed around Baghdad could adequately defend the capital. Our sight picture was imprecise, and the prerequisite to concrete action was acquiring a first-hand, eyes-on accounting of the situation. In my meetings with Iraqi officials, they said they would welcome U.S. Special Operations Forces to assess Iraqi force capabilities.

The President authorized the deployment of six Special Operations Forces “assessment teams” to augment efforts that were previously underway through our Office of Security Cooperation. These teams have recently completed an initial, two-week assessment of Iraqi units in and around the greater Baghdad area, examining each unit’s capabilities and potential for a closer U.S. partnership. This mission has already provided greater visibility into the situation on the ground, and will help the national security team calibrate additional and tailored measures.

The Department of Defense is currently reviewing this comprehensive assessment, which, as the President has said, is designed help determine “how we can best train, advise, and support Iraqi security forces going forward.”

## **4) Establishing Joint Operations Centers in Baghdad and Erbil**

To harness an improving intelligence picture, we have stood up two combined Joint Operations Centers (JOCs) in Baghdad and Erbil. These JOCs help ensure a constant 24/7 flow of real-time intelligence information from across Iraq. We are now able to coordinate closely with Iraqi Security Forces, the Ministry of Defense, and the Baghdad Operations Center (BOC).

The Baghdad JOC is fully functional and has dramatically improved our ability to understand and assess the situation on the ground. I visited the JOC shortly before departing Baghdad last week, and it is an impressive operation, which began from scratch only six weeks ago. Most of our military personnel operating the facility have extensive experience and relationships inside Iraq. They report that their Iraqi counterparts have fully embraced our assistance and are asking for more, hoping that the United States will serve as their essential partner in the fight against ISIL.

The Government of Iraq has also made some welcome decisions in recent weeks to improve this bilateral coordination, including appointment of new commanders, many with longstanding ties and relationships with their U.S. military counterparts.

### **5) Positioning U.S. Military Assets in the Region**

In the immediate wake of the crisis, the Department of Defense reinforced assets in the region to prepare for multiple contingencies, including the possibility of targeted and precise military action against targets associated with ISIL. On June 16, Secretary Hagel ordered the USS Mesa Verde, carrying a complement of MV-22 Osprey tilt-rotor aircraft, into the Gulf. Its presence added to that of other U.S. naval ships in the Gulf – including the aircraft carrier USS George H.W. Bush, a cruiser, and three destroyers. These assets will provide our senior leaders with additional options in the event military action is deemed necessary to protect U.S. interests as the situation develops. They also complement the substantial defensive capabilities now on the ground to ensure the safety and security of our personnel and facilities.

### **6) Getting the Political Process on Track**

ISIL attacked Mosul at a time of extreme political volatility. On April 30, two months before the crisis, Iraq conducted credible national elections, in which 62 percent of Iraq's eligible voters participated. This high turnout included Ninewa, where Mosul is the capital, with nearly 1.1 million voters turning out (54.4 percent), despite explicit ISIL threats to kill anyone who participates in the political process.

When ISIL moved in force into Mosul on June 10, the votes had been counted but not yet certified. The four-year parliament's term had ended, and a new parliament, with its 328 members chosen in the election, had yet to convene. The attack, thus, took place during a political vacuum, and purposefully so. ISIL clearly took a play from its earlier incarnation, AQI, which led the devastating Samarra mosque attack shortly after December 2005 elections, triggering years of sectarian conflict. Their long-stated aim has always been to spark a collapse of the political process.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>The AQI attack on Samarra came at precisely the same moment in the political process as the 2014 ISIL move into Mosul: two months after national elections, after the expiration of full-term institutions, and before the selection of new leadership. The pace of signature AQI (now ISIL) attacks – measured by suicide and vehicle bombs – were also nearly identical in the months before the 2006 and 2010 elections, running at nearly 80 per month. In the 30

We worked immediately to ensure ISIL could not succeed in destroying the Iraqi political process. First, we urged Iraq's government to finalize the election results, which would set in place a series of timelines for forming a new government. This required judges who had fled Baghdad to return. They did so, and ratified the election, on June 16. The next day, Iraqi religious and political leaders from all major communities declared ISIL "an enemy of all Iraqis" and requested international assistance to combat the threat. Second, we worked with the UN to press Iraqi leaders to convene the parliament on time, no later than July 1, which it did. Third, we pressed all newly elected political blocs to choose their leaders for key posts, pursuant to the constitutional timeline for forming a new government.

This process now has some traction. On July 15, the parliament confirmed a new speaker, which is the first position to be named pursuant to the constitutional steps required to form a new government. The moderate Sunni leader, Salim al-Jabouri, received votes from all major political blocs and was confirmed overwhelmingly, together with two deputies. The next step is confirming a president, which may happen as early as this coming week. Once there is a president, there will be a fifteen-day deadline to charge a prime minister nominee to form a government.

It is not the job of the United States to choose Iraq's leaders. We neither want to, nor have the power to do so. Iraq has a parliamentary system, and the next prime minister of Iraq must secure a 165-seat majority to form a new government. We do have an obligation, however, pursuant to our Strategic Framework Agreement, to "support and strengthen Iraq's democracy." Thus, from the moment this crisis began, we have actively prodded the process forward, serving as a neutral broker, and encouraging all Iraqi leaders to form a new government with leaders who reflect a broad national consensus between component communities.

The administration has been engaged on this issue from the outset, including the visit from Secretary Kerry to Baghdad on June 23, and to Erbil on June 24. The Secretary and the Vice President have also made regular phone calls to Iraqi leaders and to our regional partners to discuss the emerging situation and to help broker compromises where necessary to advance the political process and keep the system on track.

As President Obama has made clear, the Iraqi people deserve a government that represents the legitimate interests of all Iraqis. We are cautiously hopeful that Iraq's newly elected leaders are on their way to forming such a government, and as they do, they will find a committed partner in the United States.

## **7) Building Regional Coalescence Against ISIL**

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days prior to the April 2014 elections, ISIL launched over 50 suicide attacks inside Iraq with nearly all of the suicide bombers, according to our assessments and ISIL's own statements, foreign fighters who enter Iraq from Syria.

At its root, ISIL is not strictly an Iraq problem. It is a regional and international problem. The Government of Iraq has requested international assistance, and it has stated clearly that it cannot manage this problem on its own, particularly with an open border and ISIL safe havens and staging areas in Syria. Accordingly, we have been regularly engaged with Iraq's neighbors and our key partners. The UN Security Council, European Union, Arab League, and NATO have strongly condemned ISIL's actions and expressed strong support for the people of Iraq.

Secretary Kerry's extensive trip to the region, capped by a quadrilateral meeting in Paris with the Foreign Ministers of Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and UAE, and then a visit to Riyadh for a meeting with King Abdullah, led to a new commonality of effort against ISIL. Shortly after Secretary Kerry visited Riyadh, Saudi Arabia pledged \$500 million to UN relief agencies managing the humanitarian response in Iraq. In parallel, we are working with all of our regional partners to close down foreign fighter networks that continue to send thousands of terrorists into Syria, many of whom make their way to Iraq, with up to 50 per-month becoming suicide bombers.

We are also mindful of Iran's influence in Iraq and have seen Iran and Russia work to fill a security vacuum in the early weeks of the crisis. These activities are part of our daily conversations with Iraqi political and military officials, and we are confident that most Iraqi leaders want to retain strategic independence, while also grappling desperately with the serious threats to the Iraqi capital and the Iraqi people.

## **8) Coordinating Humanitarian Relief Efforts and Protecting Religious Minorities**

Finally, ISIL's advances have exacerbated a humanitarian crisis. The UN estimates that more than 1.2 million Iraqis have been displaced in fighting since ISIL moved into major cities in Anbar earlier this year. More than 300,000 Iraqis have fled to the Iraqi Kurdistan region since the fall of Mosul on June 10th. We have praised the efforts of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in dealing with the situation, and call on the KRG to continue these efforts, as well as the Government of Iraq to assist the KRG with additional resources.

As noted, numerous countries have come forward and donated to the UN's appeal for humanitarian assistance. In addition to Saudi Arabia, other contributors include Kuwait, Japan, New Zealand, and a number of others. The United States to date has contributed \$13.8 million in humanitarian assistance in response to this crisis, and we are working closely with the UN team in Iraq to coordinate the response.

We are also particularly concerned about the state of the Christian community in Iraq, including in Mosul where this ancient community is being expelled by ISIL on threat of execution. There are now reports of the community's full scale departure, which saddens us deeply. We have also seen reporting of ISIL blinding and killing 13 Yezidi men when they refused to convert to Islam and the kidnapping of two

Chaldean nuns and three teenage orphans in Mosul. We denounce these brutal actions vigorously. These actions by ISIL in Mosul – killing Christians, burning churches, killing moderate Sunnis, destroying Islamic tombs – prove to the world the barbarity of their objectives and why they must be stopped before their roots deepen.

