

Opening Statement
Amb. Stuart Jones
December 14, 2017

Chairman McCain, Ranking Member Reed,

First let me thank you for this invitation to testify before this Committee today. While we have spent a significant amount of time together it's the first time I have testified before this Committee and I am honored for the opportunity and I am equally humbled to be seated with this distinguished panel.

As we all heard, last week Iraqi Prime Minister Abadi announced the defeat of ISIS in Iraq. I had the privilege to work closely with the Prime Minister during my time in Baghdad. He has been tireless in service to his nation and a reliable partner for the United States. He deserves our commendation for leading Iraq through a difficult three-year struggle and reaching this watershed moment.

This victory was achieved by the Iraqi Armed Forces, but would not have been possible without the essential support of the Combined Joint Task Force for Iraq. We should also recognize the extraordinary military leadership of CJTF Commanders, LTG James Terry, LTG Sean MacFarland, LTG Steve Townsend and now LTG Paul Funk.

Again, I had the honor to work with all of these exceptional military leaders and their teams. They have done far more than defeat ISIS. Through their train and equip mission, they have restored the confidence of the Iraqi security forces; saved countless lives from the barbaric predations of ISIS; and facilitated the return of more than 2.7 million displaced persons to their homes.

The fight against ISIS has been the organizing principle for our Middle East policy for the past three years. We have known that the day would come when ISIS would be defeated and we would need to reassess policy priorities to build on this success. We are now at that point and the President must decide what U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East will look like going forward.

Today Iraq enjoys unprecedented low levels of violence and Prime Minister Abadi is seen by Sunni and Shi'a alike as a unifying force. Continued oil production, growth and improvements in the oil export infrastructure; stabilization of oil prices and support from the World Bank and the IMF have enabled the Iraqis to contemplate a prosperous economic future. Iraq will, however, continue to face enormous challenges.

While ISIS, the terrorist ground force, is defeated we know that extremists will go underground and continue to terrorize Iraq's innocent civilians, especially in urban areas such as Baghdad. The Iraqi Security Forces will need our continued assistance to combat this threat.

The Government of Iraq has invited a limited number of US forces to remain to provide training and other support to assist them in their efforts to combat extremism. Helping Iraq's Counter

Terrorism Service reconstitute to face this new challenge is a mission that US forces are uniquely positioned to accomplish.

With the ISIS threat destroyed, malign Iranian interference, is now the primary security challenge facing the region. Iran's activities threaten the security of our strongest ally in the region, Israel, but also threaten Jordan, a crucial partner where I had the privilege to serve -- as well as our Gulf partners.

Iranian interference has posed a challenge to Iraqi stability for some time and it is now at its highest levels. Prime Minister Abadi has committed to integrating the Popular Mobilization Forces, some with close ties to the Iranian Qods Force, into the national security forces, with the requirement that they leave their political baggage behind them. This will be a huge task and he will need our support.

The U.S. Administration is developing a strategy to push back and contain Iran throughout the entire region. This pushback needs to be a whole of government approach. In Iraq, in particular, we need to go beyond security support and remind the Iraqi public of the full benefit of their Strategic Framework Agreement with the United States.

Iraq has a large youth population. From my time there I can say that Iraqi youth yearn for US technology, US investment, US training and education. The General Electric Power Up program, which was initiated during my time in Iraq, has provided thousands of Megawatts of needed electricity, but also introduced cutting edge technology, created hundreds of high paying jobs and afforded training that will transform those young workers' lives forever.

Likewise, at this moment, US energy firms are developing proposals to assist Iraq in capturing its flared gas. A comprehensive solution to this problem -- which Prime Minister Abadi has prioritized for 2018 -- would not only address an environmental calamity but also restore billions of dollars to the Iraqi economy in a short period of time. For these measures to fully succeed, however, we must ensure that US export promotion agencies are fully operational and targeted at the problem set in the Middle East.

To his credit, PM Abadi has also launched a 'war' on corruption. The public response to his announcements has been positive. A war on corruption will be a blessing for the US Iraqi Strategic Framework Agreement because the intrinsic value of the US partnership becomes clearer on a fair and transparent playing field.

In our pushback against Iran, we should also continue to help foster Iraq's ties to its other neighbors. Saudi Foreign Minister Jubeir's visit to Baghdad in February, encouraged by Secretary Tillerson, was a game changer. Since then we have seen numerous high level visits back and forth and road and air links opened, the latter for the first time since 1990. The next step should be to encourage further progress on expanding and securing the highway between Amman and Baghdad.

Finally, the September referendum on Kurdish independence has had disastrous consequences for the Kurds and for the cooperation that had emerged between Baghdad and Erbil during the

Mosul campaign. Although we opposed the referendum, we should now support restored cooperation between Erbil and Baghdad. It is often said in Iraq that the Kurds provide the needed third leg of the Iraqi stool.

Following the referendum, Prime Minister Abadi did what was needed. Now he is in a position to work towards reconciliation. This rift needs to be repaired ahead of the May 2018 elections, so that the Kurds may participate fully in national politics.

Chairman McCain, Ranking Member Reed, I want to thank you, again for this opportunity and for your consistent leadership on these issues. I always value your insight and I look forward to taking your questions.