

be increased in spending for whatever purpose had to be paid for. That was the standard. Everything has to be paid for. We had to find offsets. Then all of a sudden, we are considering a \$680 billion hole in the deficit that doesn't have to be paid for. It is like we are all concerned about the debt, except when we aren't. Frankly, as someone who has been here for a fairly short time, I find this puzzling. The rule ought to apply both ways, because tax expenditures, by the way, are what they are. Republican and Democratic economists concede that the deductions, loopholes, and changes in the Tax Code are called tax expenditures. That is what they are, because otherwise they would be revenues to the government.

These are real dollars, and this is what has happened since the Tax Reform Act of 1986, when tax expenditures represented about 5 percent of GDP. Here we are today, and then the package we are talking about. We are going up into this area. This is almost 8 percent of GDP. This is a huge outlay that is like new mandatory spending. It happens automatically. It doesn't have to be reviewed every year. There is no assessment of whether these expenditures are effective or not, and some of them obviously are.

I have no problem with many of the items that are in here—mortgage interest deduction, health care interest deduction. But some of them deserve consideration, just as our budgets deserve consideration. This is on automatic pilot. This is a kind of new mandatory spending. The other piece is that we are deepening the debt hole. This is the percent of GDP of spending, and these are revenues. This is the deficit. This is the debt. That is what is killing us in the long run.

There is a tremendous interest rate risk here—as the Senator from Virginia pointed out. We are now at historically low interest levels. In living memory, I don't know a time when interest rates have been as low as they are. For every point that interest rates go up with an \$18 trillion debt, the cost to the Treasury is \$180 billion. The math isn't that complicated. If interest rates go up to 5 percent, just interest payments on this \$18 trillion debt will be \$90 billion a year. So 90 percent of our current total discretionary budget would go to interest payments. It would swamp the defense budget. It would swamp the discretionary budget. Yet we are tiptoeing along the edge of this precipice.

If interest rates go up with an \$18 trillion debt, we are in real financial trouble. The second problem with this huge debt is it gives us no room for slack. It gives us no room for an emergency, for a recession, for hostilities, for a major terrorist attack and its effect on our economy. We have no cushion because we have used the cushion up. We continue to use it up, even when the economy improves. This \$18 trillion some day is going to have to be paid back.

Finally, these aren't really tax cuts. Tax cuts are when you lower taxes and lower expenditures or raise other taxes so it is revenue neutral. If you cut taxes in a time of deficit, which means you have to simply borrow the difference of what the revenues would have been, that is not a tax cut. That is a tax shift.

We are simply shifting the taxes from ourselves to our children. This bill should be called the "tax your grandchildren act" because we are cutting our own taxes, but we are borrowing the money that otherwise would be collected and our kids are going to have to pay it back at some point with interest.

That is unethical. That isn't right. If 5-year-olds knew what was going on and could vote, we would be dead ducks, because that is who is bearing the burden of these policies.

What do we have to do to solve this? In some ways, it is simple and in other ways it is hard. Conceptually it is simple. We have to bring expenditures and revenues into balance. That means looking at the whole course of Federal revenues and also Federal investments, and we also have to make investments to make our economy grow.

The best solution to this deficit problem is a growing economy. But ultimately for me, this is an issue of ethical stewardship. Tom Brokaw wrote the famous book "The Greatest Generation." They fought World War II, sacrificed, built the Interstate Highway System, and built the economy that we are running on today—the greatest generation.

I shudder to think what would be the case if Tom Brokaw wrote a book about our generation, which is borrowing and is not keeping our infrastructure up, is not adequately providing for the common defense, and is shifting the cost from us to our children. That is not stewardship; that is intergenerational theft. That is what we are engaged in here.

We are going to have one vote tomorrow. I intend to vote for the bill because I believe in the budget section, but I am very uncomfortable with the tax extender section. I don't have policy problems with many of those tax extenders. I do have a fundamental problem if they are not paid for. I don't think it is honest for us to go home and say that we cut your taxes when our grandchildren are going to have to pay those bills with interest.

That is the point that I think needs to be made about this, not that we are going to be able to stop this train that is going to be coming through here in the next 24 hours, but that we really need to talk next year about serious tax reform, about trying to balance revenues and expenditures and putting this country on a financial path, on a fiscal path that is sustainable and responsible.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from West Virginia.

Mr. MANCHIN. Madam President, my colleague and dear friend from Virginia, Senator WARNER, has worked extensively on trying to reform our Tax Code. We had something called the Simpson-Bowles Commission, which I think he took the lead on and was very much instrumental. What does this do to give you the chance to basically fix the problems we have with the Tax Code?

Mr. WARNER. It decreases our revenue line going forward. It does take some of the things, particularly in international tax reform, off the table. There are arguments that some of these being made permanent may make it easier. I will give you an example. The R&D tax credit is something that most of us on both sides of the aisle support. Here is the kind of only-in-Washington math that takes place. We are making permanent the R&D tax credit and not paying for it. Yet, if next year we decided to cut back on the R&D tax credit, that would be viewed as additional revenue to the bottom line, even though the cost of it has never been built in. Again, people who maybe are watching might say: I don't understand that accounting.

Let me assure you: If you questioning that accounting, then welcome to Washington, DC, and Federal Government accounting and budget lines.

I think this will make it more challenging. There are some benefits, as I said earlier—predictability to our business community. I would echo what the Senator from Maine has said. At the end of the day, we are simply transferring the obligations from our responsibility to that of our kids and grandkids. Long term, that is not going to give them the same kind of country that we all inherited.