Over the past two weeks alone, I met with the Christian leadership in Iraq, including Chaldean Patriarch Louis Raphael Sako in Baghdad, and Archbishop Bashar Warda in Erbil. I am always impressed by the deep faith and resilience of these leaders. In Baghdad, Patriarch Sako, shortly before my visit, presided over a mass with nearly 500 worshipers from across the capital. Both leaders also expressed detailed concerns about the plight of Christians in northern Iraq, and we are working with them and KRG leaders to ensure new Christian enclaves are protected and secured.

Finally, we are deeply troubled by ISIL's treatment of women as we receive a steady stream of reporting regarding women being deprived of their basic rights and subjected to gross violations of their freedom.

### **III. Current Situation**

It is now seven weeks since this crisis began. Mosul remains in the hands of ISIL. Its leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, gave a sermon on July 4th, at one of Mosul's oldest mosques, an act made possible after ISIL executed its moderate Imam and thirteen other leading clerics in the city. The Iraq-Syria border, hundreds of miles between the Kurdish region and Jordan, is controlled on both sides by ISIL. Weapons and fighters now flow freely between Iraq and Syria, resupplying ISIL units fighting on both fronts. To say this situation is extremely serious would be an understatement. The situation is dire, and it presents a direct threat to all the Iraqi people, the region, and to U.S. interests.

Our immediate response, however, helped provide a barrier against further deterioration, and may offer a new foundation on which to begin fighting back. Since the first week of the crisis, the Iraqis – working closely with us – managed to absorb the shock, restore some morale, and began to push back, albeit with halting and uneven steps.

On the security front, an immediate focus was restoring control of portions of Highway One, which runs parallel to the Tigris River from Baghdad to Mosul. Iraqi forces during the third week of the crisis managed to clear the highway from Baghdad to Samarra, ensuring a steady resupply for the historic shrine city. During the fourth week of the crisis, they cleared most of the highway from Samarra to Tikrit, although sophisticated IED emplacements, ISIL snipers, and repeated suicide attacks have halted progress.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> During this period of crisis, Iraqi forces have increasingly relied on volunteers from southern Iraq to hold stretches of the highway cleared by security forces. Many of these volunteers have affiliations with Shi'a militia groups, and in the earliest weeks of the crisis, they operated in the open for the first time in years. Since then, Grand Ayatollah

These operations remain extremely challenging, and we have differed with the Iraqis on some of their tactical objectives, such as moving into the city of Tikrit, which did not seem militarily essential given the need to focus on supply routes. They have, however, gradually allowed the Iraqis to move out of a defensive crouch and pressure the ISIL networks north of Baghdad, which had been poised to advance further to the south towards the capital. We are also urging the Iraqis to immediately focus security efforts to the west, where tribes continue to hold out against ISIL near Haditha, blunting what had been a rapid ISIL advance following the fall of al Qaim, on the Syria border, on June 21.

The tribal situation in western and north-central Iraq remains fluid. Many tribes are now actively fighting ISIL – but lack the resources to do so effectively. According to our regular contacts in these areas ISIL is able to over-match any lightly armed tribal force. The complete withdrawal of the Iraqi army from these areas, together with the lack of coverage by Iraqi aviation in the border regions, provides ISIL free rein to move manpower and heavy weapons to areas where tribes resist.

The result has been many longstanding enemies of ISIL and its earlier incarnation AQI – such as Albu Mahal tribe in western Anbar; Shammar in western Ninewa; Obeidi south of Kirkuk; and Jabbouri in central Salah ad-Din – risk making accommodations to ISIL due primarily to the reality of battlefield dynamics. These tribes may have issues with the central government, but that alone is not why ISIL infiltrated their areas. In al Qaim, for example, the Albu Mahal resisted ISIL for months, before the town ultimately fell after waves of attacks from across the Syrian border weakened Iraqi defense forces.

A tangible example of this dynamic is the Sunni town of Zowiya, near Tikrit in north-central Iraq. The residents there, a mix of Jabbouri and other tribes, resisted ISIL and would not accept their presence in the town. The result, as reported in the media and confirmed by our own contacts, was an ISIL military assault to kill all the residents of the village, starting with an hour-long artillery barrage. ISIL fighters then swept into the village, forcing surviving residents to flee, and sending the message to surrounding areas that any tribal resistance to their movement would be futile – and crushed.

As a result, absent some military pressure on ISIL, we are unlikely to see a broad-based tribal uprising against the movement, as happened between 2007 and 2008. This tribal uprising was enabled by U.S. military forces, which applied consistent and relentless pressure on then-AQI leadership networks, staging areas, and supply routes. While the Iraqis will never match this level of pressure, we must help enable their forces to better deny safe haven to ISIL within Iraqi territory. The Iraqis must also focus on training and equipping locally grown units to secure local areas. As the President said in his June 19

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Sistani has stated clearly that any volunteers should only join established state security services, and emphasized that militias or individual gunmen should not be accepted on the streets. The United States will continue to encourage Iraqi leaders to establish legal and practical mechanisms to incorporate volunteers, including tribal fighters, into the state security structures, where they can be trained to protect the population consistent with the rule of law.

statement on the situation in Iraq, “the best and most effective response to a threat like ISIL will ultimately involve partnerships where local forces, like Iraqis, take the lead.”

The Iraqis recognize this principle, as well, and they have undertaken a reassessment of how their security forces are structured and might be reconstituted. Based on our most recent meetings with Iraqi security commanders, this effort will proceed in three phases. First, the Iraqis have begun to recall soldiers from dissolved units for re-training at two sites north of Baghdad. They report that nearly 10,000 have answered this call. Second, they are recruiting from existing units and from new volunteers for elite counter-terrorism forces, similar to those we train through our Office of Security Cooperation. Third, they are looking to dramatically restructure their security services, with units recruited locally to secure local areas, while the national army provides over-watch support.

Such a program may take many months to demonstrate results, and years to provide a lasting foundation for sustainable security. It will also be linked to the process of forming a new government, requiring a full national commitment and national resource base to ensure effective execution. It remains in our interest, together with such a national commitment from a new government, to provide appropriate assistance and help this process unfold in a manner that can eliminate space for ISIL over the long-term.

#### **IV. Emerging Way Forward – a Functioning Federalism**

The crisis response described above, together with Iraqi efforts over the past month, contain the elements of a longer-term strategy to deny space for ISIL. Any such strategy, to be effective, must be deliberate, long-term, and multi-faceted. In my discussions with Iraqi leaders from all communities over the past six weeks, there is an emerging political-military approach that might begin to address the root causes of the current crisis.

First, it is important to focus at the outset on why this matters. The situation we confront is not simply about stabilizing Iraq, though that alone is an important interest. Rather, it is about ensuring that a movement with ambitions and capabilities greater than the al Qaida that we knew over the past decade does not grow permanent roots in the heart of the Middle East. Flush with thousands of foreign fighters and suicide bombers, ISIL in Syria and Iraq increasingly represents a serious threat to U.S. interests.

Indeed, ISIL’s leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, seeks to follow in the footsteps of Osama Bin Laden as the leader of a global jihad, but with further reach – from his own terrorist state in the heart of the Middle East. After Osama Bin Laden was killed in May 2011, Baghdadi eulogized his death and promised “violent retaliation.” His audio messages routinely contain thinly veiled threats against the United States, and he has promised in a “message to the Americans” that “we will be in direct confrontation.” The ISIL suicide bombers – still averaging 30 to 50 per month – are increasingly western passport holders. Days ago, ISIL boasted that an Australian and a German blew themselves up in Baghdad, and it is a matter of time before these suicide bombers are directed elsewhere.

To combat this threat, we must proceed along three tracks. First, ISIL must be starved of resources, manpower, and foreign fighters. This requires working with our partners around the globe and especially with Turkey to seal the Syrian border from ISIL recruits. Second, the safe havens and training camps in Syria must be isolated and disrupted, preferably by the moderate opposition, enabled by U.S. training. Third, Iraqis must be enabled to control their sovereign space and reconstitute their western border with Syria, through capacity development, tribal engagement, and targeted military pressure.

This third element is essential, and achievable. It will require commitments from Iraq and support from the United States. Our perspectives may not always be the same, but our efforts must be mutually reinforcing. This is because, while ISIL presents a serious counter-terrorism challenge to the United States, the Government of Iraq also faces a serious counter-insurgency challenge, and the two are inextricably linked. Our combined focus must be on isolating ISIL from the broader population and empowering tribes and other local actors to effectively combat it. This will require a combination of political and security measures, based on the principle of a “functioning federalism” as defined in the Iraqi constitution – but never fully and effectively implemented.

