

Crisis talks in London over Islamic State

Paul Mitchell
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US Secretary of State John Kerry joined 20 of the 60 or so “coalition” states in London on Thursday in crisis talks over the offensive by the Sunni militants of Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

ISIS controls most of eastern Syria and western Iraq.

It was the first time the US-led coalition had met since the Paris attacks by gunmen affiliated with al Qaeda on the magazine *Charlie Hebdo* and a Jewish supermarket.

Participating in the UK/US-hosted talks were Australia, Bahrain, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Egypt, France, Germany, Iraq, Italy, Jordan, Kuwait, the Netherlands, Norway, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Spain, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates. Press releases said they were there to discuss how to support Iraqi and Kurdish armed forces, cut ISIS financing, counter its propaganda and provide humanitarian assistance.

Kerry said, “The purpose of coming here is to bring everybody’s best advice, everybody’s thoughts about where there may be weaknesses, everybody’s thoughts about things we can do better, put that together, improve our own performance and operations, and lay down the strategy for the days ahead.”

He made clear what he meant when boasting that some 2,000 coalition air strikes had halted or reversed the momentum of the jihadist group, reclaimed some 700 square kilometres and killed half its leadership since August, adding that Iraqi forces would be getting lots of M16 rifles “very, very shortly.”

“We need to move ahead on every single front, militarily, but also through law enforcement, through intelligence sharing, by attacking the root causes so that terrorist appeals fall flat and foreign recruits are no longer enticed to go to a place and wreak havoc on it,” Kerry added.

Kerry’s remarks followed the State of the Union address January 20 by President Barack Obama, who insisted air strikes were effective. “In Iraq and Syria,

American leadership—including our military power—is stopping ISIL’s (IS) advance,” Obama said. “Instead of getting dragged into another ground war in the Middle East, we are leading a broad coalition, including Arab nations, to degrade and ultimately destroy this terrorist group.”

UK Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond said progress against ISIS was slow, but the coalition was determined to defeat it. “This isn’t going to be done in three months or six months. It’s going to take a year, two years to push ISIL back out of Iraq but we are doing the things that need to be done in order to turn the tide,” Hammond asserted.

Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi warned that his country’s military capability was suffering from low oil prices and pleaded with the conference to provide more weapons and training. Baghdad has criticised Washington for not doing “enough” to destroy ISIS.

UK Prime Minister David Cameron told Abadi that he was ready to help rebuild the Iraqi military so they could carry out a sustained ground offensive against ISIS, but stopped short of making any new commitments.

“The threat from extremist terror you face in Iraq is also a threat we face here in the United Kingdom,” he said. “We will do everything we can to help stop foreign fighters coming to your country and creating the mayhem we see today.”

European police agency Europol estimates up to 5,000 European Union citizens have joined ISIS.

On January 16, Cameron met with Obama to discuss the escalation of military operations by the two countries in the Middle East, further NATO provocations against Russia and, in the aftermath of the *Charlie Hebdo* attack in France, greater domestic repression in the name of the “war on terror.” Cameron wanted Obama’s cooperation in putting “pressure” on US Internet companies such as Facebook and Twitter to

work more closely with UK intelligence agencies. He has pledged to implement a “snoopers’ charter” Communications Bill, giving the British intelligence agencies greater powers to access encrypted communications.

The London meeting took place a day after Kurdish forces in northern Iraq said they had cleared ISIS from nearly 500 square kilometres of territory and broken a key supply line to Iraq’s second largest city of Mosul, which ISIS seized in June 2014. Reports earlier this month in the American press suggested that the US troops sent to Iraq by Obama are on the verge of entering direct combat with ISIS.

The *Wall Street Journal* (WSJ) reported that an Iraqi counteroffensive to retake Mosul “will be the centrepiece” of the US-led military efforts for early 2015. WSJ also revealed that the total of US and allied “trainers and advisers” deployed in Iraq has reached 5,000, considerably higher than the figures usually cited for this effort.

Over the last period, ISIS has scored a number of propaganda successes, which many analysts see as a big factor in its recruitment of thousands of international volunteers. One shows captured Jordanian pilot Muath al-Kasaesbeh—ISIS claimed it had downed his plane using a heat-seeking missile—describing the way the US lays down operations against ISIS. “There are American bases in Qatar where the missions are planned, targets are decided, and assignments are distributed,” Kasaesbeh tells the interviewer, adding, “They draw out the missions for every participating country a day before. The participating parties are informed of their assignments by 4 o’clock the next day. The Americans use aerial snipers, satellites, spies, and drones taking off from Gulf countries to determine and study targets. We are given aerial maps and pictures of the targets.”

Captured British journalist John Cantlie has appeared in several IS propaganda videos apparently railing against the growth of “dollar-linked fiat currencies” and promoting ISIS plans to bring in a new currency based on a return to some sort of gold standard.

German journalist Jurgen Todenhofer, the first western journalist granted access to ISIS after spending time in Mosul, declared, “ISIS is much stronger than we think here.”

He described how it is supported by “an almost

ecstatic enthusiasm that I have never encountered in any war zone” and is implementing “social welfare” and a “school system.” Todenhofer concludes that ISIS cannot be overcome by Western intervention or air strikes.

On January 19, the US Central Command was forced to take down its Twitter feed after a group declaring its sympathy with ISIS hacked the Command’s social media accounts, just as Obama was delivering a speech on cyber security, and replaced its logos with an image of a hooded fighter and the words “CyberCaliphate” and “I love you ISIS”.

ISIS’s growth is the responsibility of the US, which has consciously promoted fratricidal sectarian warfare in order to overthrow the Baathist party of former president Saddam Hussein and prepare new efforts to overthrow the Assad regime in Syria. These conditions enabled Al Qaeda and ISIS—neither of which existed in Iraq before the US-led invasion—to gain a foothold in the country.

Like the 2003 invasion of Iraq, the latest war in Iraq and Syria is a predatory intervention aimed at securing imperialist domination over the resource-rich and geo-strategic Middle East. Its purpose is to stabilise the deeply unpopular US-backed regime in Iraq and effect regime change in Syria. That is the real agenda behind the London talks.



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