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ADMINISTRATION'S STRATEGY AND MILITARY CAMPAIGN AGAINST ISLAMIC STATE IN IRAQ AND THE LEVANT (ISIL)

U.S. HOUSE COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

ONE HUNDRED THIRTEENTH CONGRESS, SECOND SESSION

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Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, U.S. Department of Defense

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Secretary of Defense, U.S. Department of Defense

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**STATEMENT BY SECRETARY OF DEFENSE CHUCK HAGEL
HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE HEARING ON
THE ADMINISTRATION'S STRATEGY AND MILITARY CAMPAIGN AGAINST ISIL
THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 13, 2014**

Chairman McKeon, Congresswoman Sanchez, Members of the Committee:

I appreciate the opportunity to update you on the progress of our nation's comprehensive strategy to degrade and ultimately defeat ISIL.

I especially want to thank you, Mr. Chairman, for your partnership and friendship over these last two years. On behalf of all the men and women of the Department of Defense, I wish you and your family all the best as you retire from a career of distinguished public service. Your contributions to America's security and strength are recognized everywhere – and greatly appreciated.

I am joined this morning by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, General Dempsey, who, together with our CENTCOM Commander, General Austin, has played a critical role in not only helping develop and execute our campaign against ISIL, but also in helping assemble a broad, global coalition.

President Obama, Chairman Dempsey, General Austin, and I have all been clear that our campaign against ISIL will be a long and difficult struggle. We are three months into a multi-year effort.

As we enter a new phase of this effort – working to train and equip more counter-ISIL forces in both Iraq and Syria – we will succeed only with the strong support of Congress...and the strong support of this committee.

Since I testified before this committee two months ago, our campaign against ISIL has made progress. ISIL's advance in parts of Iraq has stalled, and in some cases been reversed, by Iraqi, Kurdish, and tribal forces supported by U.S. and coalition airstrikes.

But ISIL continues to represent a serious threat to American interests, our allies, and the Middle East...and wields influence over a broad swath of territory in western and northern Iraq and eastern Syria.

As President Obama has said, ISIL will not be defeated through military force alone.

Our comprehensive strategy is focused on supporting inclusive governance, sustaining a broad-based regional and global coalition, and strengthening local forces on the ground. It also includes undercutting ISIL's flow of resources; countering ISIL's messaging; constricting the flow of foreign fighters; providing humanitarian assistance; and our intensive regional and global diplomatic effort.

In Iraq, much more needs to be done to achieve political reform, but we are seeing steps in the right direction. In the wake of years of polarizing leadership, Iraqi Prime Minister Abadi is leaning forward by engaging all of Iraq's diverse communities. He has appointed a Sunni defense minister after that post was left vacant for four years. And he is moving to create an Iraqi National Guard, which would empower local forces, especially in Sunni tribal areas of Anbar Province, while aligning them with the central government.

Thanks to intensive diplomacy, America is not supporting this effort alone. We have built a global coalition to support local forces in both Iraq and Syria...a coalition of over 60 nations that are contributing assistance ranging from air support to training to humanitarian assistance.

Since I testified here in September, 16 nations have joined the military campaign against ISIL.

The first coalition air strikes in Syria involved Bahrain, Jordan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates – a tremendous demonstration of unity among Arab nations.

Coalition partners have carried out more than 130 air strikes against ISIL in both Iraq and Syria. Last week, Canada launched its first air strikes in Iraq, bringing the total to 12 nations participating in strike operations in Iraq and Syria, as additional partners provide tanker, command and control, and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance aircraft.

Coalition nations have also pledged hundreds of personnel to support our mission to train, advise, assist, and help build the capacity of Iraqi forces.

Our global coalition is also helping share the burden of the campaign...with nearly all our coalition partners funding their own contributions.

With the President's Special Envoy for our counter-ISIL coalition – General John Allen – in the lead, we are coordinating the coalition's strategy and contributions across all our lines of effort.

As a coalition, and as a nation, we must prepare for a long and difficult struggle. There will be setbacks. But we are seeing steady and sustainable progress along DoD's two main lines of effort.

First, we are seeing progress in degrading and destroying ISIL's warfighting capacity – and in denying safe haven to its fighters.

Directly and through support of Iraqi forces, coalition air strikes have hit ISIL's command and control, its leadership, its revenue sources, its supply lines and logistics, and impaired its ability to mass forces. In recent weeks, these strikes helped Peshmerga forces push ISIL out of Zumar, in northern Iraq, and helped Iraqi Security Forces begin re-taking areas around the major oil refinery at Bayji. Last weekend, air strikes hit a gathering of ISIL battlefield commanders near Mosul.

ISIL fighters have been forced to alter their tactics – maneuvering in smaller groups, hiding large equipment, and changing their communications methods.

Sustaining this pressure on ISIL will help provide time and space for Iraq to reconstitute its forces and continue going on the offense. This pressure is having an effect on potential ISIL recruits and collaborators...striking a blow to morale and recruitment. And as Iraqi forces build strength, the tempo and intensity of our coalition's air campaign will accelerate in tandem.

We need to continue to help build partner capacity – so that local forces can take the fight to ISIL...and ultimately defeat it.