In our view, a functioning federalism would empower local populations to secure their own areas with the full resources of the state in terms of benefits, salaries, and equipment. The national army, under this concept, would focus on securing international borders and providing over-watch support where necessary to combat hardened terrorist networks. Other critical reforms, such as an amnesty for those detained without trial, amendments to the criminal procedure laws, and addressing other legitimate grievances from the Iraqi people including those related to de-Ba’athification, will also be necessary elements to strengthen and empower local actors to stand and fight ISIL.<sup>4</sup>

While these concepts remain embryonic, and ultimately will require a new government to flesh out and develop, the five core principles can be summarized as follows:

1. Local citizens must be in the lead in securing local areas;
2. Local citizens defending their communities must be provided state benefits and resources (modeled along the lines of a National Guard type force structure);

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<sup>4</sup> There are three fighting groups in the Sunni areas of Iraq. To be effective, any political-military initiative must focus on each of them. First, and most prominently, is ISIL. While there is no political solution to ISIL, political initiatives can help isolate ISIL from other associated groups. The second group is Jaysh al-Tariqa al-Naqshabandi (JRTN). JRTN is a militant wing of the former Ba’ath Party, now led by Saddam’s former Vice President, Izzat al-Douri. While the most militant core of JRTN will remain non-responsive to political initiatives, such initiatives can help minimize that core and degrade the network. The third group includes national insurgent movements, such as the Islamic Army, with some associated tribes. These groups mostly want local security control, and rarely launch offensive operations outside of their local areas. For them, there is a political solution, and through some of the reforms discussed above, these groups can probably be harnessed to protect local areas from ISIL infiltration over time.

3. The Iraqi Army will rarely deploy inside cities, but will remain outside in an over-watch posture and to carry out federal functions (such as protecting borders);
4. There must be close cooperation between local, regional (KRG), and national security services to gradually reduce operational space for ISIL;
5. The federal government must work diligently on a package of reforms that can address legitimate grievances and deny any pretext for ISIL activities.

These five principles can begin to address many of the core grievances in the Sunni-majority areas of Iraq, while also, importantly, denying space for ISIL to operate and thereby protect the Shi'a majority and other groups from ISIL attacks. Cooperation will be essential. The Government of Iraq from the center cannot restore stability in many areas that ISIL now controls, nor can local actors do so – without support and national-level resources – given ISIL's demonstrated capacity. Restoring stability and degrading ISIL will require a smart, integrated (central-regional-provincial) approach, led by a new Iraqi government with an appropriate level of U.S. support and assistance.

## **Conclusion**

The situation in Iraq remains extremely serious. While our immediate crisis response may have blunted the initial security crisis, ISIL represents a growing threat to U.S. interests in the region, local populations, and the homeland. Countering this threat will require close coordination between the administration and the Congress, and between the U.S. and our regional partners. I look forward to working closely with this Committee to ensure that we are doing all we can to address this vital national security challenge.

**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS  
COMMITTEE**

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The establishment of the Islamic State (IS) by the Al Qaeda in Iraq offshoot group Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIL) changes the geostrategy of the entire Middle East, represents a dramatic setback to U.S. policy and interests, and requires an immediate response from Washington. The creation of an extremist quasi-state, analogous to Afghanistan under the Taliban, carries the risk of further escalation including a regional Sunni-Shia conflict, and an irreparable loss in US influence. But the rise of the ISIL first in Syria and now in Iraq reflects in part the nefarious effort by Iran to exploit sectarian divides to achieve regional hegemony. The US government must counter both the IS threat and Iran's quest for domination, bearing in mind that Iran is not our ally in the campaign against al Qaeda terror. Above all, the U.S. must recognize that we are in a full blown crisis that requires action, even if politically risky.

**THE SITUATION**

The rise of the IS, with control over up to five million people and massive military equipment and funding, in close proximity to some of the largest oil fields in the world, and bordering our NATO ally Turkey and security partners Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait, threatens three of the four vital interests President Obama laid out in his UN General Assembly speech last September: threats to our allies and partners, rise of terrorist organizations, and threats to international flow of oil. The situation if it deteriorates further will likely threaten the fourth, development of weapons of mass destruction, as Iran, in part influenced by events in Iraq, is balking at a compromise outcome of the nuclear negotiations with the P5+1.

A traditional approach to IS based on maintaining a unified Iraq, while building up the Iraqi Government, the Kurdistan Regional Government

(KRG), and Sunni elements willing to resist ISIL, is the best option, but it may not long be attainable. Despite the election of a moderate Sunni Arab speaker of the Iraqi parliament two weeks ago, there is no certainty that Iraqi political leaders and parliament can overcome their deep divisions to create an inclusive new government as rightly demanded by the U.S. Government. For starters, any such government must not be headed by PM Maliki. He has lost the trust of many of his citizens, including a great many Shia Arabs, yet is still trying to hold on to power. In this uncertain situation, while pushing the traditional approach, we must simultaneously prepare to deal with an Iraq semi-permanently split into three separate political entities, and to shape our approach to the Sunni Arab, Shia Arab, and Kurdish populations and to the central government on that basis.

But with either the traditional or this possible new approach, American military force under certain circumstances must be used against ISIL, for political as well as military and counter-terrorism reasons, and everyone in the U.S. must understand that we are in an emergency. The costs of doing little or nothing now are greater than the risks of most actions short of committing ground troops.

## **CONTINUING OUR TRADITIONAL POLICIES**

The President's course of action outlined in his Iraq speech of June 19<sup>th</sup> is reasonable: protect our Baghdad embassy, strengthen our intelligence and military presence in and around Iraq, increase assistance to the Iraqi military, and press the Iraqi political system to support a new, inclusive government which can reach out to estranged Sunni Arabs and Kurds and maintain the country's unity; only then with our help can it begin to retake areas held by the IS. This approach, reflecting our traditional policy towards a united Iraq, remains the best option, but over a month has passed since the President laid out this policy, and we have had little follow-through beyond better intelligence collection and on-the-ground coordination. That is important but not sufficient, and now it is not clear if we still have time to carry out this course of action.

To maximize the chances of a unified, inclusive Iraq to which we can provide significant new military assistance including air strikes, the following needs to occur in the days ahead:

--The Iraqi parliament, charged with forming a new government after the March elections, must decide on a prime minister other than Nuri al Maliki. Few Sunni Arabs or Kurds will believe that any Iraqi government is inclusive and would consider their interests if Maliki remains its leader. Promises to be inclusive and non-sectarian are cheap in Baghdad, but follow-through usually lacking. The most convincing proof that politicians have gotten the 'be inclusive' message is for Maliki to step down, or be forced out by his own and other Shia parties. Removing Maliki is not a direct U.S. responsibility, and too obvious a U.S. push would be counterproductive. But we must make clear to all parties that decisive American support can only come with an inclusive government and buy-in by all major sectarian groups, and that this is not possible with Maliki.

--The Kurdistan Regional Government must forego its threats of independence in return for a government that will consider their interests. Finding a replacement for Maliki is necessary but not sufficient to win the Kurds back. This will require compromises on Kurdish oil exports building on a December 2013 agreement on calculating oil shares, and renewed payment by Baghdad of the Kurds' 17% share of southern oil exports. The Kurds in turn will have to share their oil proceeds 17-83% between themselves and Baghdad, which they claim they will do, and exercise restraint on the status of the Kirkuk field, which they have not committed to do. The US should push for such a solution by pressing both the Kurds directly and through their informal partner, Turkey, to engage fully the central government. Kurdish thirst for independence is understandable, but under current circumstances it is a recipe for reduced hydrocarbons income to the KRG for years, turmoil with the rest of Iraq, and resistance from regional states. It is thus a last option, not a first choice.

--Any new Iraqi leadership must also win over Sunni Arabs. A commitment to provide significant oil revenue earnings to individual provinces (as has occurred already with the KRG, Basra, Najaf, and Kirkuk provinces) would provide concrete evidence of outreach to Sunni Arabs, and promote Iraq's federal system and probably government efficiency at the same time.

--A new defense minister from the Sunni Arab community, with very strong commitments by all parties to lead the military in fact, must be quickly selected once a new prime minister is chosen.

