

TESTIMONY  
OF  
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BEFORE THE HOUSE PERMANENT SELECT COMMITTEE ON INTELLIGENCE

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Chairman Rogers  
Ranking Member Ruppertsberger  
Members of the Committee

It is an honor to testify before this committee on the threat of Islamic extremism and in particular the terror threat from the Islamic State at this critical moment. Thank you for showing leadership. It is a particular honor to be here with my friend and comrade of many years and many fights, General James Mattis.

Sadly, terror is hardly new in the Middle East. I spent almost four decades in the region and have seen terrorism in many forms. I witnessed Palestinian secular terrorism in the 1970's. One of my predecessors as Ambassador to Lebanon, Frank Meloy, and his colleague, among others were assassinated by the communist Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. I witnessed the rise of Iranian and Syrian backed Shi'a Islamic terror in the 1980's in the form of Hizbollah. I survived the Beirut Embassy bombing in April 1983 and was present for the destruction of the Marine barracks and the horrific murder of 241 service members, almost all Marines, in October of that year. Hizbollah remains a scourge today, fighting on the side of Assad's forces in Syria. Not all the terror of these years came at the hands of non-state actors. We will always remember the destruction of the Pan Am 102 in 1988 at the hands of the Libyan government.

The 1990's brought us a new strain of terror – the rise of Osama bin Laden's Al Qaeda, first in Africa, then in Afghanistan, then in New York, and here in Washington. Terror in the Middle East was killing Americans not only in the region but here at home. A week ago, we marked the 13<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the 9/11 attacks.

Now we are in a new and even more dangerous era. Pressures on the always fragile Arab State system, within and without, have brought about upheaval, civil war and state collapse. Into the void have moved a range of terror organizations in Yemen, in Somalia, in North Africa, in Libya, where they assassinated my friend and colleague, Ambassador Chris Stevens, in Nigeria, in Iraq. Most to some extent are Al Qaeda franchises.

Now, out of the ugly brutality of the Syrian civil war and the collapse of good governance in Iraq, a new, even more lethal threat has emerged. It goes by several names, and the names tell a story. Originally, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, ISIS, its ambitions grew bigger and it adopted the name the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, to encompass Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Jordan, and the Palestinian territories. Now it calls itself simply the Islamic State – it accepts no borders.

Its leadership and fighters are a larger, more lethal, better funded, and more experienced threat than those who brought us 9/11. But they have the same agenda: regional dominance in the name of their twisted version of Islam, and international reach – we are delusional if we don't think we are on their list. In their long-range planning they are assisted by an asset Osama bin Laden never had - several thousand fighters with western passports, including US, who have no need of visas.

Their lightning sweep – out of Syria through northern Iraq in June demonstrated how the region has changed. For the first time in the long history of terror in the Middle East, an extremist organization controls territory that is effectively a state. The Islamic State is not a band of insurgents; it is an army. And as Senator Feinstein said so well, it takes an army to beat an army.

So what is our way forward against a determined, capable and implacable foe? The President's speech last week offers a start.

First we must be clear in our goal and our resolve: to degrade and ultimately defeat the Islamic State.

To that end, the US must demonstrate that it is prepared to lead this fight with determination, with resolve and for as long as it takes.

But leading does not mean going it alone. We must lead and sustain a broad coalition of our western allies and regional partners. The latter have an especially critical role. They know the political dynamics of the area better than we. Most important, their readiness to confront the Islamic State will show the region and the world that this is a fight between moderates, Muslim, and non-Muslim on one-side, against fanatics who would destroy both. President George H. W. Bush assembled such a coalition against Iraq in 1990; the Administration is working on it today. It will be hard, especially in the region where many of our friends have come to doubt our consistency and resolve.

We must move now to bring sufficient military power to bear to degrade the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. In other words, we must walk the walk. And we should understand that as this conflict evolves, so must our tactics. We may need combat forces under certain circumstances. And in any case, it is seldom good strategy to tell your enemy at the outset what you are not prepared to do.

We need to understand that while effective military action is essential to set the conditions to defeat the Islamic State, it is not sufficient. This must be a coordinated political/military campaign. We need to continue to work with the Iraqi government to ensure the inclusiveness and cohesion necessary for it to present a common front against a common enemy. Our political engagement with the Iraqis is as important as our military support.

As soon as possible, we must do the same in Syria, establishing on the ground liaison with moderate forces to assess capabilities, broker alliances and forge a common strategy. Given their fragmentation and disorganization this will be extraordinarily difficult. But at the same time, we should understand that many who stand with Assad do so out of fear, not loyalty. If we can

significantly degrade the Islamic State, as we strengthen a moderate opposition coalition we may set the conditions for a political dialogue. It will not be easy. But it has been impossible until now.

There are some things we must not do. We must avoid any appearance of siding with Asad, His Hizbollah supporters and Iran. It would alienate Sunnis in Iraq just at a time when Iraqi unity is essential, and it would create dangerous doubts about our intentions among our Arab allies, many who already have questions about our policies and resolve as we saw last week in Riyadh.

Mr. Chairman, this is a time of testing for the U.S. and its allies. The worst have shown they are full of passionate intensity. The best must show they come to this fight with equal conviction.

Above all else, a successful campaign against the Islamic State will require sustained, determined American leadership. Without it, a coalition will falter, our allies on the ground will lose heart, and we will not succeed. With it, we can prevail as we have at other critical moments in our history. But we must summon the determination and strategic patience to see this through. Too often, our allies in the region have come to fear our lack of strategic patience, and our adversaries to count on it. This must not happen now. Our own security is at stake.

Thank you.