

INTERNATIONAL SECURITY UPDATE
July 28 - August 11, 2015

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1. [1 Year in, Officials Assess Anti-ISIL Progress](#) (08-08-2015)

By Air Force Master Sgt. Sonny Cohrs
U.S. Air Forces Central Command

On Aug. 8, 2014, coalition aircraft conducted the first airstrikes against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant. A year later, senior leaders have had a chance to reflect on the progress thus far and how it shapes the future of Operation Inherent Resolve.



A U.S. Navy F/A-18E Super Hornet aircraft assigned to Strike Fighter Squadron 31 launches from the flight deck of the aircraft carrier USS George H.W. Bush in the Persian Gulf Aug. 9, 2014, as the ship supports operations in Iraq. President Barack Obama authorized humanitarian aid deliveries to Iraq as well as targeted airstrikes to protect U.S. personnel from extremists known as the Islamic State in Iraq and the

Levant. U.S. Central Command directed the operations. U.S. Navy photo by Petty Officer 3rd Class Margaret Keith .

Defense Secretary Ash Carter said in late July that bolstering Iraq's security forces and building moderate, vetted Syrian opposition forces is essential to enabling the two countries to defeat ISIL and work to establish peace within their own countries.

"We can help them. We can enable them. We can train them. We can equip them. We can support them," he said. "But we can't substitute for them. Because we don't live here ... we can't keep them beaten. Only the people who live here can keep them beaten."

While coalition air power patrols the skies, ground forces continue to train and equip vetted local forces in Iraq. About 3,550 American personnel are in Iraq, helping to build partner capacities and assisting with ongoing operations.

Training for new Syrian forces is still in the early stages, Carter said in May, but it is "a critical and complex part of our counter-ISIL efforts"

Air, Ground Progress

The air campaign continues to have success in striking ISIL facilities, vehicles and equipment, and it enables both the Iraqi Security Forces as well as anti-ISIL fighters in Syria, according to U.S. Marine Corps Brig. Gen. Kevin Killea, the chief of staff for Combined Joint Task Force Operation Inherent Resolve.

"In my opinion, this is not the same fight as it was when it started, and I look at that based on the effects that we have had on ISIL," Killea said.

"They are much more territorial -- meaning they're defending more than they are on the offensive. Their attacks are smaller, they are more focused, and they're less enduring, and all you have to do is look at the gains that have been made on the ground recently to see ... there is an effect, and there is progress," he said.

Unlike ISIL, Killea said, the coalition works to address and minimize the possibility of collateral damage and civilian casualties.

"We have struck ... staging areas and destroyed multiple ISIL armored personnel carriers and other vehicles," he explained. "Coalition forces have also focused on destroying ISIL [roadside bomb] facilities. Airstrikes have gone a long way to degrade ISIL's ability to mount large offensive attacks, as well as reducing their ability to openly control towns and cities, where they so often inflict terror on those civilian populations."

Air Force Lt. Gen. C.Q. Brown Jr., commander of the combined force air component, said American troops and their coalition partners have conducted more than 5,900 airstrikes since the start of Operation Inherent Resolve. The airstrikes are intended to limit ISIL's freedom of movement, Brown said, while constraining its ability to reinforce its fighters and degrading its command and control.

Precise Attacks

"Our coalition air power enables [anti-ISIL] ground forces in Iraq and Syria," he said. "The faster [ISIL] falls, the sooner innocent civilians can return to a peaceful way of life."

The general also commended the coalition on its ability to make precise strikes against ISIL targets while minimizing collateral damage on the ground and restricting freedom of movement for ISIL. Of the 20,000-plus coalition munitions used against ISIL in the last year, 99 percent of them were precision-guided, Brown said.

“Coalition airstrikes are the most precise in the history of warfare,” he said. “Conducting strikes in heavily populated areas where [ISIL] hides can present a challenge, but our coalition pilots are well disciplined and our weapon systems are extremely accurate.”

Once the ISIL members are flushed out into the open by advancing anti-ISIL fighters, they are once again susceptible to coalition targeting, Brown added.

He said coalition forces can redirect the enemy’s advances or retreats, forcing them to travel discreetly or risk coalition airstrikes.

"Even our combat air patrols -- merely the presence of coalition aircraft in an area -- also affect their freedom of movement," Brown explained. “And one year into this coalition effort to rid the world of these [ISIL] terrorists, the team can be proud of what they’ve accomplished. Their hard work and sacrifice have already saved countless lives and we will not stop until we have defeated this barbaric enemy.”

2. State Dept. on U.S. Engagement in 2015 ASEAN Regional Forum (08-06-2015)

FACT SHEET

U.S. Engagement in the 2015 ASEAN Regional Forum

On August 6 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, Secretary of State John Kerry led the United States’ delegation to the 22nd Meeting of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), an annual gathering of foreign ministers and senior officials representing 26 countries from Pakistan to the Pacific Rim and the European Union. The ARF is a regional foreign minister-level forum for promoting security, and this year it addressed pressing political and security issues including: marine environmental protection and conservation; the South China Sea; concerns over the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea’s proscribed nuclear and ballistic missile programs and human rights situation; the humanitarian crisis emanating from the irregular maritime movement of people in Southeast and South Asia and the Mediterranean; and regional cooperation on issues ranging from cyber-security to non-proliferation to humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HA/DR). The ARF ministers adopted the U.S. co-sponsored Statement on Strengthened Cooperation on Marine Environmental Protection and Conservation and Secretary Kerry announced a new USAID Oceans and Fisheries Partnership with an initial commitment of \$4.3 million that will address the threat of Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing in Southeast Asia.

Ministers also endorsed ARF activities that occurred during the past year and approved over 30 proposals for the coming year. These activities cover several key security areas, including: preventive diplomacy; maritime security; disaster response; counterterrorism and transnational crime; and nonproliferation and disarmament. The United States is actively engaged in these areas and is committed to working through the ARF to shape a rules-based order that is stable, peaceful, open and free.

Preventive Diplomacy

A top priority for U.S. engagement in the ARF is advancing the forum from a body focused on confidence building to one capable of preventive diplomacy. Preventive diplomacy refers to timely, non-coercive and peaceful methods consistent with international law to deal with disputes and conflict.

In July, the United States, Thailand, and New Zealand co-chaired the ARF Track 1.5 Symposium on Preventive Diplomacy in Bangkok, and last October the United States, China, Brunei, and New Zealand hosted the ARF Training Course on Preventive Diplomacy in Beijing. These events are aimed at promoting and shaping the advancement of Preventive Diplomacy within the ARF after 20 years of focusing on confidence-building measures (CBMs).

Building on momentum from these events, the United States with support from the United States Institute of Peace plans to partner with Vietnam and Brunei to hold a preventive diplomacy training course in Vietnam early next year. This event will capitalize on regional think tank and academic expertise to help develop an effective, comprehensive approach to regional preventive diplomacy. The United States submitted input to the ARF Annual Security Outlook, which provides a comprehensive outline of U.S. security policies and capabilities in the region, to encourage full transparency in military resources and strategy among ARF members.

Maritime Security

With over 40 percent of the world's seaborne trade flowing through the Asia-Pacific, maintaining open sea lines of communication and ensuring freedom of movement and other lawful uses of the sea are critical for regional security and stability. As a Pacific nation, the United States continues to prioritize maritime security cooperation through the promotion of freedom of navigation, international law, the peaceful settlement of disputes, and unimpeded lawful commerce.