--As noted above, the U.S. cannot consider decisive U.S. strikes until Iraq has an inclusive government which will resonate with many Sunni Arabs. The Administration, in line with the President's June 19 remarks, clearly is using possible U.S. military action as leverage to ensure such a government. That makes sense, but it is not incompatible with limited U.S. strikes for objectives similar to those General Dempsey spelled out recently—to protect population centers and strategic infrastructure and target ISIL leadership. Limited strikes now for such strategic purposes make sense. Any day is a good day to strike an al Qaeda offshoot as dangerous as this one. People to whom we have given commitments, not just the Iraqi military but many Sunni Arabs and the Kurdish Peshmerga, are today locked in combat with ISIL, and need help. Especially given the recent record of American reticence in using force, limited strikes avoiding civilian areas now would increase, not decrease, our political leverage.

--The US should rapidly deploy its \$500 million committed to train and equip the Syrian opposition. The US should also strike against IS in Syria.

--Once these steps have been taken, the U.S. can plan with the Iraqi government, KRG, friendly Iraqi Sunni Arabs, and regional partners, to retake those Iraqi areas now held by the IS. Such a counter-insurgency plan would include aggressive US training, equipping, and coordinating, intelligence, and air strikes, along with action by Sunni Arabs willing with our help to take on IS.

## **A DIVIDED IRAQ?**

While the above is aligned with Administration policy, and in theory offers the best way forward, it may be too late to implement it, as the divisions between the various Iraqi groups deepen, sectarian slaughter especially of Sunni Arabs in and around Baghdad continues, and the KRG moves towards virtual independence, all with Maliki still in office.

Were this to occur, the US must deal with three separate entities, all posing significant problems for American interests: an IS threatening us, as well as our allies and partners, and a magnet for jihadist supporters world-wide; a KRG moving towards a de jure breakup with Baghdad, raising the specter of a Near East-wide quest for a Kurdish nation state which would undermine existing borders; and a rump Iraq, dominated by Shia religious parties heavily influenced by Iran, and controlling what the International Energy

Agency believes could well be exports of six million barrels of oil by 2020—almost two thirds of Saudi Arabia’s exports.

If this materializes, the U.S. must de facto abandon a policy prioritizing Iraqi unity. The first priority rather should be to deter and if necessary defeat IS attacks on Jordan, the KRG, and other partners and allies. Policy coordination with Turkey, Jordan, Israel, the KRG, and the Gulf States, important in any scenario, would be vital in this one, first as a shield for vulnerable states and groups, and then as a platform to destroy the IS. Such coordination would require much greater US support for the Syrian opposition, caution with outreach to the KRG, whose independent status is anathema not just to Baghdad but to Arab states, and continued containment of Iran. It would also require U.S. strikes against IS in both Iraq and Syria.

-In such a scenario, US policy towards Baghdad would inevitably evolve. To the extent the rump central government is willing to cooperate with us, and avoid provoking the Kurds and the Sunni Arabs further, then limited US military support under the FMS program should continue, as should direct US military action against IS attacks against Shia population centers. This policy will require constant review depending upon how influential Iran is in Baghdad, and how Baghdad treats its Kurdish and Sunni Arab citizens. The experience with Maliki in the past several months gives little hope that such treatment would improve as long as he remains in power.

## **IRAN**

The US can talk with Iran about Iraq, emphasizing common interests such as unity of the state and the fight against IS, but we do not share common goals. In the fix we are presently in we have not one but two hegemonic Islamic radical forces intent on overthrowing the prevailing nation state order in the region—Al Qaeda especially IS, and the Islamic Republic of Iran. And our allies in the common struggle for stability—Turkey, Israel, and the Sunni Arab states—see Iran as at least an equal threat to their survival as Al Qaeda.

But we also must do everything possible to avoid a regional “Sunni versus Shia” conflict. Such a conflict would tear the region apart, and any US involvement would have us violating our “we fight for liberal principles, not sectarian interests” policy that we have been able to maintain in the region and elsewhere, such as in the Balkans.



Statement by

Michael D. Barbero  
Lieutenant General, U.S. Army (Retired)

Before the

United States Senate  
Committee on Foreign Relations

July 24, 2014

Chairman Menendez, Ranking Member Corker, and distinguished members of the committee, thank you for inviting me to appear before you today to discuss the situation in Iraq and options for US policy there.

One year ago I retired following 38 years of active duty, during which I spent three tours of duty in Iraq, spending a total of 46 months in Iraq. Since my retirement, over the past year, I have been back to Iraq – in Erbil, Baghdad and Basra – 6 times, maintaining close contact with many Shia, Sunni and Kurdish leaders. So, Iraq and its future is a subject of great personal importance to me.

I am especially honored to appear with these two distinguished fellow panelists who are respected experts on the subject of today's hearing. And given the broad and deep expertise of Ambassador Jeffrey and Doctor Pollack, I will focus my remarks on the security sector -- the current security situation and recommendations on options for our security policy moving forward.

I would like begin with several overall observations on the current security situation; followed by an assessment of the ISIS threat, and finishing with recommendations on assistance to Iraq's security needs.

### **Observations on the current situation**

- Time accrues to the benefit of ISIS; while we “assess” they maintain the momentum, they grow stronger, and their hold on the population intensifies. ISIS continues to exert its control, consolidate gains and build a state.
- ISIS has established control across a contiguous area in both Syria and Iraq and we must realize it is the Iraq-Syria front, not just think in terms of Iraq.
- ISIS poses a formidable regional threat. As it executed its sweeping campaign in Iraq, ISIS simultaneously continued its campaign expansion in Eastern Syria and has the strategy and capabilities to continue the offensive.
- The Iraqi Security Forces have regrouped and stopped the ISIS advance. However these forces have serious, fundamental flaws

and will require significant assistance to be able to undertake a counteroffensive to dislodge and rollback ISIS control.

- ISIS is an existential threat to both Baghdad and the Kurds. The Kurds have a 1000+ KM border/front with ISIS and they are largely on their own. It is time to assist and enable the Kurds in their fight with ISIS.

Now, I would like to elaborate on these points and discuss the security situation in Iraq.

### **ISIS and the Syria-Iraq Front**

ISIS seeks to create an Islamic Caliphate extending across Syria and Iraq by first destroying the existing state boundaries of Iraq and Syria and expanding the territory under their control. It is a mistake to consider ISIS actions in Iraq in isolation. Rather, ISIS must be viewed in the new reality that it has established control over major, contiguous areas of Syria and Iraq.

In Syria, following the declaration of a caliphate by ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, a cascade of surrenders by rebel and tribal brigades in Syria's Deir ez-Zour province conferred large swaths of territorial control to ISIS. Beginning on July 2, these advances dramatically changed the balance of power within the province and provided ISIS the opportunity to achieve territorial continuity along the Euphrates River into Iraq's al-Anbar Province. ISIS has successfully linked its territorial control between its ar-Raqqa stronghold and Deir ez-Zour city, solidifying an ISIS control zone that stretches from ar-Raqqa into Iraq's al-Anbar province. ISIS seized control of eight towns located northwest of Deir ez-Zour city from the al-Bosarya tribe on July 18. This advance comes as Jabhat al-Nusra (JN) and Ahrar al-Sham forces surrendered control of the towns of as-Shametia and Jabal Kabous to ISIS, abandoned their local headquarters and withdrawing from the province.

The surrender of a large number of local rebel and tribal brigades to ISIS in Syria's Deir ez-Zour province was a reflection and result of ISIS success in Iraq. Driven by apprehension in the wake of ISIS's success in Iraq, a number of local leaders sought to avoid an armed takeover by reinvigorated ISIS forces and agreed to a set of ISIS-imposed conditions for the peaceful surrender of rebel forces. These agreements

allowed ISIS to quickly and efficiently assert full control over a large swath of territory whose armed takeover would have otherwise required a significant and costly ISIS ground offensive. Critically, further surrenders have occurred as ISIS began to consolidate. In addition to providing an additional windfall of weaponry, these surrenders have expanded ISIS's zones of control and sustained the current ISIS momentum within the province.

According to some reports ISIS now controls 35% of Syrian territory and the Syrian regime has been unable to meaningfully challenge the ISIS advance.

In Iraq, as evidence that actions in Syria and in Iraq are closely linked, ISIS completed its military operation to connect its line of communication between its strongholds in ar-Raqqa, Deir ez-Zour and Mosul, Iraq. For example, ISIS has extended its campaign against primarily Kurdish-protected areas by attacking in Sinjar. Sinjar, which has been quiet since Tal Afar fell, may become a more significant focus for ISIS.

In Baghdad, ISIS's Vehicle-Born Improvised Explosive Devices (VBIED) campaign is active again, relaunching its signature wave of VBIEDs attacks. Multiple, near-simultaneous attacks are the signature strategy that ISIS pursued as it gained strength in 2012 and 2013. In the first significant use of VBIEDs since a wave of attacks occurred on May 13, 2014, Last Saturday on 19 July, multiple VBIEDs detonated in Baghdad's Shi'a neighborhoods. I believe these actions portend an ISIS campaign to attack Baghdad as part of its strategic campaign to secure Baghdad. Spectacular attacks in the form of VBIED and indirect fire attacks against Shia and Government targets in Baghdad, including Baghdad International Airport will be accompanied by 'conventional' ground attacks to turn Baghdad into a warzone.

