

Revised Advance Policy Questions for Patrick Shanahan
Nominee for Deputy Secretary of Defense

Strategy to Defeat the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)

On January 28, 2017, National Security Presidential Memorandum-3 was issued, which states: “It is the policy of the United States that ISIS be defeated” and directs the Administration “to develop a comprehensive plan to defeat ISIS” with the Secretary of Defense as the lead of the interagency effort.

How would you define success in the defeat of ISIS?

I would consider success in defeating ISIS to be when the threat the group poses has been degraded to a point where it is localized and periodic and when it can be addressed as a law enforcement issue by partner nations and forces without extensive assistance from the United States.

What do you view as the role of the U.S. military in the strategy to defeat ISIS?

Ultimate victory over ISIS requires integration of both military and non-military capabilities. The Department should provide capabilities and leadership for a comprehensive military campaign that is fully integrated with other U.S. departments and agencies’ whole-of-government efforts to defeat ISIS – with our coalition partners playing a vital role.

In your opinion, what are the major lessons learned from the fight against ISIS in Iraq, Syria, Libya, and elsewhere over the last two-and-a-half years?

The key lesson is that there is no substitute for constant, dedicated U.S. leadership and engagement in areas of the world where there is an enemy that seeks to do us harm. The results of U.S. withdrawal from Iraq and Libya were unsurprisingly disastrous, not just for U.S. interests, but for those of our allies and partners as well. This lesson is particularly relevant now as the United States considers its regional posture in the Middle East after ISIS is defeated – which it will be – in Iraq and Syria. It is also relevant in Afghanistan policy discussions, where the easiest course of action is to abandon America’s longest war would, I believe, likely result in greater threats in the future. Where an enemy seeks to do us harm, we must confront it aggressively. We must stay engaged in the fight and not walk away, because, as hard as it is, the alternative is worse.

It is also evident that the military instrument of power alone is insufficient to defeat ISIS. The Department’s efforts must be nested within and supportive of a whole-of-government approach. The Department must work in concert with local partners to make lasting gains against ISIS. Also, even as gains are made against ISIS in Iraq and Syria, there must be simultaneous focus on ISIS globally – to include its ability to operate in cyberspace and develop affiliate networks around the world. More effort in particular

needs to be focused on ISIS globally even as the Coalition squeezes its geographic so-called caliphate in Iraq and Syria. There are likely operational lessons learned from the conflict, to include DoD's efforts in the cyber realm, but I have not received classified briefings from the Department on such matters.

What non-military activities by the U.S. Government will be important for achieving a lasting defeat of ISIS?

There are a number of non-military activities by the U.S. Government that are integral to achieving a lasting defeat of ISIS. The most pressing need is a sufficient stabilization effort to consolidate military gains in the Middle East and elsewhere. Although the U.S.-led military Coalition and its local partners are succeeding in retaking territory from ISIS in Iraq and Syria, consolidating these gains requires non-military resources to help stabilize the areas to and to achieve its lasting defeat.

In addition to stabilization efforts, public diplomacy to counter violent extremism, information operations, and cyber strategies must be employed to isolate and delegitimize ISIS and its ideology. We must also continue efforts to cut off or seize ISIS's financial support, including financial transfers, money laundering, oil revenue, and human trafficking.

After Mosul and Raqqa are liberated from ISIS control, the next major military campaign will likely occur in the Euphrates River valley.

What is the strategy needed to accomplish U.S. objectives in Iraq and Syria after Mosul and Raqqa are liberated from ISIS?

In Iraq, I believe there will be an enduring requirement for a U.S. military presence in partnership with the Government of Iraq after Mosul is liberated in order to prevent a repeat of events in 2011-2014 – that is, when the absence of strong American leadership and support of our partners left a security vacuum that ISIS exploited. An enduring presence will be required to continue the counterterrorism mission against ISIS in areas where it maintains a presence. A U.S. military presence will also be required to build off of the gains made in supporting and developing the Iraqi and Kurdish security forces. As to specific next steps, if confirmed, one of my top priorities is supporting the Department's efforts to accelerate the defeat of ISIS wherever we find it. I would also seek the details on the required size and composition of an enduring presence in Iraq. I assess key missions would include training, advising, and assisting the Iraqi and Kurdish security forces, counterterrorism, logistics support, intelligence support, and other activities.