Together with Singapore, Vietnam, and China, the United States sponsored the ARF Statement on Strengthened Cooperation on Marine Environmental Protection and Conservation that was endorsed by the foreign ministers at the meeting. This statement acknowledges the vital importance of marine ecosystems and resources to food security, human health, and economic well-being in the Asia-Pacific and calls on ARF participants to cooperate on efforts to reduce pollution, conserve coastal and marine areas, manage fisheries and combat illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing. IUU fishing practices threaten biodiversity, food security, and livelihoods in the region. Secretary Kerry announced a new USAID Oceans and Fisheries Partnership, with an initial commitment of \$4.3 million, to address this threat and help to implement regional initiatives and projects. This program implemented in partnership with the Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center, includes measures designed to promote national policies that support sustainable and legal fishing, increase transparency of fishery supply chains, and facilitate international research cooperation. The United States, Japan, and the Philippines hosted the Inter-Sessional Meeting (ISM) on Maritime Security in Honolulu in April, which is the first year of a three-year co-chairmanship. The agenda focused on building confidence and sharing best practices on multiple issues, including the marine environment, maritime safety, piracy, and combatting IUU fishing. Participants also exchanged views on pressing maritime security issues in the region, including concerns over recent developments in the South China Sea, where tensions have risen over disputed territorial and maritime claims. The United States continues to encourage greater multilateral cooperation through increased transparency and confidence building as it continues its co-chairmanship of the Maritime Security ISM for another two years.

In March, Japan, Malaysia, India, and the United States co-chaired a seminar in Tokyo on counter-piracy. This event highlighted the challenges in addressing piracy and armed robbery, particularly for coastal countries in Asia.

Disaster Relief

Seventy percent of all natural disasters occur in the Asia-Pacific, costing the region \$68 billion annually over the past ten years. Through continued, dedicated efforts, ARF participants have made considerable progress in the area of disaster relief, using lessons learned to improve the capabilities of ASEAN's Coordination Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management (AHA Centre) and its goal to achieve "One ASEAN, One Response" by 2020.

The United States participated in the 2015 ARF Disaster Relief Exercises (DiREx), a biennial exercise which was held this year in Kedah, Malaysia. Co-chairs Malaysia and China addressed sensitive but critical issues that can hamper effective disaster response, including customs, immigration and quarantine (CIQ) protocols, coordination mechanisms, and the need to consider the East Asia Summit (EAS) Rapid Disaster Response (RDR) guidelines. Since its inception in 2009, the United States has supported this event, including its role as the first co-chair. In order to strengthen regional cooperation and improve regional disaster response, the United States expects to continue to participate and support DiREx in the future with USAID's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance, U.S. Pacific Command, and other U.S. agencies.

Climate change is a complex strategic factor with significant economic, societal, and political implications. Initiatives to adapt to a changing climate are already underway in the Asia-Pacific, including in the ARF, where the United States, Thailand, and Brunei intend to co-chair a climate change adaptation workshop to build regional awareness and capacity to address this challenge. The United States co-chaired a workshop with Australia and Malaysia to develop a common framework for the region's numerous HA/DR exercises among its various fora—namely the ASEAN Committee on Disaster Management (ACDM), ARF, the ASEAN Defense Minister's Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus) and the East Asia Summit (EAS). This workshop marked the first time members have met to address regional HA/DR needs, capacities, and roles as well as synchronizing training activities and exercises in order to better coordinate life-saving relief efforts during future disasters.

Counterterrorism and Transnational Crime

The ARF addresses five core areas in its work on counterterrorism and transnational crime: illicit drugs; cyber security; counter-radicalization; chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) issues; and trafficking in persons (TIP). The ARF is making efforts to improve collaboration among regional governments to address these issues:

The United States is working with Singapore to conduct the next in a series of cyber workshops focused on developing CBMs for the region. As national security interests are increasingly tied to cyberspace, the development of confidence building measures that facilitate increased transparency, greater cooperation, and improved capacity within the region is essential to reducing the risk of future conflict.

The ARF Cross-Sectoral Security Cooperation on Bio-Preparedness and Disaster Response project, led by the United States and the Philippines, is a series of workshops and activities designed to implement the best practices approved by the 20th ARF. Participants in the events can use these activities as a basis for developing their respective national guidelines and enhancing regional capacity for preparedness and collective response to a biological event. An outcome of the first workshop conducted in August 2014 was a template for national bio-preparedness that ARF participants can use for these purposes. The next event is a tabletop exercise in Manila this month aimed at validating the draft template for national bio-preparedness.

In March, the United States and Malaysia co-chaired a workshop on mitigating demand for illegal wildlife trafficking in the Asia-Pacific. This joint U.S.-Malaysian effort attracted a high level of interest, with participants including the Malaysian Minister of Foreign Affairs and the U.S. Under Secretary of State for Economic Growth, Energy, and the Environment. This event complemented wildlife trafficking-related activities in the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and other fora, as well as the work of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) and the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime (ICWC).

Also in March, the United States and Myanmar co-chaired in Nay Pyi Taw the ARF Workshop on Security, Stability, and International Migration in the ASEAN Region. This workshop reviewed ARF priorities in promoting the benefits of legal, safe, and orderly migration and in addressing the security challenges associated with irregular migration. Furthermore, the workshop emphasized the role of regional cooperation in promoting the rights of migrant workers and ways to strengthen regular migration processes at the national and transnational levels, including during times of crises. In September, the United States and the Philippines are hosting the ARF Workshop on First Response Support for Victims of Terrorism and other Mass Casualty Events in Manila. This workshop will bring together policymakers and practitioners to promote good practices regarding the treatment of victims of terrorist attacks and other mass casualty events.

Nonproliferation and Disarmament

The ARF is the premier regional venue for multilateral cooperation on nonproliferation and disarmament issues through tangible capacity building programs and open discussions to coordinate efforts and build common understanding.

Working with other ARF members, the United States led an effort to institutionalize the discussion on nonproliferation and disarmament issues in the ARF and to develop a work plan of activities that promotes balance across the three central pillars of the global nonproliferation regime: preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, promoting the peaceful use of nuclear technology, and advancing global disarmament efforts.

The agenda of the 7th ARF ISM on Non-Proliferation and Disarmament (NPD) considered international mechanisms as well as tools, resources, and capacity-building for WMD threat reduction together with preventing and countering WMD proliferation which included export control regimes, UNSCR 1540, the Proliferation Security Initiative, the Nuclear Security Summit, and assistance programs from other countries.

Space Security

Capitalizing on the first ARF Space Security Workshop, the United States, China, Russia, and Laos plan to co-chair a follow-on workshop to explore the benefits of outer space for ASEAN Member States, address current issues facing the space environment, and assess approaches to space security to ensure the benefits for future generations.

3. Successes and Challenges in Afghanistan and Pakistan (08-05-2015)

Remarks by Dan Feldman
Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan

I'm delighted to be at USIP to give my valedictory address as the Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, or, as we term it, "SRAP." I visited the region this past week to pay my farewell calls, and look forward to comparing notes here with Steve and Andrew given their own extremely recent travels, and appreciate their flexibility on the timing of this event. The relationship with USIP has been a special and even familial one, and a model for the way in which experts and policy makers can shape each other's thinking in a collaborative manner. Thank you for that.

I started working on Afghanistan and Pakistan six years ago when Richard Holbrooke offered me a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity at the inception of the SRAP office to serve as his deputy, and ultimately became Special Representative myself a year ago. Now that I'm transitioning back to the private sector, I wanted to reflect on the successes that have been achieved while also acknowledging the many challenges that remain.

I was incredulous recently when in the midst of testifying to Congress, my deputy was asked derisively, "What has diplomacy actually *achieved* in Afghanistan?" That demonstrated for me the need to highlight the fragile but significant developments in the region that have been fostered and sustained due primarily to assiduous diplomatic efforts.

- It was diplomacy that facilitated and nurtured the Afghan effort to create a government of national unity;
- It was diplomacy that has put our bilateral relationship with Pakistan on firmer footing now than at any point in this Administration;
- It was diplomacy that opened an historic opportunity for Afghanistan and Pakistan to work together toward a common interest in peace;
- It was diplomacy that has supported Afghan determination to fundamentally change the role of women in society;
- It was diplomacy that secured the international political and financial support the Government and security forces of Afghanistan need;
- And it can only be through sustained diplomacy with the international community and especially the countries of the region that the opportunity for success in Afghanistan will be preserved.