Across the Syria-Iraq front, ISIS possesses the momentum in all areas and will continue its operations to assert control over occupied territories, continue its assault in Iraq to secure its lines of communication and expand its control over strategic objectives.

## **Iraqi Security Forces**

Iraqi Security Forces (ISF), in their present state, cannot successfully meet this ISIS threat, let alone mount a major and effective counteroffensive, without significant assistance. Preparing ISF for an effective counteroffensive operation requires extensive preparation; it cannot be thrown together in days or weeks. The capabilities necessary to counter ISIS do not exist today in Iraq and they will not likely materialize on their own anytime soon.

Let me be clear -- I am not talking about a direct ground combat role for US Forces. However, enabling the ISF to be successful against ISIS will require robust advising and enabling by American forces, and this effort must be started immediately and executed simultaneously in several critical areas.

First, the decisive way to defeat an ISIS force is to attack its entire network: its leaders, financiers, suppliers and key operators, combat capabilities and front line fighters. However, generating targetable intelligence to attack ISIS requires a deep understanding of the network, which is only gained through a robust and effective intelligence effort over time. This intelligence support has 2 components. First, this requires an investment of personnel and technical intelligence capabilities in Iraq to develop an intelligence system that integrates all types of intelligence from all sources. The ISF need support in tactical intelligence collection, analysis and dissemination in order to understand the ISIS structure and develop targets. In the absence of this actionable intelligence, independent ground operations or isolated airstrikes, as we have seen from the ISF in recent days and weeks, will remain ineffective in producing the desired effect of seriously degrading the ISIS network.

To support operations in Iraq, there must be a second intelligence component – the collection and analysis effort of ISIS and their external support network must be made a priority for our National Intelligence Community. The ISIS network in Iraq, Syria and the Regional support network external to the Iraq-Syria front must be a National collection and analysis priority. And one of the prime objectives of this collection is to identify and target ISIS finances and financial support. While ISIS is reported to be very well resourced from their recent asset seizures in

Iraq, these resources must be replenished. We must identify all sources of income and employ all of the Counter Threat Finance tools that our Interagency brings to this fight in order to target and limit the free flow of funding to ISIS. This targeting must include any regional government and non-government entities.

Second, we should establish a training program for ISF to improve their basic combat skills to develop modest combined arms capability in order to effectively conduct offensive operations by conventional forces to dislodge ISIS from the occupied areas under ISIS control. The ISF are largely a 'checkpoint army.' Since 2011 their operations have been defensive in nature, static in disposition and disjointed in execution. They need training to develop the skills required to fight this ISIS army, as recent tactical failures against ISIS clearly indicate. We also need to enhance the capabilities of ISF Special Operations Forces. While these are the most competent and most effective of the ISF, they will need to greatly improve their capabilities in order to conduct the unrelenting, precise strike operations against critical ISIS targets.

Third, the ISF need assistance in establishing effective wartime sustainment structure and process. The existing sustainment system of the ISF is a peacetime system, designed to support fielding of military systems while dealing with a low-level insurgency. In 2010, we identified ISF sustainment as being a significant shortfall and that if it was not addressed, the readiness of ISF equipment would soon be in a 'death spiral' where the backlog of deferred maintenance would overwhelm their abilities to field effective, modern forces. Reversing years of decline in equipment readiness will be a daunting, but not impossible process.

Fourth, The ISF require a decentralized command and control system that can rapidly process information and enable tactical decisions. The system that is in place in Iraq, one of Area Operations Commands emplaced by, and reporting directly to, Prime Minister Maliki, is a peacetime structure to ensure centralized control, with leaders chosen by the Prime Minister for loyalty over combat competence. The ISF require a command and control structure for sustained combat operations against a capable enemy.

Fifth, the ISF need the weaponry and equipment necessary for sustained combat operations. We have rushed some weapons and armaments to Iraq, however we need to do more. Most of our military aid to Iraq is moving at the glacial pace of our Foreign Military Sales (FMS) process. Iraq's Ambassador to the United States has lamented that the slow pace of our support when compared to the rapid support from Iran and Russia. We should quickly approve, ship and enable material support to Iraq.

Sixth, we should support the ISF with airstrikes in order to degrade ISIS capabilities. But, let me be clear – isolated drone and air strikes in the absence of these other capabilities will be marginally effective. One cannot drone-strike or airstrike one's way out of this. These strikes will serve as an important part of a coordinated approach to this ISIS threat, but in isolation they will achieve fleeting effects. They must be integrated into the overall counteroffensive. Also, to produce effective airstrikes, especially against an enemy among the population, one needs to have air controllers on the ground to call-in precise strikes and to control the effects. The Iraqis do not possess the capability to serve in this role. And no amount of isolated airstrikes will turn the current tactical situation in Iraq and produce *decisive* effects on their own.

Seventh, we should support the Kurds and enable them to defend against this existential threat of ISIS. The Peshmerga are an effective, determined and well-led force. However, they are lightly armed, inadequately equipped and insufficiently trained to counter the better-equipped ISIS force. They are stretched very thin over their 1050-kilometer front with ISIS and, *when* ISIS turns on them, they will be outgunned and overmatched. The Kurds have proven to be loyal friends and allies to the United States and they have recently asked for material and non-material support from us and we should expedite this support to them.

Understanding the complex relationship between Erbil and Baghdad, our "one Iraq" policy, and the arguments against aiding the Kurdish Region apart from the central government, the realities on the ground make this an exigent requirement. From a purely tactical and security perspective, why wouldn't we enable the Kurds to defend Northern Iraq from ISIS, prevent the oil-rich North from falling into ISIS hands, and force ISIS to fight on two fronts in Iraq?

## **Security depends on a Political Arrangement that includes Sunnis and Kurds**

However, for this security support to succeed, we need two things from Baghdad. First, we need a willing partner, one that is committed to accepting this assistance and to making the systemic and structural changes necessary to the Iraqi Security structure in order to build the ISF into an effective force. Second, underpinning these military operations is the most critical requirement, a political accommodation of the Sunnis and the Kurds. In order to separate ISIS from their greatest advantage, an acquiescent Sunni population, there needs to be a political arrangement in Baghdad that the Sunnis can broadly accept. This political arrangement must also accommodate the Kurds and create the proper conditions for the Kurds to participate. However, as the recent political activities in Baghdad prove, a political agreement that satisfies all parties of Iraq could be the toughest impediment to reversing this existential threat to Iraq. But, in order for *any* hope of success, there must be some sort of political accommodation and an acceptable arrangement, which allows the Sunnis and Kurds to join in a unified military action.

## **Conclusion**

ISIS is an existential threat to Iraq and a significant threat to the Region. Iraq and its security forces have proven unable to defeat this threat in their present condition and with their present capabilities. The longer we wait to decide on our response to Iraq's requests for support, the stronger ISIS becomes. If the prevention of an ISIS-controlled Iraq is in the interest of the United States, then we should act to aid and enable Iraq and the Kurds to defeat this threat as quickly as possible.

Chairman Menendez, Ranking Member Corker, and distinguished members of the committee, again, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I look forward to your questions.

Testimony of  
**Kenneth M. Pollack**  
Senior Fellow  
The Brookings Institution

**Options for U.S. Policy Toward Iraq**

Before the Committee on Foreign Relations  
The United States Senate

July 24, 2013

Mr. Chairman and distinguished Senators, I am honored to be able to appear before you to discuss possible options to address the grave situation in Iraq.

I think it important to start any such conversation with an acknowledgement of the realities we face. First, it is painful, but necessary, to recognize that the United States has only very limited influence in Iraq today. The George W. Bush Administration, by its many disastrous mistakes, squandered a great deal of the influence we once had there. The Obama Administration, by its misguided neglect, surrendered most of what we had left. Indeed, Iraq now constitutes the hardest of situations for Americans to confront: it is a crisis in which our interests exceed our influence. Consequently, the options we consider moving forward must include methods to help increase U.S. influence to improve our ability to defend our interests.

Second, it is equally critical that we accept the reality that Iraq has fallen once more into civil war. It is not “on the brink of civil war.” It is not “sliding into civil war.” It is not “at risk of a new civil war.” It is in a civil war. This is what civil war looks like. And civil wars have certain dynamics that need to be understood if they are to be ended, or even merely survived.

Iraq’s current situation is the recurrence of the civil war of 2006-2008. In 2007-2008, the United States committed tremendous military and economic resources to pull Iraq out of that first instance of civil war. This time around, Washington has made clear that it will not devote anything like the same resources and there is no other country that can.