In Syria, it will be important to use the momentum generated by the capture of Raqqa to continue to improve conditions on the ground – completing the annihilation of ISIS and building leverage for a political solution that limits Iranian influence, checks Russian ambitions, and leads to a stable governing arrangement that Syrians view as legitimate. There is significant work required after ISIS is defeated in Mosul and Raqqa on the

diplomatic and humanitarian front. In particular, there must be a concerted effort to prevent Syria or Iraq from being a continued safe haven for other extremist groups that may emerge after ISIS is defeated. This means addressing root causes of Sunni political disenfranchisement in Iraq, managing Kurdish ambitions in both Iraq and Syria, and developing a strategy in Syria to end the civil war and prevent it from becoming a safe haven in the future.

What steps should be taken to prepare for the next phase in the campaign after the liberation of Mosul and Raqqa?

See answer above.

Syria

What are the key U.S. national security interests in Syria and how would you describe the strategy to secure them?

Many U.S. national interests come together in Syria. We have an interest in preventing Syria, like Afghanistan prior to September 11, 2001, from becoming a safe-haven for extremists to launch external attacks against the United States and its allies and partners. We have an interest in preventing Syria from becoming a platform from which adversarial powers such as Iran and Russia can project malign influence in the Middle East. We have an interest in preventing the proliferation and further use of weapons of mass destruction in Syria or outside of it. And we have an interest in bringing the horrific conflict in Syria to an end, halting the destabilizing out-flow of refugees, and beginning to stabilize the country through a political solution that is viewed as legitimate by the Syrian people. It appears to me that U.S. strategy must align ends, ways and means to change the situation on the ground, reduce the violence, and create conditions for diplomacy to succeed.

How does the strategy address the residual threat from Al Qaeda in Syria and their associates?

From publicly available information, it is clear that destroying ISIS is the primary focus of the U.S. military in Syria, but the strategy to address the residual threat is not clear. I am concerned that some of the underlying root causes of instability in the area – particularly Sunni political disenfranchisement, Assad’s continued brutal rule, and Russia’s indiscriminate military operations – will remain in place even after ISIS is defeated. If these broader factors are not addressed, they will likely sow the seeds for continued violence, refugee flows, radicalization, and terrorist recruitment.

How would the defeat of ISIS impact the civil war in Syria?

Defeating ISIS could create opportunities for a political solution in Syria. This will not happen without changing conditions on the ground and international pressure bringing all

parties to the table. Russia in particular has not played a constructive role in ending the conflict. To the contrary, its assault on Aleppo and other parts of Syria has further radicalized the opposition to Assad and empowered ISIS, al-Qaida, and other violent extremist organizations. We should not allow a security vacuum to develop in Syria after the defeat of ISIS. Instead, we should work with our partners to ensure that extremist organizations cannot find safe havens in a post-ISIS Syria.

Do you believe a political resolution to the civil war in Syria is necessary to address the underlying conditions that enable violent extremists like ISIS and Al Qaeda to take root?

Yes. Only a stable, inclusive government in Syria that can exert control over its territory will be able to secure these areas against violent extremist organizations.

What are the key strategic interests and objectives of the Russians in Syria?

Moscow intends to prop up the Assad regime, re-assert its regional influence, and establish a long-term military presence in Syria. Russia claims that its primary motivation in Syria is to fight violent extremists, but its actions have been focused on supporting Assad. This was true from the day Russia intervened, and it remains true now.

Discussing the removal of Bashar al-Assad from power with reporters in March 2017, the U.S. Ambassador to the UN said: “Are we going to sit there and focus on getting him out? No....”