These types of diplomatic openings don't just spontaneously generate. I am extremely proud to have been a charter member of SRAP – this innovative and entrepreneurial team, created by the vision of Secretary Clinton and Ambassador Holbrooke, and sustained by Secretary Kerry's own commitment to this office, this region, and to the power of diplomacy. Due to its achievements, I believe SRAP will serve as a whole-of-government prototype for how government can more nimbly respond to complex crises in the future. And every day, this dedicated team, many of whom are here today, has honored Richard Holbrooke's memory by seeking to fulfill his definition of diplomacy -- minimizing conflict, saving lives, and achieving results.

Afghanistan

You all know the list of momentous achievements in Afghanistan: access to education, improving the role of women and girls, health and longevity, independent media, infrastructure, and GDP growth. Afghanistan is simply not the country it was when the Taliban ruled.

Political stability in Afghanistan is the lynchpin of Afghan security. Just one year ago, the prospects for stable leadership after the electoral impasse seemed remote, and the unpalatable options included an extension of President Karzai's term and threats of a "parallel government." After an Afghan request for his intervention, Secretary Kerry made two visits to Kabul last July and August, when he famously brokered the political compromise that resulted in the unity government. After achieving agreement on the parameters of that framework, I was left behind in Kabul to lead the

mediation and hammer out, over six or seven weeks, a political agreement between now-President Ghani and now-CEO Abdullah to form a unity government, becoming the first democratic transition of power in Afghanistan's history.

Coalition governments, even in the most mature democracies, grapple mightily with implementation, and Afghanistan is no different. But President Ghani's government has made progress in a range of key areas over the past year, from appointments and anti-corruption initiatives to the recent establishment of the Special Electoral Reform Commission, which was especially fulfilling for me to meet with last week.

For this unity government to achieve its promises of reform, it must operate in a more inclusive manner. This includes empowering Ministries and provincial governors to assume much of the work, and engaging more comprehensively with the *full range* of Afghan stakeholders – the Parliament, civil society, opinion leaders, domestic media, and ultimately the Afghan people. Those who feel excluded from the government pave the way for spoilers to attract the disaffected and create unnecessary instability.

That is why I urge my colleagues in the Afghan government to seize this last, best opportunity to demonstrate that this government is both durable and functional, and can translate the rhetoric of policy vision into tangible policy implementation that will benefit the daily lives of all Afghans. And my message to those outside of government is – support the unity government and ensure it's on the path to success. *This* is the legitimate government, reflective of the millions of votes cast, that the international community will continue to support. Afghans don't deserve *any* alternative that weakens rather than strengthens the fabric of their society.

Political stability will optimize success in the ongoing efforts to address other related challenges. The economic climate must weather the shock of the drawdown of international resources. And the security challenges throughout the country are severe, as the Taliban has launched a violent onslaught, killing many civilians and inflicting significant casualties. We always anticipated this would be a difficult fighting season and pose a real challenge to the Afghan security forces, but they have held their own. While the Taliban has made temporary gains, the ANSF has retaken lost territory, and the Taliban have not seriously challenged any major urban center or provincial capital. The ANSF has proven it was ready for the lead security responsibility transferred to it from NATO last year, and we will continue to support the ANSF as it builds the skills and resources it needs to match its undoubted courage and commitment.

One final word on the progress we have seen in Afghanistan. We and our allies should be proud of the role that our assistance has played – including that administered through our unprecedented “civilian surge.” Development will always be difficult work, and there will at times be accurate reports of waste given the challenges faced by one of the world's poorest, most conflict-affected, and least institutionalized countries. And to be clear, anyone – American or Afghan, government employee or contractor – who illegally benefits from assistance funds must be held accountable. But despite the easy allure of “gotcha” reporting on assistance delivery, we must continue to assess the overall impact of our efforts, and not just focus on the easiest, mechanical accounting of project execution. We must redouble our efforts to provide accountability to the extent feasible, but not fundamentally chill initiatives that are critical to achieving our core security interests – degrading Al Qaeda and its affiliates, and ensuring Afghanistan does not once again become a safe haven for terrorists who can threaten international security. These are hard goals and important ones, and there will be failures as we try to find the right mix of initiatives to achieve them. But that risk of failure is one worth taking.

Pakistan

In Pakistan, too, diplomats have been at the front lines of protecting our national interests. Diplomacy has brought our bilateral relationship from a tumultuous nadir several years ago to its current strengthened and stable position, based on a more honest and realistic set of expectations.

The principal vehicle for this recovery has been our Strategic Dialogue, where we have honed in on key areas of strategic alignment to deliver results, including countering terrorism, addressing nuclear concerns, and promoting stability through economic reforms and trade, energy initiatives, and educational opportunities.

This evolving dynamic has produced some notable progress, particularly in targeting Al Qaeda leadership and countering the threat posed by IEDs. There is a renewed effort by the Pakistani leadership to bring greater security throughout the country, as demonstrated by the ambitious undertaking of the North Waziristan operation just a year ago, and which has been further accelerated in the aftermath of the Peshawar massacre last December.

Our assistance has been of great value under Kerry Lugar Berman, which has rebalanced our assistance portfolio in favor of civilian assistance, from the previously disproportionate reliance on security assistance. In particular, our ability to better brand key “high visibility, high impact signature projects” in energy, economic growth, infrastructure development, and higher education contributed to improved perceptions of the U.S. High-level economic visits, including by Commerce Secretary Pritzker earlier this year, showcase the potential of the economic relationship, which can be unlocked if Pakistan continues progress on its reform agenda.

Yet despite this progress, as with other complex – yet crucial – relationships, the U.S.-Pakistan one still faces challenges, though ones we now discuss in a transparent manner befitting real partners. We continue to have concerns about Pakistan’s history of using proxies against perceived foes in the region. Although we’ve seen concrete actions by Pakistan to more clearly establish the writ of sovereignty, the military and civilian leadership must make good on their commitments not to differentiate between terrorist groups. Just as they have vigorously pursued the Pakistani Taliban, they must take equally forceful actions against groups like the Haqqani Network, which pose serious threats to American (and Afghan) lives and resources, and Lashkar-e-Tayyiba, which has the potential to destabilize the region.

Let me also say a word about Pakistan’s democracy. I’ve heard many allege that the U.S. is ambivalent about democracy in Pakistan – but that could not be further from the truth. We realize that the process of strengthening and embedding democratic rule will be gradual – but it is critical to Pakistan’s future, and I know this is also understood by both Pakistan’s civilian and military leadership. It has been almost eight years since democracy was reinstated in Pakistan, and two and a half years since the country’s own first historic transition of power, and there continue to be challenges. Just a year ago, the Sharif government was beset by protests that fed rumors of a coup, but today, it appears that civilian and military leadership have come to an important modus vivendi, as preserving the centrality of civilian led, democratic institutions, is critical to Pakistan’s future.

AfPak / Reconciliation

Diplomacy is also giving new life to the relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan. President Ghani deserves great credit for courageously opening the opportunity for rapprochement with Pakistan, and particularly in such a deliberate and strategic manner.

We similarly appreciate Pakistan’s efforts to further an Afghan-led, Afghan-owned reconciliation process, as the U.S. has long maintained that it is just such a process, which we strongly support without pre-conditions, is the surest way to end violence and achieve lasting stability in Afghanistan and the region.

It is clear that there can be no long-term stability in Afghanistan without Pakistan's support and Pakistan has taken unprecedented actions this year to facilitate a discussion between the Afghan government and the Taliban, resulting in the Murree meeting on July 7th, the first time that senior Taliban representatives openly and with permission from their leadership met with an official and representative Afghan government delegation.

Needless to say, the news of Mullah Omar's death last week has complicated this picture. But I believe it may be an important opportunity. The Taliban think of themselves as a movement that emerged to end a civil war. Now they have to decide whether to continue to fight, or to finally end the violence that has stunted Afghanistan's development, and become part of the legitimate political system of a sovereign, united Afghanistan.