Mr. MANCHIN. As we finish up on the colloquy here, the House is going to vote twice. They are going to vote on the extenders bill and the omnibus bill. For the second time, we are going to roll them into one in the Senate. We will not have the opportunity to vote twice. The omnibus bill is something that I could have supported. The extenders bill is absolutely something I cannot support, for the future of our country and our children. It is a shame that we don't have a separate vote.

With that, I thank the Senator from Maine and the Senator from Virginia for this colloquy.

With that, we yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arizona.

Mr. MCCAIN. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent to address the Senate in morning business and take as much time as I may consume.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

PRESIDENTIAL STRATEGY TO DEFEAT ISIL

Mr. MCCAIN. Madam President, 70 years ago, a group of American leaders forged the rules-based international

order out of the ashes of World War II. Those who were there recall that they were “present at the creation.” We may well look back at 2015 and realize we were present at the unravelling. We were present at the unravelling.

At the beginning of this year, President Obama was still committed to degrading and ultimately destroying ISIL. He had warned: If left unchecked, ISIL could pose a growing threat beyond the Middle East, including to the United States. In 2015, that is exactly what had happened in Paris and San Bernardino, and it will not be the last. I promise my colleagues that under this administration, with the present policy and lack of strategy, there will be other attacks on the United States of America. I deeply regret having to say that, but I owe it to my constituents and Americans whom I know and respect to tell them the truth.

More than 1 year into the campaign against ISIL, it is impossible to assert that ISIL is losing and that we are winning. And if you are not winning in this kind of warfare, you are losing. Stalemate is not success.

We asked the witnesses before the Senate Armed Services Committee the following question: Is ISIS contained? It is not. ISIS is not contained, contrary to the statements—bizarrely—made by the President of the United States literally hours before the attack on San Bernardino.

This year our Senate Armed Services Committee held several hearings specifically focused on the threat of ISIL, including three hearings specifically with Secretary of Defense Ash Carter. We heard about nine lines of effort. We heard about three “arrrghs.” We never heard a plausible theory of success, nor a strategy to achieve success. What do I mean by that? There is no time line on when Mosul, the second largest city in Iraq, will be taken. There is no strategy to take Raqqa. Raqqa is the base of the caliphate. Raqqa is the place where the attacks are being planned and orchestrated. We have news reports that they are developing chemical weapons in Raqqa. This is the first time that a terrorist organization has had a base, a caliphate, from which to operate. What has happened? They are expanding globally.

By the way, they have lost some of their territory on the margin. Hopefully, one of these days, Ramadi will fall to our forces, even though there have only been a few hundred ISIL there for the last few weeks.

The fact is that ISIL has expanded its control in Syria; it continues to dominate Sunni Arab areas in both Iraq and Syria; it maintains control of key cities such as Mosul, Fallujah, and Ramadi; and efforts to retake these territories have stalled, at least to some degree.

Meanwhile, ISIL is expanding globally. On Tuesday, GEN John Campbell, commander of U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan, told the Associated Press that ISIL is seeking to establish a re-

gional base in eastern Afghanistan as it attracts more followers and foreign fighters.

Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that an article detailing the AP interview titled “U.S. general says the number of Afghan IS loyalists growing,” be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[From The Associated Press, Dec. 15, 2015]

U.S. GENERAL SAYS THE NUMBER OF AFGHAN IS LOYALISTS GROWING

(By Lynne O'Donnell)

KABUL, AFGHANISTAN.—Supporters of the Islamic State group in Afghanistan are attempting to establish a regional base in the eastern city of Jalalabad, the commander of U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan, General John Campbell, said on Tuesday.

In an interview with The Associated Press, Campbell said that “foreign fighters” from Syria and Iraq had joined Afghans who had declared loyalty to the group in the eastern province of Nangarhar, bordering Pakistan.

He said there were also “indications” that the IS supporters in Nangarhar were trying to consolidate links with the group’s leadership in Syria and Iraq.

The Islamic State group controls about a third of Iraq and Syria. Fighters loyal to the group in Afghanistan include disaffected Afghan and Pakistani Taliban who have fought fierce battles with the Taliban in recent months.

Afghan officials have said that IS supporters control a number of border districts in Nangarhar and have a presence in some other southern provinces, including Zabul and Ghazni.

Until now, however, it was unclear whether loyalists in Afghanistan had institutional links to the group’s leadership.

Many of those who had declared allegiance to IS were “disenfranchised Taliban” from both sides of the border, Campbell said. But, he added, “they’ve been reaching out. I’m sure there are folks who have come from Syria and Iraq—I couldn’t tell you how many but there are indications of some foreign fighters coming in there.

“But they don’t have the capability right now to attack Europe, or attack the homeland, the United States. But that’s what they want to do, they’ve said that’s what they want to do,” he said.

During the summer months, Taliban and IS loyalists fought fierce battles in the far eastern districts of Nangarhar, with residents reporting a range of atrocities, including arbitrary imprisonment, forced marriages for young women, and beheadings.

The IS loyalists have said they want to absorb Afghanistan into a larger province of its “caliphate” called Khorasan. Campbell said the group wants to establish a base in Nangarhar’s provincial capital, Jalalabad “as the base of the Khorasan province” and “work their way up into Kunar” province immediately north.

The first credible reports of an IS presence in Afghanistan emerged earlier this year in northern Helmand, though recruiters believed to have had links to the leadership in Syria were killed by U.S. drone strikes in February.