Has the previously stated goal of removing Bashar al-Assad from power in Syria changed, and if so, what is the new objective and what are the benefits to U.S. national security interests of changing it?

While I am not a part of current interagency discussions on Syria, I believe that Bashar al-Assad must go.

As I understand it, the primary U.S. military objective in Syria remains the defeat of ISIS. Additionally, as the U.S. strike in April demonstrates, the United States will not passively stand by while Assad ignores international law and employs chemical weapons against his own people. I support a political resolution to the civil war in which the Syrian people decide the future of their country, but such a resolution will only be achieved once conditions on the ground are changed. The defeat of ISIS in Raqqa could create important momentum to pursue such a broader strategic approach to the horrific situation in Syria.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has been adamant that the People’s Protection Units (YPG) of the Syrian Kurds should not receive U.S. and coalition support in their efforts to liberate Raqqa.

If the United States chooses not to support the YPG in operations to liberate Raqqa, what alternative forces could be used and how would their use affect the timeline and logistical support of the operation?

I understand that the Syrian Democratic Force, which includes YPG elements, is the force most capable of seizing Raqqa within the current timeline. I also understand that the Department maintains a focus on recruiting and training more members of the Syrian Arab Coalition (SAC), the Arab component of the SDF, to help retake and hold historically Arab regions. If confirmed, I will ensure that the Department continues to discuss how to advance the defeat-ISIS campaign with Turkey, a key NATO ally, as well as how best to protect Turkey's interests as we move forward.

Iraq

What are the key U.S. national security interests in Iraq and how would you describe the strategy to secure them?

Our national security interests in Iraq are to defeat ISIS and to enable Iraq to provide for its own security, allowing for a stable and sustainable political environment. A stable Iraq is central to a stable Middle East. The United States and the Coalition will continue to work by, with, and through the Government of Iraq to enable the Iraqi Security Forces to deliver a lasting defeat of ISIS in Iraq.

Do you believe that an enduring U.S. military presence is needed in Iraq? If so, what should be the missions and size of the enduring U.S. military presence?

Based on the information I have received so far, I do believe enduring U.S. forces will be needed in Iraq. Any enduring U.S. force presence should be focused on countering terrorist organizations and ensuring our Iraqi partners are sufficiently organized, trained, and equipped to avoid a repeat of the scenario that unfolded in 2014 when ISIS swept across the country following the complete withdrawal of U.S. forces in 2011.

The United States and Iraq are committed to improving the Iraqi Security Forces and dealing ISIS a lasting defeat. Even after the liberation of Mosul, ISIS will still have a presence in certain parts of Iraq, and the Government in Iraq will still require long-term assistance and support from the United States. If confirmed, I will work closely with our military commanders and the Government of Iraq to ensure the size, scope, and timeline of a U.S. military presence is sufficient to achieve U.S. goals and succeed in our mission.

How would you characterize Iran's influence in Iraq today and what is the strategy to limit that influence in the future?

Iran's sectarian approach to Iraq contributes to extremism and instability and reinforces ISIS's appeal among select Sunni Arab populations. Iran is using its long-standing political, cultural, and religious ties to deepen its involvement in the Iraqi state. The best

strategy to limit Iranian influence is to work with the Government of Iraq to strengthen Iraq's security institutions and promote Iraqi national sovereignty.

Afghanistan

What are the key U.S. national security interests in Afghanistan and how would you describe the strategy to secure them?

There are several U.S. interests in support of a stable and secure Afghanistan, but foremost is to prevent Afghanistan from being used as a safe-haven for terrorists and violent extremist organizations to attack the U.S., our interests, or our allies and partners. If confirmed, I will support the Secretary of Defense and the interagency process as it finalizes and executes a strategy to promote a stable and secure Afghanistan.

In a hearing on Afghanistan before this Committee in February 2017, General Nicholson said that we are in a stalemate after more than 15 years of fighting.

Do you agree with General Nicholson that we are in a stalemate in Afghanistan, and if so, what strategic changes would you recommend?