Region

Concerted American diplomacy has also resulted in the sustained engagement of the international community, and particularly the key nations of the region. Since the beginning of this Administration, one important mechanism for coordination has been the International Contact Group we launched, comprised of the SRAPs from over 50 countries, including more than one-third from Muslim-majority countries.

I'm especially optimistic that regional powers have increasingly come to see that supporting a stable Afghanistan, free of terrorism, is in their interests. There has been a marked and productive change in the posture of countries in the region over the past six years. As one example, we welcome China's engagement in Afghanistan and Pakistan, which we see not as competitive but complementary to our own efforts. In 2009, on my first official trip to engage the Chinese, my colleagues in Beijing refused to even have the words "Afghanistan" or "Pakistan" on our agenda. Today we have embarked on a series of collaborative development projects in Afghanistan and convened a trilateral U.S.-China-Afghanistan discussion, both firsts of their kind with the Chinese.

Our efforts to spur broader regional integration include both diplomatic endeavors to convene key neighbors, such as through the Heart of Asia process, and economic initiatives, such as energy connectivity between countries via the CASA-1000 project, or fully implementing the Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement.

Closing

Our interest in stability in Afghanistan and Pakistan is no less acute than it was 14 years ago. The achievements that have been made in Afghanistan and Pakistan have come at the cost of an immense investment in blood and treasure by not just the U.S., but by our coalition partners, and most of all, by Afghans and Pakistanis. Those investments can be redeemed and our interests secured only by continued diplomacy. I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to learn from some of America's finest and most storied diplomats and to myself carry that baton for a year, working with what remains, as Holbrooke frequently touted, the best and most dedicated team I've ever seen. I will watch with passionate interest as they continue this critical work.

4. [Obama on Iran Nuclear Deal](#) (08-05-2015)

American University, Washington, D.C.

It is a great honor to be back at American University, which has prepared generations of young people for service in public life. I want to thank President Kerwin and the American University family for hosting us here today.

Fifty-two years ago, President Kennedy, at the height of the Cold War, addressed this same university on the subject of peace. The Berlin Wall had just been built. The Soviet Union had tested the most powerful weapons ever developed. China was on the verge of acquiring a nuclear bomb. Less than 20 years after the end of World War II, the prospect of nuclear war was all too real. With all of the threats that we face today, it's hard to appreciate how much more dangerous the world was at that time.

In light of these mounting threats, a number of strategists here in the United States argued that we had to take military action against the Soviets, to hasten what they saw as inevitable confrontation. But the young President offered a different vision. Strength, in his view, included powerful armed forces and a willingness to stand up for our values around the world. But he rejected the prevailing attitude among some foreign policy circles that equated security with a perpetual war footing. Instead, he promised strong, principled American leadership on behalf of what he called a "practical" and "attainable peace" -- a peace "based not on a sudden revolution in human nature but on a gradual evolution in human institutions -- on a series of concrete actions and effective agreements."

Such wisdom would help guide our ship of state through some of the most perilous moments in human history. With Kennedy at the helm, the Cuban Missile Crisis was resolved peacefully. Under Democratic and Republican Presidents, new agreements were forged -- a Non-Proliferation Treaty that prohibited nations from acquiring nuclear weapons, while allowing them to access peaceful nuclear energy; the SALT and START Treaties which bound the United States and Soviet Union to cooperation on arms control. Not every conflict was averted, but the world avoided nuclear catastrophe, and we created the time and the space to win the Cold War without firing a shot at the Soviets.

The agreement now reached between the international community and the Islamic Republic of Iran builds on this tradition of strong, principled diplomacy. After two years of negotiations, we have achieved a detailed arrangement that permanently prohibits Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon. It cuts off all of Iran's pathways to a bomb. It contains the most comprehensive inspection and verification regime ever negotiated to monitor a nuclear program. As was true in previous treaties, it does not resolve all problems; it certainly doesn't resolve all our problems with Iran. It does not ensure a warming between our two countries. But it achieves one of our most critical security objectives. As such, it is a very good deal.

Today, I want to speak to you about this deal, and the most consequential foreign policy debate that our country has had since the invasion of Iraq, as Congress decides whether to support this historic diplomatic breakthrough, or instead blocks it over the objection of the vast majority of the world. Between now and the congressional vote in September, you're going to hear a lot of arguments against this deal, backed by tens of millions of dollars in advertising. And if the rhetoric in these ads, and the accompanying commentary, sounds familiar, it should -- for many of the same people who argued for the war in Iraq are now making the case against the Iran nuclear deal.

Now, when I ran for President eight years ago as a candidate who had opposed the decision to go to war in Iraq, I said that America didn't just have to end that war -- we had to end the mindset that got us there in the first place. It was a mindset characterized by a preference for military action over diplomacy; a mindset that put a premium on unilateral U.S. action over the painstaking work of building international consensus; a mindset that exaggerated threats beyond what the intelligence supported. Leaders did not level with the American people about the costs of war, insisting that we could easily impose our will on a part of the world with a profoundly different culture and history.

And, of course, those calling for war labeled themselves strong and decisive, while dismissing those who disagreed as weak -- even appeasers of a malevolent adversary.

More than a decade later, we still live with the consequences of the decision to invade Iraq. Our troops achieved every mission they were given. But thousands of lives were lost, tens of thousands wounded. That doesn't count the lives lost among Iraqis. Nearly a trillion dollars was spent. Today, Iraq remains gripped by sectarian conflict, and the emergence of al Qaeda in Iraq has now evolved into ISIL. And ironically, the single greatest beneficiary in the region of that war was the Islamic Republic of Iran, which saw its strategic position strengthened by the removal of its long-standing enemy, Saddam Hussein.

I raise this recent history because now more than ever we need clear thinking in our foreign policy. And I raise this history because it bears directly on how we respond to the Iranian nuclear program. That program has been around for decades, dating back to the Shah's efforts -- with U.S. support -- in the 1960s and '70s to develop nuclear power. The theocracy that overthrew the Shah accelerated the program after the Iran-Iraq War in the 1980s, a war in which Saddam Hussein used chemical weapons to brutal effect, and Iran's nuclear program advanced steadily through the 1990s, despite unilateral U.S. sanctions. When the Bush administration took office, Iran had no centrifuges -- the machines necessary to produce material for a bomb -- that were spinning to enrich uranium. But despite repeated warnings from the United States government, by the time I took office, Iran had installed several thousand centrifuges, and showed no inclination to slow -- much less halt -- its program.

Among U.S. policymakers, there's never been disagreement on the danger posed by an Iranian nuclear bomb. Democrats and Republicans alike have recognized that it would spark an arms race in the world's most unstable region, and turn every crisis into a potential nuclear showdown. It would embolden terrorist groups, like Hezbollah, and pose an unacceptable risk to Israel, which Iranian leaders have repeatedly threatened to destroy. More broadly, it could unravel the global commitment to non-proliferation that the world has done so much to defend.

The question, then, is not whether to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon, but how. Even before taking office, I made clear that Iran would not be allowed to acquire a nuclear weapon on my watch, and it's been my policy throughout my presidency to keep all options -- including possible military options -- on the table to achieve that objective. But I have also made clear my preference for a peaceful, diplomatic resolution of the issue -- not just because of the costs of war, but also because a negotiated agreement offered a more effective, verifiable and durable resolution. And so, in 2009, we let the Iranians know that a diplomatic path was available. Iran failed to take that path, and our intelligence community exposed the existence of a covert nuclear facility at Fordow.

Now, some have argued that Iran's intransigence showed the futility of negotiations. In fact, it was our very willingness to negotiate that helped America rally the world to our cause, and secured international participation in an unprecedented framework of commercial and financial sanctions. Keep in mind unilateral U.S. sanctions against Iran had been in place for decades, but had failed to pressure Iran to the negotiating table. What made our new approach more effective was our ability to draw upon new U.N. Security Council resolutions, combining strong enforcement with voluntary agreements from nations like China and India, Japan and South Korea to reduce their purchases of Iranian oil, as well as the imposition by our European allies of a total oil embargo.