The presence in Nangarhar became clear in the summer, when IS loyalists launched battles against the Taliban in the border regions. For months, the Afghan forces—occupied with fighting elsewhere—had let the two groups fight each other, Campbell said. “If the Taliban and ISIL want to kill each other, let them do it,” he said, using an alternative acronym for the Islamic State group.

He said that control of the four districts—Achin, Nazyan, Bati Kot and Spin Gar—had seasawed between the two groups.

The revelation in July that the Taliban’s founder and leader, Mullah Mohammad Omar had been dead for more than two years has led to deep fissures in the leadership, and infighting between rival Taliban factions that Campbell said had left hundreds dead.

Campbell, who took control of U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan in mid-2014, said splits among the Taliban, who have been trying to overthrow the Afghan government since their regime was driven from power in 2001 by the U.S. invasion, could make the fight even harder in 2016.

“The prize really is Kandahar, that’s their strategic goal,” he said, referring to the southern province from where the Taliban emerged after Afghanistan’s vicious civil war ended in 1996.

Neighboring Helmand province, where most of the world’s opium is produced, is currently the scene of fierce battles for control of strategically important districts, including Marjah.

Taliban fighters took control of the northern city of Kunduz in September, for just three days before the Afghan military, backed by U.S. forces, pushed them out.

Campbell said he did not believe the Taliban had planned to hold or govern Kunduz, but the psychological impact of the city’s fall had been enormous. Jalalabad, he said, “is not going to fall.”

Afghan forces, “challenged in many areas, understand the impact of Kunduz,” he said. “I think they will make the right adjustments so that it (Jalalabad) doesn’t become another Kunduz.”

Mr. MCCAIN. It says: “Supporters of the Islamic State group in Afghanistan are attempting to establish a regional base in the eastern city of Jalalabad, the commander of U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan, General John Campbell, said on Tuesday.”

The Wall Street Journal reports that ISIL has expanded in Libya and established a new base close to Europe, where it can generate oil revenues and plot terror attacks.

Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the Wall Street Journal article entitled “Islamic State Tightens Grip on Libyan Stronghold of Sirte”—the hometown, by the way of Muammar Qadhafi—be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[From The Wall Street Journal, Nov. 29, 2015]

ISLAMIC STATE TIGHTENS GRIP ON LIBYAN STRONGHOLD OF SIRTE

(By Tamer El-Ghobashy and Hassan Morajea)

MISRATA, LIBYA.—Even as foreign powers step up pressure against Islamic State in Syria and Iraq, the militant group has expanded in Libya and established a new base close to Europe where it can generate oil revenue and plot terror attacks.

Since announcing its presence in February in Sirte, the city on Libya’s Mediterranean coast has become the first that the militant group governs outside of Syria and Iraq. Its presence there has grown over the past year from 200 eager fighters to a roughly 5,000-strong contingent which includes administrators and financiers, according to estimates by Libyan intelligence officials, residents and activists in the area.

The group has exploited the deep divisions in Libya, which has two rival governments, to create this new stronghold of violent religious extremism just across the Mediterranean Sea from Italy. Along the way, they scored a string of victories—defeating one of the strongest fighting forces in the country and swiftly crushing a local popular revolt.

Libya's neighbors have become increasingly alarmed.

Tunisia closed its border with Libya for 15 days on Wednesday, the day after Islamic State claimed responsibility for a suicide bombing on a bus in the capital Tunis that killed 12 presidential guards.

Tunisia is also building a security wall along a third of that border to stem the flow of extremists between the countries. Two previous attacks in Tunisia this year that killed dozens of tourists were carried out by gunmen the government said were trained by Islamic State in Libya, which has recruited hundreds of Tunisians to its ranks.

This burgeoning operation in Libya shows how Islamic State is able to grow and adapt even as it is targeted by Russian, French and U.S.-led airstrikes in Syria as well as Kurdish and Iraqi ground assaults in Iraq.

On Thursday, nearly two weeks after Islamic State's attacks on Paris, French President François Hollande and Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi met in the French capital where both said Europe must turn its attention to the militants' rise in Libya. Mr. Renzi said Libya risks becoming the "next emergency" if it is not given priority.

In Libya, Islamic State has fended off challenges from government-aligned militias and called for recruits who have the technical know-how to put nearby oil facilities into operation. Libyan officials said they are worried it is only a matter of time before the radical fighters attempt to take over more oil fields and refineries near Sirte to boost their revenues—money that could fund attacks in the Middle East and Europe.

Sirte is a gateway to several major oil fields and refineries farther east on the same coast and Islamic State has targeted those installations in the past year.

"They have made their intentions clear," said Ismail Shoukry, head of military intelligence for the region that includes Sirte. "They want to take their fight to Rome."

Islamic State is benefiting from a conflict that has further weakened government control in Libya. For nearly a year, the U.S. and European powers have pointed to the Islamic State threat to press the rival governments to come to a power-sharing agreement. Despite a United Nations-brokered draft agreement for peace announced in October, neither side has taken steps to implement it.

A new U.N. envoy, Martin Kobler, was appointed this month to break the stalemate, part of efforts to find a political solution to counter the extremists' expansion.

"We don't have a real state. We have a fragmented government," said Fathi Ali Bashaagha, a politician from the city of Misrata who participated in the U.N.-led negotiations. "Every day we delay on a political deal, it is a golden opportunity for Islamic State to grow."