This second point is important because intercommunal civil wars like Iraq’s are difficult for external powers to end without either a significant commitment of resources or a terrible slaughter by one or more of the combatants. Given the American public’s understandable unwillingness to re-commit the kind of resources we did in 2007-2008, we are unlikely to bring the Iraqi civil war to a speedy end with minimal bloodshed and still safeguard the range of American interests engaged there. For those reasons, the hard truth we face is that, in the circumstances we currently find ourselves in, our options range from bad to awful.

Nevertheless, doing nothing because all of the options are unpalatable would be the worst choice of all. Civil wars do not just go away if they are ignored. They burn on and on. They also have a bad habit of infecting neighboring states—just as the Syrian civil war has helped reignite the Iraqi civil war. If we try to turn our back on Iraq once again, it will affect its neighbors. It could easily affect the international oil market (and through it, the U.S. economy, which remains heavily dependent on the price of oil no matter how much we may frack). It will also

generate terrorists who will seek to kill Americans. So our option may be awful, but we have no choice but to try to make them work.

### **Plan A: Rebuilding a (Somewhat) Unified Iraq**

Although I believe that the Obama Administration's Iraq policy has been disastrous, and a critical factor in the rekindling of Iraq's civil war,<sup>1</sup> I find myself largely in agreement with the approach they have adopted to deal with the revived civil war. Our first priority should be to try to engineer a new Iraqi government that Kurds, Shi'a and moderate Sunnis can all embrace, so that they can then wage a unified military campaign (with American support) against ISIS and the other Sunni militant groups.<sup>2</sup>

That needs to remain Washington's priority until it fails because it is the best outcome for all concerned, including the United States. Doing so would be the most likely way to dampen or eliminate the current conflict, and create the fewest causes for future violence. It could also succeed relatively quickly—in a matter of months rather than years like all of the other options. However, it will be extremely difficult to pull off.

The keys to this strategy will be to convince the Kurds not to break from Iraq and convince moderate Sunnis to remain part of the Iraqi political process—and to turn on ISIS and the other Sunni militant groups. As I and other experts on Iraq have written, this will require both a new political leadership and a drastic overhaul of Iraq's political system. With regard to the former condition, at this point, it seems highly unlikely that Nuri al-Maliki can remain prime minister and retain either the Kurds or meaningful Sunni representation in his government. However, even if he were removed and new, more acceptable leaders chosen, there would still be a long way to go.<sup>3</sup>

Even moderate Sunni leaders are not going to go back to the status quo ante. They now insist on decentralizing power from the center to the periphery, a redistribution of power within the federal government, and a thorough depoliticization of the Iraqi security services so that they cannot be used as a source of repression by what will inevitably be a Shi'a-dominated central government. They are likely to demand to be allowed to form a federal region like the Kurdistan Regional Government, complete with a separate budget and their own military forces akin to the Kurdish Peshmerga.

For their part, the Kurds will want even more than that. At this point, given the extensive autonomy that the KRG already enjoys, coupled with the territorial and administrative gains it has won in the wake of the ISIS offensive, greater federalism probably won't be an adequate alternative to independence for the Kurds. If the Kurds can be prevented from seceding, it will probably require Baghdad to accept a confederal arrangement with Erbil.

The difference here is that in a typical federal system, resources and authorities are generated from the center and delegated to the periphery for all but a limited number of constrained functions. However, keeping the Kurds on board will likely necessitate a shift to one

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<sup>1</sup> This should not be taken to imply that I believe Iraq's current problems are entirely the fault of the Obama Administration. Quite the contrary. I believe that the George W. Bush Administration is at least equally to blame, and arguably more so.

<sup>2</sup> Full disclosure: I proposed that the United States adopt this policy the day after Mosul fell and before the Administration embraced it. See Kenneth M. Pollack, "How to Pull Iraq Back from the Abyss," *The Wall Street Journal*, June 10, 2014.

<sup>3</sup> For a fuller description of the political reforms that would be required to make this scenario work, see Zalmay Khalilzad and Kenneth M. Pollack, "How to Save Iraq," *The New Republic* Online, July 22, 2014, available at <http://www.newrepublic.com/article/118794/federalism-could-save-iraq-falling-apart-due-civil-war>.

in which resources and authority begin in the periphery and then are shared with the center for specific purposes and under specific constraints.

The Kurds are likely to insist that the KRG maintain the current lines of control in disputed territories unchanged until a referendum can be conducted in accordance with article 140 of the Iraqi constitution. Baghdad will have to recognize Erbil's right to develop and market the oil it produces as the new status quo. As for oil revenues, Erbil will demand that it be allowed to keep the Kirkuk oil fields it has now secured, and agree that Baghdad and Erbil each be allowed to pump as much oil as they like and pay all of their own expenses from those revenues.

Assuming that moderate Sunnis, Kurds and moderate Shi'a can all agree on these various changes, we could see the resurrection of a unified Iraqi polity. It is reasonable to assume that in those happy circumstances, many Sunni tribes will be ready to fight ISIS and the other Sunni militant groups—and to accept assistance from the United States to do so. (Although they have made clear that they will not accept assistance from the Iraqi security forces until they have been thoroughly depoliticized.) Moreover, these are really the only circumstances in which the United States should be willing to provide large-scale military assistance to the Iraqi government to fight ISIS and the other militant groups. Only in those circumstances will such assistance be seen as non-partisan, meant to help all Iraqis and not just the Shi'a (and their Iranian allies).

However, what is important to note about this scenario is that replacing Prime Minister Maliki, if that can be accomplished at all, is a necessary but not sufficient condition to end the conflict on the best terms imaginable for the United States (and Iraq). Even after Maliki is removed, the Iraqis will have to sort out far-reaching reforms and redistributions of power and wealth. As hard as all of that will be, there is the added danger that given the overwhelming distrust among all of the Iraqi parties, the Sunnis tribes will refuse to take any action against the Sunni militants until all of the political negotiations have been concluded. Having been burned so many times in the past, that will be a reasonable inclination on their part. However, if they do so, it could be months or years before they work things out and are ready to turn on ISIS and the other militants. By then it would be much harder to rid the country of the Sunni militants and those groups may well have done a great deal of damage already, including possibly mounting terrorist attacks abroad.

One area in which I think that the Obama Administration could be doing a better job to foster this approach to the revived Iraqi civil war would be to lean in, rather than leaning back. What I mean by this is that moderate Iraqis from across the political and ethno-sectarian spectrum have complained that while the Administration is loudly demanding a wide range of changes in Iraq's political leadership and reforms of the Iraqi political process, they have so far been vague and equivocal in describing what the United States would do to help a new and reformed Iraqi government. Given how many Iraqis already believe that President Obama wants nothing to do with Iraq and will never provide meaningful assistance, such reserve only undercuts what little influence the United States has left in Iraq.

Instead, the only way to increase American leverage with the Iraqis is to enumerate plainly the kinds of support that the United States would be willing to provide to a reformed, reunified Iraqi government. This support should include drone strikes, the provision of weapons and reconnaissance assets, greater intelligence support and targeting assistance, improved and expanded training for Iraqi forces, and potentially even manned airstrikes. Better still, it could include a commitment to make the 2008 Strategic Framework Agreement into the kind of across-the-board bilateral assistance relationship always envisioned, but never actually implemented by

the Obama Administration. This would entail technical, administrative and possibly even financial assistance for the full panoply of Iraqis needs—military, agriculture, education, energy, telecommunications, transportation, diplomatic, and virtually anything else the Iraqis might need. An American commitment to provide such assistance would be enormously popular among average Iraqis, and therefore would buy Washington considerable influence with their leaders. It would also galvanize Iraq's economy and help knit its fractured society back together—two more keys to preventing yet another outbreak of civil war.

### **Plan B: Syria First**

If the United States, working in conjunction with our regional allies, the Iraqis themselves and (necessarily) the Iranians cannot forge a new Iraqi national consensus and power-sharing arrangement, the civil war will worsen.

Intercommunal civil wars like Iraq's share a number of unhelpful qualities. First, they tend to stalemate along the internal ethno-sectarian dividing lines of the country. Those divides become the frontlines, and they tend to be very, very bloody. Second, they tend to empower the worst elements in every society. It is the radicals who take advantage of the chaos and the fear, using it to kill off or drown out moderate rivals who are typically not ruthless enough to retain power. Of course, the radicals typically prosper from the conflict and have little interest in seeing it end except in complete victory.