I agree with General Nicholson. We must provide adequate resources in terms of troops and enablers for the commander to prosecute the counter-terrorism fight and to continue to train, advise, and assist Afghan forces as they fight to secure their country. We must also find ways to help and encourage Pakistan to prevent terrorist organizations from having freedom of movement to go back and forth between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Fundamental to all of this is a coherent strategy that aligns resources with desired end-states in Afghanistan and can be articulated to Congress. I have not seen such a strategy, if one exists, and, if confirmed, I will support the Secretary of Defense in his evaluation and implementation of potential changes regarding our policies and military approach in Afghanistan and the broader region.

Do you agree with General Nicholson that there is a need for additional coalition troops in Afghanistan?

Based on the publicly available information that I currently have access to, I agree with General Nicholson. It is clear the Taliban continues to gain ground, and has been making steady progress against Afghan forces.

The military advice of the commander on the ground is important, and I believe the Department's civilian leadership should consider and weigh such advice appropriately. If confirmed, I will work with the Secretary of Defense, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Combatant Commander, and our other leadership to ensure that our commanders on the ground in Afghanistan have sufficient forces and other resources to succeed in their mission.

What key Afghan capabilities need to be enhanced to promote long-term strategic stability?

As stated previously, the military advice of the commander on the ground is important. General Nicholson has noted that the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces need to enhance close air support capabilities, develop their leaders, and counter internal corruption. I understand General Nicholson has emphasized the need for enhanced Afghan aviation capabilities – an investment that seems reasonable given the threat. If confirmed, I will examine these recommendations and consider what additional Afghan capabilities are necessary to promote long-term strategic stability.

What is the role of U.S. and coalition military operations in promoting reconciliation with the Afghan Taliban and other insurgent groups?

If Taliban leaders believe they are winning on the battlefield Taliban, they have no incentive to seriously negotiate. The Afghan security forces must first turn the tide militarily against the Taliban in order for reconciliation to be viable. The role of U.S. and coalition military operations to support Afghanistan's military is critical to this effort.

What is your view of Russian claims that they are in discussions with the Afghan Taliban to promote reconciliation and also to partner in the fight against ISIS?

I agree with Secretary Mattis that Russia has chosen to be a strategic competitor of the United States. In general, I view Russian activities in Afghanistan and in Syria largely destabilizing and contrary to stated U.S. objectives. Russia has consistently undermined U.S. and coalition interests in both theaters.

With respect to Afghanistan, I believe that all regional states, including Russia, should respect and work within the framework of an Afghan-led peace process.

Do you agree that the sanctuary for extremist forces in Pakistan is a key factor affecting the stability and security of Afghanistan? If so, what recommendations would you have to end this sanctuary?

Yes. Sanctuary for the Taliban and other militant networks inside Pakistani territory continue to negatively affect security conditions and stability in Afghanistan. The U.S. should help and encourage Pakistan to do more to prevent terrorist organizations from finding sanctuary in Pakistan. If confirmed, I will work with the Secretary and our Commanders to find ways in which we can deny extremist forces sanctuary in Pakistan.

Do you agree that any future reductions in the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces from the 352,000 troop level should be based on the security conditions in Afghanistan at the time the reductions would occur?

I believe that recommendations on force structure should be based on security conditions on the ground. If confirmed, I will examine carefully any proposals on force level reductions in the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces and listen to the recommendations from the commanders on the ground in order to provide informed advice to the Secretary of Defense.

Russia

Senior U.S. military officials have said Russia is the number one threat to the United States.

What are the challenges to U.S. national security interests from Russia and what are the key principles that must underpin a successful strategy to protect our interests?

Russia has chosen to be a strategic competitor with the United States and our allies. The challenges to our interests stem from its efforts to undermine global norms, fracture the cohesion of NATO, and extend a sphere of influence over the countries on its periphery. Russia's provocative behavior also includes alarming messages regarding the use of nuclear weapons; treaty violations; the use of hybrid warfare tactics to destabilize neighboring countries; and aggressive cyber and information warfare. Buttressing NATO will be fundamental to meeting these challenges, as will unified action across the U.S. Government to counter both traditional and emerging threats.