Since early 2014, two rival factions have ruled Libya, effectively dividing the country. In the east, an internationally recognized government based in the town of Tobruk has won the backing of regional powers Egypt and the United Arab Emirates. In the west, an Islamist-leaning government based in Tripoli has relied on Misrata fighting forces for political legitimacy.

Islamic State militants have successfully taken on and defeated myriad Libyan armed factions, including the powerful militias from Misrata which were the driving force behind the revolt that unseated longtime

dictator Moammar Gadhafi in 2011. Misrata, 150 miles west of Sirte, has recently come under sporadic Islamic State attacks.

Members of Misrata's militias, who are loosely under the control of the western government in Tripoli, say they lack the support to mount an offensive against Islamic State. Earlier this month, the Tripoli government forced the Misrata militias into a humiliating prisoner swap with Islamic State.

"There will be no meaningful action without a political agreement," said Abdullah al-Najjar, a field commander with the Brigade 166, an elite Misrata militia that engaged in a protracted fight with Islamic State on the outskirts of Sirte earlier this year. "You have to know you're going to war with a government that is going to back you."

This month, the U.S. launched an airstrike against Islamic State in Libya, its first against the group outside of Syria and Iraq. Officials said they believe the strike killed one of the top deputies of Islamic State leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. The deputy, Abu Nabil al-Anbari, had been sent to Libya last year to establish the group's presence there.

In recent weeks, a flood of foreign recruits and their families have arrived in Sirte—another indication the group is becoming increasingly comfortable in its North African base, according to residents and activists from Sirte and Libyan military officials.

Islamic State has called on recruits to travel to Libya instead of trying to enter Syria, while commanders have repatriated Libyan fighters from Syria and Iraq, Libyan intelligence officials said.

"Sirte will be no less than Raqqa," is a mantra often repeated by Islamic State leaders in the Libyan city during sermons and radio broadcasts, several residents and an activist from the city said. Raqqa is the group's self-declared capital in Syria.

Like its mother organization in Syria, Islamic State has appointed foreign "emirs" in Sirte to administer its brutal brand of social control. Music, smoking and cellphone networks have been banned while women are only allowed to walk the streets in full cover. Morality police patrol in vehicles marked with Islamic State's logo and courts administering Islamic law, or Shariah, as well as prisons have been set up.

With a population of about 700,000, Sirte was long known for being Gadhafi's hometown and a stronghold of his supporters.

Soon after Libya's uprising ended more than four decades of Gadhafi's rule, he was killed in Sirte by fighters from Misrata.

Earlier this month, Islamic State reopened schools in the city, segregating students by gender and strictly enforcing an Islamic State approved curriculum. On Fridays, the traditional day of communal prayer, the group organizes public lectures and residents are often herded into public squares to witness executions and lashings of those who run afoul of the strict rules.

The seeds of Islamic State's growth in Libya were planted after Gadhafi's ouster. In the almost exclusively Sunni Muslim Libya, the Sunni extremist group exploited tribal and political rifts that lingered after the strongman's death, particularly around Sirte.

Islamic State lured extremists from other groups under the Islamic State umbrella.

By June, Brigade 166, one of western Libya's strongest armed brigades, abandoned a months long battle with the militants on Sirte's outskirts. In August, Islamic State cemented their grip on the city, bringing the last holdout district under their control, officials and residents said.

Islamic State crushed an armed uprising in August in three days. It was sparked by local residents angered over the group's killing of

a young cleric who opposed the radicals. Militants publicly crucified several people who participated in the revolt and confiscated homes.

The brutality moved the internationally recognized government in eastern Libya to plead for military intervention by Arab nations and a lifting of a U.N. arms embargo on Libya in effect since 2011. But the support never came.

Unlike in Syria, the group has struggled to provide basic services. Gas stations are dry and residents are expected to smuggle in their own fuel—as long as it is not confiscated by Islamic State.

Hospitals have been abandoned after Islamic State ordered male and female staffers be segregated. The ill must travel miles to other cities for treatment, a trip that is often accompanied by difficult questioning and searches at Islamic State checkpoints.

"No services, just punishment," said Omar, a 33-year-old civil engineer who fled Sirte after taking part in the failed uprising against Islamic State. "Sirte has gone dark."

Despite the challenges, Islamic State has big plans for Sirte. A recent edition of their propaganda magazine, Dabiq, featured an interview with Abu Mughirah al-Qahtani, who was described as "the delegated leader" for Islamic State in Libya. He vowed to use Libya's geographic position—and its oil reserves—to disrupt Europe's security and economy.

About 85% of Libya's crude oil production in 2014 went to Europe, with Italy being the largest recipient. About half its natural gas production is exported to Italy.

"The control of Islamic State over this region will lead to economic breakdowns," the leader of the Libyan operation said, "especially for Italy and the rest of the European states."

Mr. MCCAIN. It states: "Even as foreign powers step up pressure against Islamic State in Syria and Iraq, the militant group has expanded in Libya and established a new base close to Europe where it can generate oil revenue and plot terror attacks."

Libya is an oil-rich country—a very oil-rich country. If you let ISIS get control of Libya, my friends, they will have unlimited sources of revenue.

The Wall Street Journal: "Its presence there has grown over the past year from 200 eager fighters to a roughly 5,000-strong contingent which includes administrators and financiers, according to estimates by Libyan intelligence officials, residents and activists in the area."