Winning this global buy-in was not easy -- I know. I was there. In some cases, our partners lost billions of dollars in trade because of their decision to cooperate. But we were able to convince them that absent a diplomatic resolution, the result could be war, with major disruptions to the global economy, and even greater instability in the Middle East. In other words, it was diplomacy -- hard, painstaking diplomacy -- not saber-rattling, not tough talk that ratcheted up the pressure on Iran.

With the world now unified beside us, Iran's economy contracted severely, and remains about 20 percent smaller today than it would have otherwise been. No doubt this hardship played a role in Iran's 2013 elections, when the Iranian people elected a new government that promised to improve the economy through engagement with the world. A window had cracked open. Iran came back to the nuclear talks. And after a series of negotiations, Iran agreed with the international community to an interim deal -- a deal that rolled back Iran's stockpile of near 20 percent enriched uranium, and froze the progress of its program so that the P5+1 -- the United States, China, Russia, the United Kingdom, Germany, France, and the European Union -- could negotiate a comprehensive deal without the fear that Iran might be stalling for time.

Now, let me pause here just to remind everybody that when the interim deal was announced, critics -- the same critics we're hearing from now -- called it "a historic mistake." They insisted Iran would ignore its obligations. They warned that sanctions would unravel. They warned that Iran would receive a windfall to support terrorism.

The critics were wrong. The progress of Iran's nuclear program was halted for the first time in a decade. Its stockpile of dangerous materials was reduced. The deployment of its advanced centrifuges was stopped. Inspections did increase. There was no flood of money into Iran, and the architecture of the international sanctions remained in place. In fact, the interim deal worked so well that the same people who criticized it so fiercely now cite it as an excuse not to support the broader accord. Think about that. What was once proclaimed as a historic mistake is now held up as a success and a reason to not sign the comprehensive deal. So keep that in mind when you assess the credibility of the arguments being made against diplomacy today.

Despite the criticism, we moved ahead to negotiate a more lasting, comprehensive deal. Our diplomats, led by Secretary of State John Kerry, kept our coalition united. Our nuclear experts -- including one of the best in the world, Secretary of Energy Ernie Moniz -- worked tirelessly on the technical details. In July, we reached a comprehensive plan of action that meets our objectives. Under its terms, Iran is never allowed to build a nuclear weapon. And while Iran, like any party to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, is allowed to access peaceful nuclear energy, the agreement strictly defines the manner in which its nuclear program can proceed, ensuring that all pathways to a bomb are cut off.

Here's how. Under this deal, Iran cannot acquire the plutonium needed for a bomb. The core of its heavy-water reactor at Arak will be pulled out, filled with concrete, and replaced with one that will not produce plutonium for a weapon. The spent fuel from that reactor will be shipped out of the country, and Iran will not build any new heavy-water reactors for at least 15 years.

Iran will also not be able to acquire the enriched uranium that could be used for a bomb. As soon as this deal is implemented, Iran will remove two-thirds of its centrifuges. For the next decade, Iran will not enrich uranium with its more advanced centrifuges. Iran will not enrich uranium at the previously undisclosed Fordow facility, which is buried deep underground, for at least 15 years. Iran will get rid of 98 percent of its stockpile of enriched uranium, which is currently enough for up

to 10 nuclear bombs, for the next 15 years. Even after those 15 years have passed, Iran will never have the right to use a peaceful program as cover to pursue a weapon.

And, in fact, this deal shuts off the type of covert path Iran pursued in the past. There will be 24/7 monitoring of Iran's key nuclear facilities. For decades, inspectors will have access to Iran's entire nuclear supply chain -- from the uranium mines and mills where they get raw materials, to the centrifuge production facilities where they make machines to enrich it. And understand why this is so important: For Iran to cheat, it has to build a lot more than just one building or a covert facility like Fordow. It would need a secret source for every single aspect of its program. No nation in history has been able to pull off such subterfuge when subjected to such rigorous inspections. And under the terms of the deal, inspectors will have the permanent ability to inspect any suspicious sites in Iran.

And finally, Iran has powerful incentives to keep its commitments. Before getting sanctions relief, Iran has to take significant, concrete steps like removing centrifuges and getting rid of its stockpile. If Iran violates the agreement over the next decade, all of the sanctions can snap back into place. We won't need the support of other members of the U.N. Security Council; America can trigger snapback on our own. On the other hand, if Iran abides by the deal and its economy begins to reintegrate with the world, the incentive to avoid snapback will only grow.

So this deal is not just the best choice among alternatives -- this is the strongest non-proliferation agreement ever negotiated. And because this is such a strong deal, every nation in the world that has commented publicly, with the exception of the Israeli government, has expressed support. The United Nations Security Council has unanimously supported it. The majority of arms control and non-proliferation experts support it. Over 100 former ambassadors -- who served under Republican and Democratic Presidents -- support it. I've had to make a lot of tough calls as President, but whether or not this deal is good for American security is not one of those calls. It's not even close. Unfortunately, we're living through a time in American politics where every foreign policy decision is viewed through a partisan prism, evaluated by headline-grabbing sound bites. And so before the ink was even dry on this deal -- before Congress even read it -- a majority of Republicans declared their virulent opposition. Lobbyists and pundits were suddenly transformed into arm-chair nuclear scientists, disputing the assessments of experts like Secretary Moniz, challenging his findings, offering multiple -- and sometimes contradictory -- arguments about why Congress should reject this deal. But if you repeat these arguments long enough, they can get some traction. So let me address just a few of the arguments that have been made so far in opposition to this deal. First, there are those who say the inspections are not strong enough because inspectors can't go anywhere in Iran at any time with no notice.

Well, here's the truth: Inspectors will be allowed daily access to Iran's key nuclear sites. If there is a reason for inspecting a suspicious, undeclared site anywhere in Iran, inspectors will get that access, even if Iran objects. This access can be with as little as 24 hours' notice. And while the process for resolving a dispute about access can take up to 24 days, once we've identified a site that raises suspicion, we will be watching it continuously until inspectors get in. And by the way, nuclear material isn't something you hide in the closet. It can leave a trace for years. The bottom line is, if Iran cheats, we can catch them -- and we will.

Second, there are those who argue that the deal isn't strong enough because some of the limitations on Iran's civilian nuclear program expire in 15 years. Let me repeat: The prohibition on Iran having a nuclear weapon is permanent. The ban on weapons-related research is permanent. Inspections are permanent. It is true that some of the limitations regarding Iran's peaceful program last only 15

years. But that's how arms control agreements work. The first SALT Treaty with the Soviet Union lasted five years. The first START Treaty lasted 15 years. And in our current situation, if 15 or 20 years from now, Iran tries to build a bomb, this deal ensures that the United States will have better tools to detect it, a stronger basis under international law to respond, and the same options available to stop a weapons program as we have today, including -- if necessary -- military options.

On the other hand, without this deal, the scenarios that critics warn about happening in 15 years could happen six months from now. By killing this deal, Congress would not merely pave Iran's pathway to a bomb, it would accelerate it.

Third, a number of critics say the deal isn't worth it because Iran will get billions of dollars in sanctions relief. Now, let's be clear: The international sanctions were put in place precisely to get Iran to agree to constraints on its program. That's the point of sanctions. Any negotiated agreement with Iran would involve sanctions relief. So an argument against sanctions relief is effectively an argument against any diplomatic resolution of this issue.

It is true that if Iran lives up to its commitments, it will gain access to roughly \$56 billion of its own money -- revenue frozen overseas by other countries. But the notion that this will be a game-changer, with all this money funneled into Iran's pernicious activities, misses the reality of Iran's current situation. Partly because of our sanctions, the Iranian government has over half a trillion dollars in urgent requirements -- from funding pensions and salaries, to paying for crumbling infrastructure. Iran's leaders have raised the expectations of their people that sanctions relief will improve their lives. Even a repressive regime like Iran's cannot completely ignore those expectations. And that's why our best analysts expect the bulk of this revenue to go into spending that improves the economy and benefits the lives of the Iranian people.