Third, in part for that reason, intercommunal civil wars tend to burn on for years, sometimes even decades. The Algerian civil war ran from 1991 to 2002. The Lebanese civil war lasted from 1975-1991 and ended only because of Syrian intervention. The Congolese civil war has been roiling on since 1994. Somalia since 1991. Afghanistan has arguably careened from civil war to civil war since 1979, or more conventionally since 1989.

And fourth, they always produce spillover.<sup>4</sup> Spillover typically takes six different forms: terrorism, refugees, secessionism, radicalization of neighboring populations, economic downturns, and intervention by neighboring states. At its worst, spillover from an intercommunal civil war can help cause a civil war in another state (as spillover from Lebanon caused the 1976-1982 Syrian civil war, and the current Syrian civil war helped reignite the Iraqi civil war). Or it can metastasize into a regional war as neighboring states intervene to halt the other manifestations of spillover and/or to secure their interests against the predations of other states. That's how Israel and Syria came to blows over Lebanon in the 1980s and why seven different African states intervened in Congo, producing what is often referred to as "Africa's world war." For a variety of reasons, spillover from a protracted Iraqi civil war could be very bad, threatening U.S. allies like Turkey and Jordan and critical oil producers like Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Iran.

For all of these reasons, I believe that even if the current gambit fails, the United States will have a strong interest in seeing the civil war there ended. The problem, once again, is that doing so will be even harder with the limited resources that the U.S. is willing to employ. It will mean finding ways to appeal to both moderate Shi'a and moderate Sunnis in Iraq, help them to defeat their own radicals and then convince them to make peace with one another—and ideally forge a new power-sharing arrangement that would preserve a relatively unified Iraq. (Or a

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<sup>4</sup> On spillover from intercommunal civil wars, its causes, manifestations and efforts to stem it, see Daniel L. Byman and Kenneth M. Pollack, *Things Fall Apart: Containing the Spillover from an Iraqi Civil War* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 2006).

relatively unified Arab Iraq since it is highly unlikely the Kurds will refrain from independence under conditions of all-out civil war in Arab Iraq.)

Doing so in Iraq would probably mean starting in Syria. That may seem counterintuitive, but Syria offers an important clarity lacking in current Iraq. If Iraq is engulfed in full-scale civil war with no hope that political change in Baghdad could end the conflict, the United States will have a particularly problematic dilemma: we will have mixed feelings about both the Shi'a-dominated government and the Sunni-dominated opposition. We will hate ISIS and the Sunni radicals, but not the Sunni tribes and moderates allied with them. We will hate the Shi'a radicals and mistrust their Iranian allies, but not the Shi'a moderates who will inevitably have to join their co-religionists. Supplying both sides in any civil war is a non-starter, but in Iraq those circumstances will make it (or *should* make it) impossible to decide which side to back. In that one respect, Syria is much easier. There the United States unequivocally backs the Sunni-dominated opposition against the Shi'a-dominated regime.

That situation would enable the United States to make a significantly greater effort to build a new, conventionally-trained, -armed and -organized Syrian opposition army. One that could defeat the forces of both the regime and the Sunni Islamist radicals.<sup>5</sup> Although such an effort would likely take anywhere from 2-5 years, it has a number of important advantages. First, it is entirely feasible—especially if coupled with Western air power. It would create the best conditions for a stable Syria, which would eliminate the spillover into Iraq, including the ability of ISIS and other radical groups to employ Syria as a base and recruiting ground to support operations in Iraq. Moreover, it would create a moderate, non-partisan but largely Sunni force that could appeal to moderate Sunni tribesmen in Iraq. Indeed, a moderate, mostly Sunni, opposition army triumphing in Syria would be a tremendous draw for the Sunnis of Iraq—a model of what they might become if they rid themselves of ISIS, as well as an ally in that fight.

Finally, if the United States were to help create such a new model Syrian opposition army, one that could then serve as a conduit for American assistance to Iraqi Sunnis as well, Washington would then be ideally placed to reach out to moderate Shi'a groups in Iraq. The defeat of the Asad regime in Syria would doubtless terrify many Iraqi Shi'a that the Syrian opposition army planned to turn on them as well. As their trainers, advisors, paymasters, and weapons suppliers, the United States could then offer to rein in the new Syrian army and even to provide similar assistance to moderate Iraqi Shi'a groups to enable them to defeat their own radicals. If they accepted, and they would have strong incentives to do so, they too would be beholden to the United States, creating the best circumstances possible for the U.S. to broker a deal between the moderate Sunnis and the moderate Shi'a (of both Iraq and Syria).

### **Plan C: Seeking a Stable Partition**

Building a new Syrian Army and helping it to defeat both the Asad regime and the Sunni militants would be time-consuming and require more resources than the U.S. has so far committed there, but it is hardly impossible. If we succeeded, then using that force to help Iraqi Sunnis turn on their own militants would also be a realistic aspiration. And if that too succeeded,

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<sup>5</sup> For a fuller description of this strategy, see Kenneth M. Pollack, "An Army to Defeat Assad: How to Turn Syria's Opposition into a Real Fighting Force," forthcoming, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 93, No. 5 (September/October 2014). Also see, Daniel L. Byman, Michael Doran, Kenneth M. Pollack and Salman Shaikh, "Saving Syria: Assessing Options for Regime Change," Middle East Memo No. 21, The Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution, March 15, 2012.

then it is reasonable to believe that those circumstances could then be employed to convince Iraq's Shi'a to do the same. Finally making possible a negotiated settlement in Iraq.

Certainly there is no reason that any of this is impossible. But none of it will be easy. And each additional step adds degrees of time, cost and difficulty. Even if we were willing to invest the time and resources to give this strategy the greatest likelihood of succeeding, it could take many years to seal the final deal. And there is no guarantee that every link in the chain would succeed enough to make the next link plausible.

With that in mind, I believe that the U.S. should also consider a more straightforward alternative, namely to should be to try to end the fighting by convincing all sides to recognize the de facto division of the country that is likely to take place. As noted, the battle lines between Sunni and Shi'a militias are likely to run roughly along the blurry dividing lines between their communities. Tragically, those lines are likely to sharpen as a result of the widespread ethnic cleansing that will accompany the fighting and that has already begun again. The Kurds, will almost certainly opt for independence under these circumstances, and even if they refrain from a formal declaration, they will be independent in all but name.

In theory, a simpler alternative to trying to put Iraq back together again, would be to recognize its partition and convince the parties to accept that reality and stop fighting. Of course, what seems simple and obvious in theory often proves anything but that in practice.

Indeed, there is a dangerous mythology taking hold in Washington that partition might be easy because Iraq has since been sorted out into neat, easily divided cantonments. That is simply false. While there are far fewer mixed towns and neighborhoods, they still exist, and even the homogeneous towns and neighborhoods remain heavily intermingled across central Iraq, including in Baghdad. Moreover, both the Sunni and the Shi'a militias are claiming territory largely inhabited by the sects of the other. All of that indicates that it would probably take years of horrible bloodshed to convince both the Sunni and Shi'a leaderships to agree to partition, let alone on where to divide the country.

Thus, the challenge for the United States would be how to assist a process by which the various Iraqi factions recognized that continued fighting was fruitless and they should agree to a ceasefire and a functional division of the country to end the war altogether. That too will not be easy. Again, the key will be to empower moderates on both sides (Sunni and Shi'a) to enable them to defeat the radicals and then strike a workable deal with one another. (By definition, a moderate in an intercommunal civil war is someone willing to work with the other side.)

In theory, (there's that phrase again), the United States might provide military support to both Sunni and Shi'a moderates to help them triumph over their respective extremists in their respective cantonments. In practice, they are just as likely to try to use that assistance against each other as against the extremists. And if military assistance is not the right way to influence such groups waging an all-out civil war, it is even harder to imagine that any other form of assistance would have greater sway with them. Historically, only the threat of punishment has carried that kind of weight in such circumstances, but that would require a willingness on the part of the United States to become very heavily involved in the Iraqi civil war, quite possibly including with combat troops, which makes it a non-starter.

Thus, the reality of a partition strategy is that, absent a willingness on the part of the U.S. to impose it by cracking heads, we will probably find ourselves on the sidelines, waiting and hoping that the Iraqi militia leaders will eventually recognize the futility of their combat and agree to accept Americans (or others) to step in as mediators and broker a disengagement and partition. That's not impossible. But typically, it is a long time coming, and in the meantime

Iraqis will die while the region will suffer all of the effects of spillover. Partition may ultimately be the outcome in Iraq, but absent a plausible mechanism for the United States to convince the militias to agree to it in the near term, it will be difficult to adopt it as an actual strategy. As Colin Powell famously remarked, ‘Hope is not a strategy,’ and hoping that Iraqi militia leaders recognize the error of their ways is not a good way to safeguard American interests in the region.