By the way, during these debates, I will comment a little bit on it—that those who are against any intervention cite Libya as the case for not going in. Facts are a stubborn thing. The fact is, Muammer Qadhafi was at the gates of Benghazi and was going to slaughter thousands of people. We brought about his downfall and walked away. If we had walked away from Japan and Germany after World War II, it would have collapsed. If we had walked away from Korea, where we still have 38,000 troops, it would have collapsed. If we had walked away from Bosnia, it would have collapsed.

I am telling you, my colleagues, we walked away. This President and this administration did not do the things necessary after the fall of Qadhafi to

build a democracy, and the people of Libya wanted it, and I can tell you that for sure because I was there. One of the great tragedies of the 21st century is our failure to act in a way to help the Libyan people transition from all of those years of being under a brutal leader.

By the way, he was also responsible for the deaths of Americans in a bar in Berlin and an airliner being shot down. Yet we should have left him in power? Sure we should have.

ISIL is operating in Lebanon, Yemen, and Egypt, and other radical Islamic groups, such as Boko Haram in Nigeria and al-Shabaab in Somalia, have pledged allegiance to ISIL. This appearance of success only enhances ISIL's ability to radicalize, recruit, and grow.

There has been some progress. I was recently in Iraq, and the operation to retake Sinjar was important. Iraqi forces, as I mentioned, have closed in on Ramadi for weeks. They haven't finished the job. Our counterterrorism operations are taking a lot of ISIL fighters off the battlefield in Iraq and Syria. All of this represents tactical progress, and it is a testament to our civilian and military leaders, who are outstanding, as well as thousands of U.S. troops helping to take the fight to ISIL every day. I would like to point out that significant challenges remain.

As a direct result of President Obama's decision to withdraw all U.S. forces from Iraq and squander hard-won American influence, the Iraqi Government is weak and beholden to Iran. I tell my colleagues, have no doubt what the dominant influence in Iraq is today: It is the Iranians. There was no more vivid example of this than when it was reported that Iraqi Prime Minister al-Abadi turned down Secretary of Defense Ash Carter's offer of new military assistance, including the use of Apache helicopters and Special Operations forces to help recapture Ramadi.

Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that an article titled "Iraq Declines Offer of U.S. Helicopters for Fight Against ISIS, Pentagon Chief Says" from the New York Times be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[From the New York Times, Dec. 16, 2015]

IRAQ DECLINES OFFER OF U.S. HELICOPTERS FOR FIGHT AGAINST ISIS, PENTAGON CHIEF SAYS

(By Michael R. Gordon)

BAGHDAD.—Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi of Iraq declined to take up the Pentagon on its recent offer to speed up the fight against Islamic State fighters in Ramadi with the help of American attack helicopters, officials said on Wednesday.

"The prime minister did not make any specific requests in connection with helicopters," Defense Secretary Ashton B. Carter told reporters after he met with the Iraqi leader here.

Mr. Carter made it clear that Mr. Abadi had not ruled out the use of the Apache heli-

copters in future operations, which are expected to be especially challenging as Iraqi forces look toward the battle for Mosul, Iraq's second-largest city, which was captured in June 2014 by the Islamic State, also known as ISIS or ISIL.

Mr. Carter also insisted that neither Lt. Gen. Sean B. MacFarland, the American military commander who is leading the campaign against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, nor the Iraqi prime minister believed that the Apaches were needed "right now" to win back Ramadi, the capital of Iraq's Anbar Province, which is the site of protracted fighting between Islamic State militants and Iraqi ground troops.

But Mr. Carter told Congress just a week ago that the United States had offered to have American-piloted Apaches fight with Iraqi forces as the Iraqi Army sought to complete its capture of the city. The United States, he noted, has also offered to deploy American advisers with Iraqi brigades on the battlefield instead of restricting them to bases inside Iraq, another proposal the Iraqis have yet to accept.

"The United States is prepared to assist the Iraqi Army with additional unique capabilities to help them finish the job, including attack helicopters and accompanying advisers, if circumstances dictate and if requested by Prime Minister Abadi," Mr. Carter told the Senate Armed Services Committee.

The meeting between the American defense secretary and the Iraqi prime minister underscored two factors shaping the American-led campaign against the Islamic State in Iraq: the Obama administration's reluctance to significantly expand the role of American troops in Iraq, and the reluctance of Iraq's Shiite-dominated government to accept highly visible forms of American military support in the face of pressure from hard-line Shiite politicians and the Iranians.

It also raised questions about the Obama administration's plans to intensify its campaign against the Islamic State militants. In recent weeks, the Pentagon has spoken of the "accelerants" it is planning to introduce to hasten the demise of the Islamic State. The Iraqi government, however, has yet to embrace two of the important "accelerants"—the Apaches and the deployment of American advisers in the field.

Mr. Carter disclosed the Apache offer to American lawmakers after it had been conveyed privately to Mr. Abadi. Iraqi officials said the public nature of Mr. Carter's statements, which appear intended to reassure Congress that the Obama administration was stepping up its efforts against the Islamic State, put the prime minister, who has already been weakened by a series of bruising struggles with his political rivals, in a difficult spot.

"This is a very complex environment," General MacFarland said, somewhat philosophically. "It is kind of hard to inflict support on somebody."

According to United States officials, the Pentagon's offer to support Iraqi forces with American Apaches was more qualified than it first appeared. Military commanders would have the authority to use the attack helicopters if Mr. Abadi agreed to their use and the risks of using them were judged to be acceptable.

The deployment of Apaches in riskier situations would require further White House review, even if Mr. Abadi approved, United States officials added.