Now, this is not to say that sanctions relief will provide no benefit to Iran's military. Let's stipulate that some of that money will flow to activities that we object to. We have no illusions about the Iranian government, or the significance of the Revolutionary Guard and the Quds Force. Iran supports terrorist organizations like Hezbollah. It supports proxy groups that threaten our interests and the interests of our allies -- including proxy groups who killed our troops in Iraq. They try to destabilize our Gulf partners. But Iran has been engaged in these activities for decades. They engaged in them before sanctions and while sanctions were in place. In fact, Iran even engaged in these activities in the middle of the Iran-Iraq War -- a war that cost them nearly a million lives and hundreds of billions of dollars.

The truth is that Iran has always found a way to fund these efforts, and whatever benefit Iran may claim from sanctions relief pales in comparison to the danger it could pose with a nuclear weapon. Moreover, there's no scenario where sanctions relief turns Iran into the region's dominant power. Iran's defense budget is eight times smaller than the combined budget of our Gulf allies. Their conventional capabilities will never compare with Israel's, and our commitment to Israel's qualitative military edge helps guarantee that. Over the last several years, Iran has had to spend billions of dollars to support its only ally in the Arab World -- Bashar al-Assad -- even as he's lost control of huge chunks of his country. And Hezbollah has suffered significant blows on the same battlefield. And Iran, like the rest of the region, is being forced to respond to the threat of ISIL in Iraq.

So contrary to the alarmists who claim that Iran is on the brink of taking over the Middle East, or even the world, Iran will remain a regional power with its own set of challenges. The ruling regime is dangerous and it is repressive. We will continue to have sanctions in place on Iran's support for

terrorism and violation of human rights. We will continue to insist upon the release of Americans detained unjustly. We will have a lot of differences with the Iranian regime.

But if we're serious about confronting Iran's destabilizing activities, it is hard to imagine a worse approach than blocking this deal. Instead, we need to check the behavior that we're concerned about directly: By helping our allies in the region strengthen their own capabilities to counter a cyber-attack or a ballistic missile; by improving the interdiction of weapons shipments that go to groups like Hezbollah; by training our allies' special forces so that they can more effectively respond to situations like Yemen. All these capabilities will make a difference. We will be in a stronger position to implement them with this deal. And, by the way, such a strategy also helps us effectively confront the immediate and lethal threat posed by ISIL.

Now, the final criticism -- this sort of a catch-all that you may hear -- is the notion that there's a better deal to be had. "We should get a better deal" -- that's repeated over and over again. "It's a bad deal, need a better deal" -- (laughter) -- one that relies on vague promises of toughness, and, more recently, the argument that we can apply a broader and indefinite set of sanctions to squeeze the Iranian regime harder.

Those making this argument are either ignorant of Iranian society, or they're just not being straight with the American people. Sanctions alone are not going to force Iran to completely dismantle all vestiges of its nuclear infrastructure -- even those aspects that are consistent with peaceful programs. That oftentimes is what the critics are calling "a better deal." Neither the Iranian government, or the Iranian opposition, or the Iranian people would agree to what they would view as a total surrender of their sovereignty.

Moreover, our closest allies in Europe, or in Asia -- much less China or Russia -- certainly are not going to agree to enforce existing sanctions for another 5, 10, 15 years according to the dictates of the U.S. Congress. Because their willingness to support sanctions in the first place was based on Iran ending its pursuit of nuclear weapons. It was not based on the belief that Iran cannot have peaceful nuclear power. And it certainly wasn't based on a desire for regime change in Iran. As a result, those who say we can just walk away from this deal and maintain sanctions are selling a fantasy. Instead of strengthening our position as some have suggested, Congress's rejection would almost certainly result in multilateral sanctions unraveling. If, as has also been suggested, we tried to maintain unilateral sanctions, beefen them up, we would be standing alone. We cannot dictate the foreign, economic and energy policies of every major power in the world.

In order to even try to do that, we would have to sanction, for example, some of the world's largest banks. We'd have to cut off countries like China from the American financial system. And since they happen to be major purchasers of our debt, such actions could trigger severe disruptions in our own economy and, by the way, raise questions internationally about the dollar's role as the world's reserve currency.

That's part of the reason why many of the previous unilateral sanctions were waived. What's more likely to happen, should Congress reject this deal, is that Iran would end up with some form of sanctions relief without having to accept any of the constraints or inspections required by this deal. So in that sense, the critics are right: Walk away from this agreement and you will get a better deal - for Iran. (Applause.)

Now, because more sanctions won't produce the results that the critics want, we have to be honest. Congressional rejection of this deal leaves any U.S. administration that is absolutely committed to preventing Iran from getting a nuclear weapon with one option -- another war in the Middle East. I say this not to be provocative. I am stating a fact. Without this deal, Iran will be in a position -- however tough our rhetoric may be -- to steadily advance its capabilities. Its breakout time, which is already fairly small, could shrink to near zero. Does anyone really doubt that the same voices now raised against this deal will be demanding that whoever is President bomb those nuclear facilities?

And as someone who does firmly believe that Iran must not get a nuclear weapon, and who has wrestled with this issue since the beginning of my presidency, I can tell you that alternatives to military action will have been exhausted once we reject a hard-won diplomatic solution that the world almost unanimously supports.

So let's not mince words. The choice we face is ultimately between diplomacy or some form of war -- maybe not tomorrow, maybe not three months from now, but soon. And here's the irony. As I said before, military action would be far less effective than this deal in preventing Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon. That's not just my supposition. Every estimate, including those from Israeli analysts, suggest military action would only set back Iran's program by a few years at best, which is a fraction of the limitations imposed by this deal. It would likely guarantee that inspectors are kicked out of Iran. It is probable that it would drive Iran's program deeper underground. It would certainly destroy the international unity that we've spent so many years building. Now, there are some opponents -- I have to give them credit; there are opponents of this deal who accept the choice of war. In fact, they argue that surgical strikes against Iran's facilities will be quick and painless. But if we've learned anything from the last decade, it's that wars in general and wars in the Middle East in particular are anything but simple. (Applause.) The only certainty in war is human suffering, uncertain costs, unintended consequences. We can also be sure that the Americans who bear the heaviest burden are the less than 1 percent of us, the outstanding men and women who serve in uniform, and not those of us who send them to war.

As Commander-in-Chief, I have not shied from using force when necessary. I have ordered tens of thousands of young Americans into combat. I have sat by their bedside sometimes when they come home. I've ordered military action in seven countries. There are times when force is necessary, and if Iran does not abide by this deal, it's possible that we don't have an alternative.

But how can we in good conscience justify war before we've tested a diplomatic agreement that achieves our objectives; that has been agreed to by Iran; that is supported by the rest of the world; and that preserves our options if the deal falls short? How could we justify that to our troops? How could we justify that to the world or to future generations?

In the end, that should be a lesson that we've learned from over a decade of war. On the front end, ask tough questions. Subject our own assumptions to evidence and analysis. Resist the conventional wisdom and the drumbeat of war. Worry less about being labeled weak; worry more about getting it right.

I recognize that resorting to force may be tempting in the face of the rhetoric and behavior that emanates from parts of Iran. It is offensive. It is incendiary. We do take it seriously. But superpowers should not act impulsively in response to taunts, or even provocations that can be addressed short of war. Just because Iranian hardliners chant "Death to America" does not mean that that's what all Iranians believe. (Applause.)

In fact, it's those hardliners who are most comfortable with the status quo. It's those hardliners chanting "Death to America" who have been most opposed to the deal. They're making common cause with the Republican caucus. (Laughter and applause.)