#### **Plan D: Containment**

Inevitably, America’s last option would be containment.<sup>6</sup> We could simply opt to leave Iraq to its fate and try as best we might to block or mitigate the spillover onto its neighbors. In fact, unless and until we could find a way to convince the militias to stop fighting, the “partition” approach described above would have to rely on containment. To some extent, so too would a strategy of remaking Iraqi politics by building a new Syrian opposition army that could stabilize Syria and then help stabilize Iraq since that would be a long time in the making if it succeeded at all. In short, the United States is probably going to rely on at least some aspects of a containment strategy toward Iraq under any circumstances unless we are able to help forge a new Iraqi political leadership and power-sharing agreement that stops the civil war in its tracks.

The problem with containment is that it does not work very well. Historically, few nations have been able to stave off the worst aspects of spillover from an intercommunal civil war for very long. Most countries find themselves suffering worse and worse, and often getting drawn into the civil wars the longer they drag on. It is harder to find good cases of neighboring countries that successfully minimized the impact of spillover on themselves.

In many cases states have simply tried to weather the storm and paid a heavy price for doing so. Others have been driven to do what they could to end the conflict instead. Syria spent at least eight years trying to end the Lebanese civil war before the 1989 Ta’if accords and the 1990-91 Persian Gulf War gave it the opportunity to finally do so. Israel’s 1982 invasion was also a bid to end the Lebanese civil war after its previous efforts to contain it had failed, and when this too failed Jerusalem tried to go back to managing spillover. By 2000, it was clear that this was again ineffective and so Israel simply pulled out of Lebanon altogether in a vain effort to prevent further spillover. Withdrawing from Lebanon was smart for Israel for many reasons, but it has not put an end to its Lebanon problem. In the Balkans, the United States and its NATO allies realized that it was impossible to manage the Bosnian or Kosovar civil wars and so in both cases they employed coercion—including the deployment of massive ground forces—to bring them to an end. Pakistan opted to try to end the Afghan civil war by building and encouraging the Taliban, an effort that, 20 years later, has left Pakistan riven by internal conflict of its own.

Nevertheless, we may well have nothing left but to try to contain the spillover from an Iraqi civil war. From America’s perspective that will require pursuing a number of critical courses of action.

***Provide Whatever Assistance we can to Iraqi Civilians and Refugees.*** In this scenario Iraq’s civil war will rage on, fueled by its militias and, unfortunately, its neighbors. The biggest losers will be the people of Iraq themselves. Hundreds of thousands are likely to die. Millions will be forced to flee their homes and suffer other tragedies. Those people represent both a moral responsibility and a strategic threat since they constitute ideal recruitment pools for militias and terrorists. Especially if the United States opts not to do anything to try to bring the civil war to a rapid end, but also if we are merely forced to wait for other aspects of our strategy to gain

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<sup>6</sup> For more on the methodologies of containment, see Byman and Pollack, *Things Fall Apart*, op. cit.

traction, we should and must provide what support we can to the people of Iraq, both those who remain and those who flee. Undoubtedly various international NGOs and UN agencies will do what they can, but without the resources of nation-states, they will not be able to do much.

***Provide Support to Iraq's Neighbors.*** The historical evidence from other intercommunal civil war suggests that the United States should provide assistance to Iraq's neighbors to reduce the likelihood that their own deprivation will create sympathy for, or incite emulation of, the actions of their compatriots in Iraq. The more content the people of neighboring states, the less likely they will be to want to get involved in someone else's civil war. Aid also provides some leverage with the government in question, making them more likely to hesitate before going against U.S. wishes. Generous aid packages can be explicitly provided with the proviso that they will be stopped (and sanctions possibly applied instead) if the receiving country intervenes in the Iraqi conflict.

That would mean continuing and even expanding the roughly \$660 million in aid the United States is providing Jordan this year. It will probably mean increased assistance to Turkey to help it deal with both refugees and terrorism emanating from the intertwined Iraqi-Syrian civil wars.

The more difficult questions will be how to help Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. Neither Kuwait nor Saudi Arabia need American financial assistance, although both might need greater security cooperation to deal with terrorists and militiamen spilling over their borders in search of either targets or sanctuary.

However, the bigger problem that both Kuwait and Saudi are likely to face will be the radicalization of their populations, a problem both were beginning to face in 2006 before the U.S. "Surge" shut down the first manifestation of civil war in Iraq. Saudi and Kuwaiti Shi'a minorities will doubtless sympathize with—and be galvanized by—the Shi'a of Iraq and Syria. Their Sunni majorities will side with the Sunni oppositions in both and will demand that their governments do ever more to support the Sunni fighters. It will almost certainly lead to widespread Gulf covert support to the Sunni militias in Iraq and Syria, potentially including ISIS and the other militant groups. Historically, such covert support can backfire against the country providing the support, as Pakistani support for the Taliban, Jordanian support for the PLO, and Turkish support for the Syrian opposition has. It can also lead to conventional interventions into the civil war when the covert support proves inadequate to the task. That's how Syria and Israel got sucked into Lebanon.

***Dissuade Intervention.*** Consequently, the United States, hopefully along with its European and Asian allies, will have to make a major effort to convince Iraq's neighbors not to intervene in an Iraqi civil war. Given the extent of their involvement already, this will be difficult to do. Our efforts should include the economic aid described above, as well as specific benefits tailored to the needs of individual countries. For Jordan and Saudi Arabia it might be yet another quixotic tilt at an Israeli-Palestinian peace, thereby addressing another of their major concerns. For Turkey, it might be financial aid or NATO security assistance. Again, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait would be the biggest challenges and the best Washington might do would be merely to try to convince them that it would be counterproductive and unnecessary to intervene—unnecessary because the U.S. and its allies will make a major effort to keep Iran from intervening, which will be their greatest worry.

Preventing Iran from intervening, especially given how much it is already involved in Iraqi affairs, is going to be the biggest headache of all. Given Iran's immense interests in Iraq, deepening Iranian intervention is likely to go hand-in-hand with a worsening civil war. And that is a foregone conclusion in a scenario of containment. For Tehran, the United States may have to lay down "red lines" regarding what is absolutely impermissible—like sending uniformed Iranian military units into Iraq or annexing Iraqi territory, both of which could prompt the Sunni Arab states to do the same. Of course, the U.S. and its allies would also have to lay out what they would do to Iran if it were to cross any of those red lines and that will inevitably be complicated by the status of nuclear negotiations with Tehran, regardless of the status of those negotiations.

***Direct Strikes at the Terrorist Infrastructure in Iraq.*** If the United States opts merely to contain an Iraqi civil war, we will have to accept some level of terrorist activity there. However, we would have to try to limit the ability of terrorists (Sunni and possibly Shi'a as well) to use Iraq as a haven for attacks outside the country. That will mean reliance on the kind of approach that Vice President Biden purportedly favored in Afghanistan rather than the "surge" of troops that President Obama opted for instead. It would mean employing air assets (manned and unmanned), special operations forces, and all manner of intelligence and reconnaissance systems to identify and strike key terrorists and their infrastructure (training camps, bomb factories, arms caches, etc.) before they could pose a danger to Americans. Thus, the U.S. would continue to make intelligence collection in Iraq a high priority, and whenever such a facility was identified, Shi'i or Sunni, American forces would move in quickly to destroy it.

Of course, such an effort would need bases to operate. Jordan and Kuwait are obvious candidates. However, in this scenario, Iraqi Kurdistan would probably be the best of all. Indeed, the United States could tie its willingness to recognize an independent Kurdistan (and provide them with the kind of military support they will need to hold off Iran as well as ISIS and the Sunni Arab militant groups) to Erbil's willingness to host American counterterrorism (CT) forces. It seems highly likely that the Kurds would jump at that opportunity, making it far more palatable to run a discrete CT campaign from independent Iraqi Kurdistan than anywhere else.

### **Learning the Lesson of Iraq**

Mr. Chairman, as I reflect on the list of options I have described above, I find myself deeply depressed. This is a miserable set of choices. But they reflect the reality of our circumstances in Iraq.

Whatever options we choose to pursue there, I find myself hoping that at the very least, we will recognize that the best option of all was to have never allowed ourselves and the Iraqis to get to this point. They have been sucked into a civil war that feeds upon itself, and we are left with almost nothing we can do, either to save them or prevent that maelstrom from wrecking vital American interests. The mistakes of both the Bush '43 and Obama Administrations led us to this point because neither was willing to acknowledge that we cannot break a country in a vital part of the world and then walk away from it. And neither was willing to practice the sage aphorism that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Today we have but an ounce of cure for a malady raging out of control, one that could easily kill the patient and who knows what else. Perhaps the best that might come of it would be if we learn not to do so again.