American officials also said it would take weeks to deploy the advisers who would accompany Iraqi brigades on the battlefield even if Mr. Abadi were to agree to their presence.

One important measure has been accepted in principle by Mr. Abadi: a new American

special operations task force, which is to number fewer than 100. Seeking to reassure the prime minister, Mr. Carter said the task force's operations would require the approval of the Iraqi authorities. He suggested that some of its missions would take place near the Iraqi border with Syria, where they would receive less attention than those carried out near the Iraqi capital.

"Everything we do, of course, is subject to the approval of the sovereign Iraqi government," Mr. Carter said at the start of his meeting with Mr. Abadi, which also included Khaled al-Obeidi, Iraq's defense minister, and Lt. Gen. Taleb Shegati al-Kenani, who heads Iraq's counterterrorism service.

"Our progress in Ramadi is a huge progress and added to it the progress in Baiji," Mr. Abadi said in English, referring to a town that is the site of a strategic oil refinery in northern Iraq.

American military officials have painted a generally positive picture of the Iraqi military's push to take Ramadi, but Iraqi troops were involved in pitched fighting on Tuesday as Islamic fighters counterattacked.

The city, which is believed to be occupied by several hundred militants, has been surrounded by about 10,000 Iraqi troops. Tens of thousands of civilians are believed to be trapped in the town, and Islamic fighters have shot at some who have tried to flee, according to American officials.

In their Tuesday counterattack, Islamic State militants took a bridge northwest of the city that spans the Euphrates, which the Iraqi Army had previously occupied. At the same time, militants sent several car bombs and a small group of fighters to attack the Anbar Operations Center, the Iraqi command that is overseeing the Ramadi campaign from north of the city.

Both attacks were beaten back as American airstrikes enabled the Iraqi military to retake the bridge. Two Iraqi soldiers were killed as were several dozen Islamic State fighters, American officials said. By the end of Tuesday, both sides were back where they had started. It was unclear when Iraqi troops might break through the Islamic State's belts of improvised explosive devices and other defenses and push into the heart of the city.

Mr. MCCAIN. I met with Prime Minister al-Abadi in Iraq. He is a good man. He knows he needs this help, but because of the dominating influence of Iran and Shia militias in Iraq, he turned it down anyway.

General McFarland, one of the greatest generals I have met—he is up there in the category of David Petraeus—is leading the fight against ISIL. He reacted with a very interesting comment. He said: "This is a very complex environment. It is kind of hard to inflict support on somebody." What General McFarland is saying is that because of the Iranian dominant influence, the Iraqis, as a body, are reluctant to accept the help they need to retake the second largest city in Iraq. The second largest city in Iraq, Mosul, is under ISIL control, and he knows full well that Apache helicopters and Special Operations forces could help him do that. But who is telling him not to? The Iranians.

When I was there, we met with the Prime Minister of Iraq, Mr. al-Abadi, and he said: If you Americans come and you lose one pilot or one plane, you will leave. That was the opinion of the Prime Minister of Iraq, and one of the

reasons—along with the Iranian influence—is because there is no trust or confidence of the United States in Iraq or in the region.

It comes as no surprise that the training of Iraqi security forces has been slow. The building of support for the Sunni tribal forces has been even slower. ISIL captured Mosul in June of 2014, and at the end of 2015, ISIL still controls the second largest city in Iraq. How do you think the families of those brave Americans who have sacrificed themselves and those individuals who are still at Walter Reed feel after the sacrifices they made and the victories they won? Now, of course, we see all of that is gone—just a glimmering—thanks to the President of the United States withdrawing all of our troops in the mistaken belief that if you pull out of wars, wars end. They don't end. It is hard to talk to the Gold Star Mothers.

Meanwhile, the Financial Times reports that ISIL is still making \$1.5 million a day in oil sales. Worse, Reuters reports that ISIL has made more than \$500 million trading oil, with significant volumes sold to—guess who. Guess who ISIL is selling oil to. The government of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. It is hard to make some of this stuff up, and it gets a little complicated.

We are now making nice—and I will talk a little bit more about it later—with Bashar al-Assad and their stewards, the Russians and the Iranians. Meanwhile, Bashar al-Assad is buying oil from—at least \$1.5 million a day—from ISIL.

Even as an Oval Office speech and a Pentagon photo op failed to reassure the American people, this administration has doubled down on its indecisive approach to ISIL, using limited means and indirect ways to achieve aspirational ends on a nonexistent timeline. The administration now admits we are at war with ISIL—wonderful—but proceeds at every turn to minimize any American role in fighting and winning that war. America has never waged anything we have called to war and then so profoundly limited our role in the hope that some other force will emerge to win it for us. The administration says we cannot “Americanize” the conflict.

I also want to point out that the President has a unique and really dishonest approach to those of us who have said for a long time that we have to have more involvement and predicted what would happen. Unfortunately, we have been wrong by saying, yes, the “popoffs”—as he called us in a speech from the Philippines—want to send hundreds of thousands of troops. That is a total falsehood. I will repeat again what we have been asking for for years, and that is another 5,000 or so Americans on the ground in Iraq and a multinational force led by the Sunni Arab countries with European participation—I would hope that people like the French would join in a—about 10,000 of 100,000-person force to go to

Raqqa and take them out. As long as Raqqa exists, they will be able to export this evil throughout the world, including to the United States of America. There is no plan by this administration to retake Raqqa. There is no strategy, and that is, indeed, shameful.