The majority of the Iranian people have powerful incentives to urge their government to move in a different, less provocative direction -- incentives that are strengthened by this deal. We should offer them that chance. We should give them that opportunity. It's not guaranteed to succeed. But if they take it, that would be good for Iran, it would be good for the United States. It would be good for a region that has known too much conflict. It would be good for the world.

And if Iran does not move in that direction, if Iran violates this deal, we will have ample ability to respond. The agreements pursued by Kennedy and Reagan with the Soviet Union, those agreements, those treaties involved America accepting significant constraints on our arsenal. As such, they were riskier. This agreement involves no such constraints. The defense budget of the United States is more than \$600 billion. To repeat, Iran's is about \$15 billion. Our military remains the ultimate backstop to any security agreement that we make. I have stated that Iran will never be allowed to obtain a nuclear weapon. I have done what is necessary to make sure our military options are real. And I have no doubt that any President who follows me will take the same position. So let me sum up here. When we carefully examine the arguments against this deal, none of them stand up to scrutiny. That may be why the rhetoric on the other side is so strident. I suppose some of it can be ascribed to knee-jerk partisanship that has become all too familiar; rhetoric that renders every decision that's made a disaster, a surrender -- "you're aiding terrorists; you're endangering freedom."

On the other hand, I do think it's important to acknowledge another, more understandable motivation behind the opposition to this deal, or at least skepticism to this deal, and that is a sincere affinity for our friend and ally, Israel -- an affinity that, as someone who has been a stalwart friend to Israel throughout my career, I deeply share.

When the Israeli government is opposed to something, people in the United States take notice. And they should. No one can blame Israelis for having a deep skepticism about any dealings with a government like Iran's -- which includes leaders who have denied the Holocaust, embrace an ideology of anti-Semitism, facilitate the flow of rockets that are arrayed on Israel's borders, are pointed at Tel Aviv. In such a dangerous neighborhood, Israel has to be vigilant, and it rightly insists that it cannot depend on any other country -- even its great friend the United States -- for its own security. So we have to take seriously concerns in Israel.

But the fact is, partly due to American military and intelligence assistance, which my administration has provided at unprecedented levels, Israel can defend itself against any conventional danger -- whether from Iran directly or from its proxies. On the other hand, a nuclear-armed Iran changes that equation.

And that's why this deal ultimately must be judged by what it achieves on the central goal of preventing Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon. This deal does exactly that. I say this as someone who has done more than any other President to strengthen Israel's security. And I have made clear to the Israeli government that we are prepared to discuss how we can deepen that cooperation even further. Already we've held talks with Israel on concluding another 10-year plan for U.S. security assistance to Israel. We can enhance support for areas like missile defense, information sharing,

interdiction -- all to help meet Israel's pressing security needs, and to provide a hedge against any additional activities that Iran may engage in as a consequence of sanctions relief.

But I have also listened to the Israeli security establishment, which warned of the danger posed by a nuclear-armed Iran for decades. In fact, they helped develop many of the ideas that ultimately led to this deal.

So to friends of Israel, and to the Israeli people, I say this: A nuclear-armed Iran is far more dangerous to Israel, to America, and to the world than an Iran that benefits from sanctions relief. I recognize that Prime Minister Netanyahu disagrees -- disagrees strongly. I do not doubt his sincerity. But I believe he is wrong. I believe the facts support this deal. I believe they are in America's interest and Israel's interest. And as President of the United States, it would be an abrogation of my constitutional duty to act against my best judgment simply because it causes temporary friction with a dear friend and ally. I do not believe that would be the right thing to do for the United States. I do not believe it would be the right thing to do for Israel. (Applause.)

Over the last couple weeks, I have repeatedly challenged anyone opposed to this deal to put forward a better, plausible alternative. I have yet to hear one. What I've heard instead are the same types of arguments that we heard in the run-up to the Iraq War: Iran cannot be dealt with diplomatically; we can take military strikes without significant consequences; we shouldn't worry about what the rest of the world thinks, because once we act, everyone will fall in line; tougher talk, more military threats will force Iran into submission; we can get a better deal.

I know it's easy to play on people's fears, to magnify threats, to compare any attempt at diplomacy to Munich. But none of these arguments hold up. They didn't back in 2002 and 2003; they shouldn't now. (Applause.) The same mindset, in many cases offered by the same people who seem to have no compunction with being repeatedly wrong, led to a war that did more to strengthen Iran, more to isolate the United States than anything we have done in the decades before or since. It's a mindset out of step with the traditions of American foreign policy, where we exhaust diplomacy before war, and debate matters of war and peace in the cold light of truth.

"Peace is not the absence of conflict," President Reagan once said. It is "the ability to cope with conflict by peaceful means." President Kennedy warned Americans, "not to see conflict as inevitable, accommodation as impossible, and communication as nothing more than the exchange of threats." It is time to apply such wisdom. The deal before us doesn't bet on Iran changing, it doesn't require trust; it verifies and requires Iran to forsake a nuclear weapon, just as we struck agreements with the Soviet Union at a time when they were threatening our allies, arming proxies against us, proclaiming their commitment to destroy our way of life, and had nuclear weapons pointed at all of our major cities -- a genuine existential threat.

We live in a complicated world -- a world in which the forces unleashed by human innovation are creating opportunities for our children that were unimaginable for most of human history. It is also a world of persistent threats, a world in which mass violence and cruelty is all too common, and human innovation risks the destruction of all that we hold dear. In this world, the United States of America remains the most powerful nation on Earth, and I believe that we will remain such for decades to come. But we are one nation among many.

And what separates us from the empires of old, what has made us exceptional, is not the mere fact of our military might. Since World War II, the deadliest war in human history, we have used our power to try to bind nations together in a system of international law. We have led an evolution of those human institutions President Kennedy spoke about -- to prevent the spread of deadly weapons, to uphold peace and security, and promote human progress.

We now have the opportunity to build on that progress. We built a coalition and held it together through sanctions and negotiations, and now we have before us a solution that prevents Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon, without resorting to war. As Americans, we should be proud of this achievement. And as members of Congress reflect on their pending decision, I urge them to set aside political concerns, shut out the noise, consider the stakes involved with the vote that you will cast.

If Congress kills this deal, we will lose more than just constraints on Iran's nuclear program, or the sanctions we have painstakingly built. We will have lost something more precious: America's credibility as a leader of diplomacy; America's credibility as the anchor of the international system. John F. Kennedy cautioned here, more than 50 years ago, at this university, that "the pursuit of peace is not as dramatic as the pursuit of war." But it's so very important. It is surely the pursuit of peace that is most needed in this world so full of strife.

My fellow Americans, contact your representatives in Congress. Remind them of who we are. Remind them of what is best in us and what we stand for, so that we can leave behind a world that is more secure and more peaceful for our children.

[5. The Iran Deal: Understanding the Deal and How It Will Work](#) (08-04-2015)

Secretaries Kerry and Moniz With Fellow Ministers and Directors Before Final Announcement of Iran Deal

On July 14, 2015, the United States and our international partners announced that we had secured a nuclear deal that would verifiably prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon. Today -- to highlight both the detail and depth of the nuclear agreement -- the White House shared the [Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action \(JCPOA\)](#) on Medium, so the public will not only be able to read the deal but also understand why it's a historic step toward a safer, more secure world.

Today's release of the agreement includes all 159 pages of the JCPOA, covering details ranging from sanctions to fuel cycles to diplomatic history. It also includes explanations of specific lines of text from the people who negotiated and will implement the deal.

In this enhanced online version of the JCPOA, Secretary of State John Kerry offers insight into the diplomatic history and credibility this deal has within the international community. Secretary of Energy -- and nuclear physicist -- Ernest Moniz provides details on how certain restrictions will gut and retool Iran's nuclear program to prevent it from creating a bomb. Treasury Secretary Jack Lew, who will lead implementation of the sanction provisions in the JCPOA alongside Secretary Kerry, outlines how phased sanctions relief for Iran will work and what will and will not -- be subject to relief after Iran meets its key nuclear-related commitments.