Should the United States condition its military engagement with Russia on certain changes in Russian behavior, and if so, what conditions if any, would you recommend?

I understand that, in response to Russia's aggressive actions in Ukraine, the Department suspended military-to-military cooperation with the Russian Federation, both as a matter of policy and due to legal constraints laid out in Section 1232 of the Fiscal Year 2017 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). In order for the legal restrictions to be lifted, Russia must "cease its occupation of Ukrainian territory and its aggressive activities that threaten the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine and members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization." I do not envision a scenario in which I would recommend a waiver given Russia's continued aggression in Ukraine.

Do you agree with General Scaparrotti that our current force posture in Europe is "inadequate" to deter Russia? What changes to our force posture would you recommend?

I do agree with General Scaparrotti. The Department has taken some steps to enhance the readiness and responsiveness of U.S. forces in the European theater, as well as to build up the military capacity of the Baltic States. These include both near-term enhancements to the U.S. defense posture through European Reassurance Initiative (ERI) funding as well

as longer-term investments in advanced power projection capabilities. I understand the Department has increased its request for ERI funding in its FY 2018 budget.

Do you support continued U.S. security assistance to Ukraine and, if so, how would the provision of such security assistance fit within the broader U.S. strategy for stability within the region?

Yes, I support continued security assistance to Ukraine, including lethal defensive assistance. Security assistance should be one part of a larger whole-of-government approach for supporting Ukraine and deterring further Russian aggression in the region.

Do you support providing lethal defensive security assistance to Ukraine as in the interest of the United States?

Yes. I support lethal defensive security assistance to Ukraine. The United States must do more to counter Russia's aggressive behavior and support the people of Ukraine.

In your view, what are the key elements of a strategy to counter Russian hybrid tactics that employ both hard and soft power and present attribution challenges?

The presence of credible and capable U.S. forces continues to help deter Russia's hard power efforts to undermine our interests around the world. Increased awareness and improved resiliency are a good start. The forward deployment of U.S. personnel to the Baltics and Poland also signals a strong intent. If we do not already have classified capabilities and ongoing operations to disrupt Russian influence networks, I would advocate for these types of measures if confirmed.

What is your assessment of the Russian malign influence threat and what recommendations, if any, would you have for the role of the U.S. Government, and the Department of Defense in particular, in countering this threat?

Russia's actions pose a serious threat to the United States, its allies, and its partners. Their disinformation campaign is part of a broader approach to undermining global security that also involves elements of cyber operations, manipulation of information, and espionage. It is a persistent and growing threat. Any strategy to respond should account for these dimensions through an integrated cross-governmental approach and should explore both defensive and offensive measures.

Russian Violation of the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty

In your view, what are the consequences for U.S. national security of Russia's actions in violation of its obligations under the INF Treaty?

The Russian Federation's violation of the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty poses a direct threat to our allies and threatens U.S. forces and interests. Russia's

actions in violation of the INF treaty, if unchecked, could lead to doubt in the stability of current and future arms control agreements and initiatives.

What do you believe would be appropriate responses for the United States to take in order to: 1) convince Russia to return to compliance with the INF Treaty, or 2) ensure that U.S. national security is maintained if Russia does not return to compliance?

While I understand that the Administration is reviewing a number of potential response options, it seems clear that the United States is operating with one hand tied behind its back since we are the only party to the treaty that is following the rules. The treaty permits the development of ground-launched missiles with ranges in excess of 500 kilometers. In light of Russia's violation of the treaty, I do not believe that the United States should continue to constrain ourselves from taking steps that we have every right to do. Indeed, such actions could generate diplomatic leverage for the United States and put pressure on Russia to return to compliance. However, if diplomatic means to reestablish Russian adherence to the treaty fail, the United States should be prepared to withdraw from the treaty.