The war against ISIL was Americanized when ISIL inspired terrorists who murdered 14 Americans on our own soil in San Bernardino. This attack should be a wake-up call and we need a strategy, as I mentioned. In Syria, there is no plausible strategy to achieve this goal on anywhere near an acceptable time line. We were briefed that it would be a year before they retake Mosul. There is no time limit on how they could even approach regaining Raqqa. There is no ground force that is both willing and able to retake Raqqa, nor is there a realistic prospect of one emerging anytime soon. The Syrian Kurds could take Raqqa but won't, and the Syrian Sunni Arabs want to but can't, partly due to our failure to support them.

Meanwhile, the administration has continued its inaction and indifference and has allowed Bashar al-Assad to slaughter a quarter of a million people. Have no doubt who is responsible for these millions of refugees; his name is Bashar al-Assad, the godfather of ISIS. He is the one who has barrel-bombed thousands and thousands of his people. Bashar al-Assad used poison gas and crossed the redline, we might recall. It is Bashar al-Assad who continues the butcher of his own people.

I will get to what Secretary Kerry has had to say in a minute.

The administration continues its policy of inaction and indifference. It has allowed Vladimir Putin to intervene militarily and protect this murderous regime.

My friends, the last time the Russians had influence in the region was when Anwar Sadat threw them out in 1973. Now they are back. Now they are major players in the Middle East. This is the headline from the Associated Press yesterday: “Russian Airstrikes Restore Syrian Military Balance of Power.” The airstrikes of the Russians have taken out significant capabilities of the moderate resistance—not ISIS but the moderates whom we had trained and equipped and we refused to protect.

I quote from the Associated Press story, “Russian Air Strikes Restore Syrian Military Balance of Power.”

Weeks of Russian airstrikes in Syria appear to have restored enough momentum to the government side to convince President Bashar Assad's foes and the world community that even if he doesn't win the war he cannot quickly be removed by force. That realization combined with the growing sense that the world's No. 1 priority is the destruction of the Islamic State group, has led many to acknowledge that however unpalatable his conduct of the war, Assad will have to be tolerated for at least some time further.

Let's get this straight. Assad will be tolerated to continue to barrel bomb

and slaughter innocent people. “How-ever unpalatable his conduct of the war. . . .” This kind of Orwellian understatement not only obscures the truth, but it cripples the conscience. My friends, it cripples the conscience.

Bashar Assad's conduct of the war, the barrel bombs, chemical weapons, slaughtering women and children, not only killed one-quarter of a million people, it is what gave rise to ISIL to start with, and it is what fuels them still.

Secretary Kerry seems not to understand that fact. While in Moscow searching for “common ground” with Russia on Syria and Ukraine, Secretary Kerry said—and I am not making this up; I am telling my colleagues, I am not making this up—“Russia has been a significant contributor to the progress” the world has made on Syria.

Was Russia making progress when it bombed U.S.-backed Syrian forces fighting the Assad regime or was that when it took a brief pause from bombing Syrian moderates to indiscriminately drop dumb bombs in ISIL's territory in eastern Syria, killing untold numbers of civilians? Is that the Russian “significant” contributions?

Secretary Kerry then said: “The United States and our partners are not seeking so-called regime change.” The focus now is “not on our differences about what can or cannot be done immediately about Assad”—i.e., Dear Mr. Assad, here is a blank check. Here is your card. Do whatever you want to. Do whatever you want to. Continue your barrel bombing, continue your torture, and continue the war crimes that you have committed. You have only killed 250,000 of your own people. Drive some more into exile and murder more.

At the beginning of this year, this administration still believed that Assad must go, but now, as one official said, “the meaning of ‘Assad has to go’ has evolved.”

I repeat, the administration official said “the meaning of ‘Assad has to go’ has evolved.” This kind of Orwellian double-speak has become all too common in the administration and is exactly why our allies and partners around the world are losing confidence in American leadership.

A very seminal event happened the day before yesterday, my friends, that will be the best indicator of what I am saying. Thirty-four Muslim nations formed an alliance to fight terrorism; i.e., ISIL, and the United States of America didn't even know about it. They didn't even tell the United States of America that they were forming their own organization with their own strategy, their own tactics, to fight against ISIS? My friends, that is an incredible statement about the total loss of American influence and prestige in the region.

I have had more than one leader in the Middle East tell me: “Sometimes we think that it is better to be America's enemy than its friend.”

So why has the meaning of “Assad has to go” evolved? Because this administration was overpowered, outplayed, and outmatched. This administration consoled themselves with the mantra of “there is no military solution” rather than facing the reality that there is a clear military dimension to a political solution in Syria. That is what Russia and Iran have demonstrated. They have changed the military faction on the ground and created the terms for a political settlement much more favorable to their interests. I believe as a result the conflict will grind on, ISIS will grow stronger, and the refugees will keep coming.

Unfortunately, America’s troubles in 2015 were not contained in Iraq and Syria. Despite conditions on the ground, President Obama elected to withdraw roughly half of the U.S. forces from Afghanistan by the end of next year.

Do you know the President of the United States, even when he announces a buildup, announces a withdrawal. So he sends the message to any potential enemy or any enemy we are engaged with: We are going to build up now, but don’t worry, we are going to pull out. We will withdraw.

So what happens? Here we are. The Pentagon says violence is on the rise in Afghanistan. The AP report says “Violence in Afghanistan is on the rise, according to a new Pentagon report to Congress that says the Taliban was emboldened by the reduced U.S. military role and can be expected to build momentum from their 2015 attack strategy.”