It took nearly two years to reach this deal, and it's important that everyone understands exactly what is in this deal and how it will work. The introduction to the JCPOA says, "These are important details—the features that make the JCPOA one of the strongest and most significant nuclear arrangements in history. With this deal, we eliminate the threat of a nuclear armed Iran, strengthening our own national security and that of our allies in the region, including Israel."

We encourage you to read the [JCPOA on on Medium](#), and when you do, "you'll see exactly why it's the cornerstone of a safer, more secure world free from the threat of a nuclear armed Iran."

For more information:

Secretary of State John Kerry Opening Remarks Before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs - [Kerry's Remarks at House Hearing on Iran's Nuclear Program](#)

Read the [White House Introduction to the JCPOA](#) on Medium.

Read the [Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action for the Iran Deal](#) on Medium.

Follow the [Department of State on Medium](#).

6. [Former Miss Jordan takes aim at terrorists online](#) (07-31-2015)

What's sure to be one of Daesh's worst nightmares is coming true: A woman is blunting the terrorists' online messaging and recruiting efforts.

Miss Jordan 2010, Lara Abdallat, decided to combat Daesh online after seeing the terror group hurt and kill daily.

"It got really sick for me to open the news every day in the morning and see thousands of people killed and it was getting frustrating. I told my dad I would love to open the TV and see something cheerful," [Abdallat says](#) in an interview.

Abdallat works with [Ghost Security](#), a hacktivist group that combats Daesh by destroying its social media accounts and websites to disrupt communications and reduce its ability to recruit members. The group says it has terminated over 100 websites and 57,000 social media accounts used by Daesh.

"It's about saving lives," Abdallat says. "I don't care if they are Muslim, Christian, Jewish, Buddhist. I don't care. I don't care what skin color you are. It's about protecting people." Along with citizen efforts like those of Abdallat, governments are working to halt Daesh online. In July, the United States and the United Arab Emirates launched [The Sawab Center](#), the first multinational online messaging and engagement program, in support of the [Global Coalition Against Daesh](#).

"As President Obama said, ideologies will not be defeated with guns; they're defeated by better ideas — a more attractive and more compelling vision," Under Secretary of State Richard Stengel told Al Arabiya News after the center's opening.

The U.S. and the U.A.E. established [the center](#) to support "the millions of people in the region and around the world that oppose Daesh."

7. [Senior U.S. Officials on Counter-ISIL Coalition Efforts](#) (07-28-2015)

Via Teleconference

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I wanted to give a – just a brief update on a couple things and then get into some of the issues regarding Turkey's cooperation and role in the coalition.

First, General Allen and Under Secretary Stengel will be heading to Canada for an important meeting the Canadians are hosting on Thursday with a small group of the global ISIL coalition. The small group really pulls together about 23 top contributors in the coalition, and we're very pleased to be hosted by the Canadians who are one of the top members of the coalition. They're the only

member of the coalition that is conducting airstrikes together with us in both Syria and Iraq. And we are very pleased also with the contribution Canadians have made on the ground in Iraq, in a train and advise capacity, and also in their humanitarian contributions. So we're very pleased to be joining the Canadians in Quebec and to have a very in-depth discussion with these core members of the coalition. This is a session at the director level to really roll up our sleeves and get a real feel for how things are going across all of the nine lines of effort that constitute our strategy.

Turkey, of course, will be in that meeting because Turkey is a critical member of the coalition, and Turkey has been in the news recently. But I wanted to kind of put a frame on our conversations with the Turks, which really go back almost nine or ten months. We've been in constant conversations with Turkey from the earliest days forming this coalition, given the vital role that they will play in defeating ISIL. And of course, our charge from the President to degrade and ultimately to defeat ISIL, which is exactly what we're doing.

These conversations began and they have been very constructive throughout, and we've made a lot of progress throughout. And this has been a very linear process. So we first came to an agreement on the train and equip program, which is really important, working very closely with the Turks in terms of getting units out of Syria, training them, and putting them back in. That's a complicated process that we worked out with the Turks, given a lot of back and forth from DOD and State. And we also came to agreement with Turkey in terms of various forms of surveillance in Syria, so we can help get a real handle on the ISIL networks in Syria.

And then about six weeks ago, Foreign Minister Cavusoglu mentioned that Turkey was open to our flying armed ISR missions off of Turkish bases. And then most importantly, just last week we came to agreement to open up Turkish bases for U.S. manned and unmanned platforms to hit Daesh targets in Syria and in Iraq. And that's very significant because it's something that we've been talking to Turkey about for some time, but it's a complicated issue and we've had a number of discussions with them.

But the important thing here is that that agreement came after months of talks and a very kind of sequenced set of steps and agreements that we've had with them for some time. Now, we've also discussed with Turkey the possibility of working with them in a coordinated way and with moderate opposition groups to begin to clear out what is really the last stretch of border – the last stretch of international border with Turkey that is controlled by ISIL. It's the last stretch of international border for the caliphate. It's only about 98 or so kilometers, about 68 miles, and we want to work very closely with Turkey and we need Turkey, of course, to really close up this last stretch of border. It's in their interest. They have come to us. They've asked for help, and we have agreed to help.

So as part of this agreement, we've agreed to sit down with them and look at ways that we might be able to organize moderate opposition fighters in coordination with us and the coalition to clean out this last stretch of border. How we do that, the mechanisms, the modalities, we'll have to sit down with them and we're going to be doing that with them over the coming days and weeks and we look forward to that conversation. And again, this will be part of the linear progression that we've had with Turkey for some time.

So we're very encouraged by this opening with Turkey. We think it is potentially a very significant development in the ongoing campaign against Daesh. It's complicated, as it is with everything else in this campaign, but it also fits within the overall state of the campaign as of right now. If you just step back and look at where we are and you kind of look at a map of the overall theater, in what

ISIL perversely calls its caliphate, you can see that they're coming under tremendous pressure from all sides.

The northern Syria border, and which they almost controlled completely, is no longer controlled by them. If you look from the Euphrates River to the east, that entire border is now controlled by groups that are very hostile to Daesh, including some of the Syrian Kurdish groups and also some of the Free Syrian Army Arab groups that have been very effective in getting Daesh/ISIL off the border. That has taken away their primary border routes and the primary entry point for foreign fighters and for explosive materials. It's a very significant development and has begun to put serious pressure on Daesh in Raqqa, which is really their self-proclaimed capital.

If you move to Iraq and you look at what's happening in the Euphrates River Valley and in Anbar province, units that we have trained and have undergone our months of training are now in combat and they're moving on Ramadi and they're actually making some progress day to day, and actually some very significant progress. I think CENTCOM put out a statement today – there's been 20 airstrikes in Ramadi over the last four days, and that is directly enabling the Iraqi Security Forces that we have trained, and they are squeezing Daesh in that critical area.

If you go up the Tigris River Valley and you look at Tikrit, which was in the news a couple months ago but it's not anymore because right now it's a fairly good-news story, we've had about a hundred thousand families, a hundred thousand individuals – these are Sunnis from Tikrit, from the environs of Tikrit that have come back into the city and its environs. About 50,000 now have returned to the streets of Tikrit. This is a very significant development. If you look historically at sectarian conflicts, this is almost unprecedented in terms of the time that this has taken. Usually it takes much longer, a period of years. This is taking a period of months, and that's because of very close cooperation between the Iraqi Government and local leaders in Salah ad Din.

Also in Anbar province, since we deployed to Taqaddum and with very good political cooperation with the Iraqi Government, the mobilization of Sunni tribal fighters is also increasing now in a very good and encouraging trend line. And of course, the Kurdish Peshmerga continue to hold their lines and conduct operations and very effectively to put pressure on Daesh.

We still have a long ways to go, but we think we are making some pretty good progress. And if you look at the map where it stood about eight months ago and particularly before the campaign in Kobani began, and you look at where we are now, I think you can see that we're making some pretty decent progress on our way to degrade and ultimately defeat Daesh. [More](#)