**Ranking Member Moulton Opening Remarks**

**House Armed Services Committee Subcommittee on Oversight & Investigations**

**Hearing on “Securing the Peace After the Fall of ISIL”**

**October 3, 2017**

Thank you, Chairwoman Hartzler and thank you to all of our witnesses.

Today, the subcommittee will focus on the critically important task of securing the peace in Iraq after the defeat of ISIS. I echo Chairwoman Hartzler’s frustration in securing appropriate administration witnesses to answer the full gamut of questions the Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee is within its purview to raise but am grateful for everyone’s presence here today and ongoing service to our country.

I also appreciate our outside witnesses who bring considerable depth of expertise to bear on this subject, including Amb. Crocker who I first met in Iraq while serving under Gen. David Petraeus.

As we convene here today, Iraqi security forces, supported by the U.S. advise and assist mission have succeeded in retaking most major population centers once controlled by ISIS - Falluja, Ramadi, and Mosul, ISIS’ power center in Iraq. Most recently, coalition supported Iraqi Forces seized back the city Tal Afar in the northwestern corner of Iraq and only isolated ISIS strongholds remain outside of Hawija, Qaim, and other pockets along the Syria-Iraq border.

Such victories have not been without a human toll. ISIS’ brutal tactics, employing civilians as human shields, vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices, and booby-trapped residential areas resulted in over 1,400 Iraqi troops killed and at least 7,000 wounded according to our embassy in Baghdad. During the campaign, two American servicemembers were killed and over 20 were wounded.

The U.S. Commander of the Combined Joint Task Force in charge of the counter-ISIS campaign, Lt. Gen. Stephen Townsend, called it “worst fighting he had seen in 35 years” of combat experience and likened it to “Falluja 2004 on steroids.”

Civilian losses have been greater still, with latest UN estimates at 8,000 killed and 1.2 million rendered homeless, displaced by the fighting.

Despite the tragic human toll, I am encouraged by the progress we have made in partnership with Iraqi forces to defeat the scourge of ISIS and look forward to hearing from our witnesses an update on the final stages of the military campaign.

As important and necessary as these operations are to militarily defeat ISIS, I am concerned that without sufficient post-conflict planning and resourcing we will find ourselves and Iraqi forces condemned to fighting the same battles so many have already given their lives for.

At its core, what troubles Iraq are fundamentally political questions. Just as I disagreed with the Obama administration, I am again concerned this administration is not sufficiently prioritizing such underlying political dynamics.

What does this mean? First and foremost, I am concerned Iraqi security forces may be woefully unprepared to provide security to Iraqi civilians and ensure displaced persons can return to their homes without fear of attack or retribution. Experts I have heard from here in Washington and in Iraq have expressed worries of insufficient hold forces and police, compounded by the beleaguered state of Iraqi military units, reeling from the toll of the brutal counter-ISIS campaign.

Without sufficient local security arrangements, we cannot expect for Iraq to be stabilized, for civilians return to normalcy, and for communities to be defended against the emergence of an “ISIS 2.0” or other militant groups. Moreover, without capable and professional security forces, we risk seeing a repeat of the same sectarian tensions leading to Sunni embitterment that provided fertile ground for the growth of ISIS.

Beyond the provisioning of civilian security, key gaps and problems remain to be addressed such as acute food insecurity, insufficient access to healthcare, destroyed infrastructure, degraded public services and utilities, newly inflamed grievances among local communities, and insufficient plans for governance arrangements in many areas.

Both as a Marine infantry officer who worked side-by-side with Iraqis to turn the tide of the insurgency and now as a Congressman and Ranking Member of this Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee, I look forward to your testimony, and hope to hear a proactive, whole-of-government strategy that represents the only chance of success.

I cannot tell you how painful it is as an Iraq war veteran to see us fighting and re-fighting the same battles we fought and for which our friends gave their lives. At this rate, my children will be fighting these same battles.

We must hear from the administration how this time will be different, how this time you will ensure a political resolution so that the U.S. military doesn’t have to keep cleaning up these messes.

Thank you, Chairwoman Hartzler, I yield back.