

Statement for the Record

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Office of the Secretary of Defense

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The U.S.-Iraq security partnership is the foundation of a safer region and future for both Iraqis and Americans. When I was in Iraq in March, every member of the Iraqi government underscored the importance of its security partnership with the United States and the broader Coalition. Iraq's Prime Minister, President and Speaker all reiterated to me the importance of maintaining the Coalition presence in Iraq in order to prevent an ISIS resurgence. The 5,200 U.S. forces operating in Iraq are present at the express invitation of the government of Iraq. This relationship is among our most compelling strategic interests.

The fight against ISIS is not over, and the road to recovery will be long. Our deepest condolences go to the Iraqis and heroic Iraqi Security Force members that recently lost their lives in ISIS attacks in Kirkuk and al-Tarmiya. Five years ago, ISIS controlled approximately 55,000 square kilometers and more than 4 million people in Iraq lived under ISIS's oppressive rule. Its attempts to establish a fraudulent caliphate were marked by mass executions and public beheadings.

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Today, the D-ISIS fight and ensuring the enduring defeat of ISIS are vital U.S. national security interests. Combined Joint Task Force – Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR), which includes the U.S. and fifteen other nations, currently helps train and equip 28 Iraqi brigades comprising thousands of soldiers. CJTF-OIR has brought immense firepower against ISIS through thousands of airstrikes and the expertise of thousands of experienced U.S. and Coalition advisors supporting Iraq’s soldiers. The U.S.-led Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS includes 80 members, twelve of which are G-20 countries. The U.S. and Coalition training and assistance mission has yielded dividends, though much work remains to ensure a secure and prosperous future for all Iraqis. The priority is to empower Iraq’s professional and capable security forces to protect its sovereignty and to prevent an ISIS resurgence.

The best way to honor Coalition and Iraqi sacrifices is preserve an enduring partnership and invest in Iraq’s long-term capacity and stability. Our relationship with Iraq is grounded in mutual respect for sovereignty and anchored in the Strategic Framework Agreement signed by our two countries more than 10 years ago.

U.S. security assistance strengthens Iraqi sovereignty by building Iraqi capacity. Only with a long-term security partnership can Iraq defeat and prevent the re-emergence of terrorists

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that threaten Iraq, the region, and the world. The more capable Iraq's security institutions, the more resilient Iraq will be in the face of its enemies.