Today, many of the approximately 1,400 U.S. troops in Iraq are engaged in advise-and-assist programs with Iraqi and Kurdish forces. As you know, last week, the Defense Department announced that we will expand this support to Iraqi forces by deploying up to 1,500 additional military personnel, including two new advise-and-assist centers at locations beyond Baghdad and Erbil, as well as four new training centers in northern, western, and central Iraq. I recommended this deployment based on the request of the Government of Iraq, U.S. Central Command's assessment of Iraqi units, and the strength of the Iraqi and coalition's campaign plan.

These additional troops and facilities will help strengthen and reconstitute Iraqi forces...expanding the geography of our mission, but not the mission itself. U.S. military personnel will not be engaged in a ground combat mission.

Our phased plan to help strengthen Iraqi security forces has three major components: first, our advise-and-assist mission that is partnering coalition advisers with Iraqi forces at the headquarters level. U.S. and coalition advisers are already helping plan current and future operations, and, as noted, we will expand this mission with two new advise-and-assist centers.

Second, we will support the regeneration of Iraqi forces so that they are better equipped to launch offensive operations over the coming year. CENTCOM's new training sites in northern, western, and central Iraq will help train 12 Iraqi brigades, and more than a dozen coalition nations have expressed their intent to send trainers and advisers to help build the capacity of Iraqi forces.

Third, we will concentrate on broader security sector reform...to help transform Iraqi forces into a more coherent and capable unified force. This includes Prime Minister Abadi's initiative to develop provincially-based National Guard units, which I mentioned earlier.

Coalition partners are playing an important role in all these efforts by providing advisers and trainers to help regenerate Iraqi combat brigades.

Together, we are also providing more arms and equipment to Iraqi Security Forces. This year, the United States alone has shipped more than \$685 million in critical equipment and supplies to Iraq, ranging from grenades and small arms to tank ammunition, helicopter rockets, and Hellfire missiles – hundreds of which will

be arriving this month. U.S. and coalition partners together have delivered over 2.7 million pounds of supplies, including 33 million rounds of ammunition, to Peshmerga forces alone.

In Syria, our actions against ISIL are focused on shaping the dynamic in Iraq, which remains the priority of our counter-ISIL strategy. But we are sober about the challenges we face as ISIL exploits the complicated, long-running Syrian conflict.

Because we do not have a partner government to work with, or regular military partners as we do in Iraq, in the near term, our military aims in Syria are limited to isolating and destroying ISIL's safe havens.

Coalition air strikes in Syria are accomplishing this by continuing to target significant ISIL assets, which has impaired ISIL's ability to move fighters and equipment into Iraq, disrupted their command and control, damaged their training bases, and significantly limited their financial revenue by hitting captured oil fields and disrupting their crude oil distribution and collection sites.

The Defense Department's longer-term effort is to train and equip credible, moderate Syrian opposition forces, especially from areas most threatened by ISIL. This will require at least 8-12 months to begin making a difference on the ground. We know the opposition will continue to face intense pressure in a multi-front battle space, and we are considering options for how U.S. and coalition forces can further support these forces once they are trained and equipped.

Our strategy in Syria will demand time, patience, and perseverance to deliver results. We cannot accomplish our objectives in Syria all at once.

The position of the United States remains: Asad has lost the legitimacy to govern. But there is no purely military solution to the conflict in Syria. Alongside our efforts to isolate and sanction the Asad regime, our strategy is to strengthen the moderate opposition to the point where they can, first, defend and control their local areas; next, go on the offense and take back areas that have been lost to ISIL; and ultimately, as their capabilities and leverage develop, to create conditions for a political settlement in Syria.

Thanks to broad bipartisan support in Congress – including majorities in both parties – preparations for our Syria train-and-equip mission are now complete. We have established a Combined Joint Interagency Task Force to coordinate the coalition's train-and-equip program for Syria. Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and other partner nations have agreed to host training sites. Development of those sites, recruiting, and vetting will begin once Congress has authorized funding.

We are still at the front end of our campaign against ISIL.

As President Obama told leaders of both houses of Congress last week, Congressional support – your support – is vital for this campaign to succeed.

As you all know, the administration is requesting \$5.6 billion in additional Overseas Contingency Operations Funding for Fiscal Year 2015 to help execute our comprehensive strategy in Iraq and Syria – \$5 billion of it for the Department of Defense.

\$3.4 billion would support ongoing U.S. military actions against ISIL under Operation Inherent Resolve.

\$1.6 billion would go toward a new Iraq Train & Equip Fund devoted to helping reconstitute Iraq's security forces. This fund will be critical for enabling Iraqi Security Forces, including Kurdish and tribal forces, to go on the offensive in 2015, and it will require the Iraqi government and coalition members to make significant contributions as well. Only 60%, or \$1 billion, of the \$1.6 billion fund would be available initially. The remaining \$600 million would not be released until the Government of Iraq and coalition partners have provided at least \$600 million of their own contributions...because the Iraqi government must invest in its own security, and its own future.

As the President said last week, the administration will be engaging the Congress to support the effort against ISIL by enacting a new and specific Authorization for the Use of Military Force – one that reflects the scope and challenges of our campaign against ISIL.

DoD will work closely with the Congress on each component of this effort.

As this mission continues to progress, we will continue to evaluate...and reevaluate each element of our strategy.

EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERY – AS PREPARED

Having marked Veterans Day earlier this week, let me again thank this committee for what you do every day to support all our men and women in uniform, serving around the world.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. # # #