It is inevitable, I say to my colleagues, there will be greater violence in Afghanistan, an increase in Taliban activity, and—I am sorry to say—ISIS, who is already establishing a foothold there, will increase their presence. Meanwhile, the Iranians, in their attempt at hegemony, will provide weapons to the Taliban.

This Senator will save the rest of my comments about what is going on with the Iran nuclear deal, about what the Iranians have already violated, and what continues with the Russian occupation of Ukraine.

Our much respected leader in Europe, General Breedlove, has said that he expects increased military activity by Vladimir Putin in eastern Ukraine. He still has the ambition of establishing a land bridge all the way across eastern Ukraine to Crimea so he doesn’t have to continue to supply by air and sea. We seem to have forgotten that over 8,000 people have died since Russia’s invasion, including 298 innocent people aboard Malaysia’s Flight 17, murdered by Vladimir Putin’s loyal supporters with weapons that were sent to Ukraine by Putin—not to mention the murder of Boris Nemtsov, one of the great leaders of the opposition, in the shadow of the Kremlin. The destabilization continues, even in countries as far away as Sweden. I will not go

into that because the Defense authorization bill calls for the provision of defensive weapons to Ukraine.

One of the more shameful chapters—although they have written more shameful chapters—but one that is really shameful is our failure to provide defensive weapons to Ukraine. There are Russian-supplied tanks in eastern Ukraine. All of us have seen the pictures of them. They have slaughtered many Ukrainians, and we refuse to give the Javelin, the most effective anti-tank weapon we have, to Ukrainians. It is beyond shameful.

So I will not talk about China, which has reclaimed 400 acres earlier and now has reclaimed more than 3,000 acres in the South China Sea, and our one foray within the 12-mile limit, the Secretary of Defense failed to acknowledge before the Senate Armed Services Committee.

So, my colleagues, we depart on this holiday season, hopefully sooner rather than later, with a world in turmoil, with a world that because of a failure of American leadership now poses direct threats, as we just found in San Bernardino, to the United States of America.

We saw too many dark days in 2015. It didn’t have to be this way. It is still within our power to choose better courses. We must never be disheartened or resigned to a world where suffering and evil are always on the ascent. On the contrary, it is in our character as Americans to face adversity with hope and optimism. We must see plainly and fully the threats to our values in order to defeat them.

As Churchill said, we recover our “moral health and martial vigor, we rise again and take our stand for freedom.”

I have no doubt America can succeed and will succeed.

Madam President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

ONE-YEAR ANNIVERSARY OF THE RELEASE OF ALAN GROSS

Mr. LEAHY. Madam President, today is an important day for two reasons. One, it is a sad day because it was just a few years ago today when a dear friend, Senator Dan Inouye, died—one of my closest friends and former President pro tempore and senior Member of this body.

It is also a good day because it marks one year since the release of Alan Gross from a Cuban prison where he had spent 5 years. During that time he lost more than 100 pounds, he lost five teeth, his mother died, his mother-in-law died, his brother-in-law died, and he missed his daughter’s wedding.

I worked for years to help obtain Alan Gross’s release and the return of the remaining members of the so-called Cuban Five, who had served more than 15 years in U.S. prisons. Scott Gilbert, Alan Gross’s lawyer, did an outstanding job, traveling countless times to Cuba. He skillfully advocated on

Alan’s behalf with Cuban and U.S. officials. My foreign policy adviser, Tim Riesen, went down several times to boost Alan Gross’s morale, visiting him in prison and bringing him messages.

My larger purpose, like my good friend from Arizona Senator FLAKE, who has been a real partner in this, was to finally put the Cold War behind us and to start looking forward to a new era.

Like Senator FLAKE and many others, I was convinced that such a step would be widely embraced by the U.S. business community, by religious groups, by academia, the scientific community, the media, and Americans across the political spectrum. I also knew it would be welcomed around the world, including in countries where people believe in democracy and human rights as strongly as we do.

I remember when an ambassador from a South American country came up to my wife Marcelle, saying: We have always respected the United States but also we respected Cuba, and your relationship with Cuba was like a stone in our shoe. Now, by restoring relations with Cuba, you have removed the stone from our shoe.

He, like so many others, recognized that Alan Gross’s release ushered in a new day in United States-Cuba relations. I will never forget on August 14, standing there when our flag was raised at the U.S. Embassy in Havana, listening to our national anthem played, and I heard Cubans standing just outside the gates of the Embassy cheering when the American flag went up. It was a deeply moving experience to be there on a swelteringly hot day.

We had 54 years of a failed, punitive policy that achieved none of its objectives. President Obama and President Raul Castro wisely decided it was time to chart a new path.

The reaction of the people of the United States and Cuba has been overwhelmingly positive. Even some of Cuba’s most vocal critics of the Castro government have welcomed this new opening.

Which brings me back to Alan Gross. He had every reason to be a bitter defender of U.S. sanctions, but instead he strongly supported the new policy of engagement. He has never expressed anything but warmth and admiration for the Cuban people.

Contrast that with the small handful of Members of Congress who continue to defend a discredited policy of isolation that has been repudiated by large majorities of their own constituents, denounced by every other government in the hemisphere, and which even they acknowledge it has not succeeded. Their answer is to keep it in place, even opposing efforts by the State Department to improve security and staffing at the U.S. Embassy in Havana, to which the Cuban Government has agreed.

I ask that you to look at this photograph of Alan Gross and his wife. I took this just minutes after he was told he