

Remarks by National Security Advisor Susan E. Rice at the U.S. Air Force Academy, Colorado Springs

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April 14, 2016

The White House

For Immediate Release

April 14, 2016

National Security Advisor Susan E. Rice

“The Global Campaign Against ISIL—Partnerships, Progress, and the Path Ahead”

Remarks As Prepared for Delivery

Ira C. Eaker Lecture

U.S. Air Force Academy, Colorado Springs

Thursday, April 14, 2016

Thank you, Ellis. Good evening, everyone. It’s an honor to be here. Earlier this evening, I had the opportunity eat with some of you in “Mitch’s.” I’ve really been looking forward to this visit. Maybe not as much as some of you are looking forward to Ring Dance. Definitely not as much as the first-class cadets are looking forward to graduation in...49 days. But who’s counting. My only regret in being here is that they wouldn’t let me go up in one of those gliders.

To start, there are a few people I’d like to recognize—though I understand “Recognition” is a searing experience that is well behind you. I want to thank your Superintendent, General Michelle Johnson, for so warmly welcoming me here. I also want to thank the head of the Political Science Department, Colonel Cheryl Kearney for sponsoring this lecture, and Captain Brad DeWees who made this all happen.

I’d like to acknowledge someone else too, and that is my beloved late father, Dr. Emmett Rice. During World War II, he was a captain in the Army Air Corps—one of the Tuskegee Airmen. I can’t lie; so, I won’t tell you that he was an ace fighter pilot. Rather, my father spent the war serving in management and logistics. He loved his country deeply, and service was his calling throughout his distinguished career. But, he never forgot the sting of having to serve in a segregated unit, being treated as a second-class citizen. It impacted him profoundly. Yet, he never let it hold him back. After the war, he got his Ph.D in Economics, taught at Cornell University, served at the Treasury Department and the World Bank, and retired as a Governor of the Federal Reserve. He taught me that the

only limits that should constrain me are the boundaries of my dreams. So, I think he would relish the irony, all these years later, of his daughter speaking at the U.S. Air Force Academy as the President's National Security Advisor.

For me, it's a tremendous privilege to look across this audience and see so many bright, young cadets, whose own dreams are bounded only by the vastness of the sky. You have limitless opportunity, no matter where you come from, no matter what you look like, what faith you hold, or whom you love. Your President, the American people, and I could not be more proud of you. And, I know that President Obama is looking forward to telling you that in person at Graduation in just a few short weeks.

Back in Washington, I'm privileged to work with many outstanding military leaders—including Air Force officers and graduates of this Academy, such as Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, General Paul Selva; Air Force Chief of Staff, General Mark Welsh; and our Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, General Philip Breedlove. I'm also very pleased to be joined today by Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director for Defense Policy and Strategy—and retired Air Force Colonel—Troy Thomas. Not bad for a guy who spent so much time sitting confinements for... well, he won't say. You might know his mom, Candyce Thomas, who has kept you all entertained for the past 19 years. We met at Troy's retirement, and, Candyce, thank you for being here tonight.

For those of you about to graduate, Troy's story is instructive. By the time he graduated, in 1991, the Cold War had ended. The Persian Gulf War had started and ended. Troy was sitting in Falcon Field, feeling proud, relieved—and wondering whether he'd missed out. Well, for Troy and all his fellow graduates, the last 25 years have seen no shortage of operations where skilled Airmen answered the nation's call—from the Balkans to Iraq to Afghanistan. Troy's service took him from Korea to the Middle East to Afghanistan. So, if any of you doubt that there's important work for you to do—don't. The work of ensuring our national security never ends. Your skills—your leadership—will be in high demand in the decades ahead.

As you begin your service, you will do so in a world defined both by incredible opportunity and pressing challenges. Across the globe, millions of people are emerging from poverty. Miraculous technologies are revolutionizing everything from the way we hail a cab to the way we treat disease. Our economy is dynamic and growing. Our alliances are robust. As the President said here in 2012, “the United States is stronger and safer and more respected in the world.”

At the same time, we also face serious threats to our security. Every morning, I brief the President on the most sobering challenges we confront. On any given day, we might be dealing with Russia's aggressive actions in Ukraine, developments in the South China Sea, North Korean missile launches, or global economic instability. The same technology that has unleashed so much opportunity also enables terrorists and cyber criminals. We face the menace of advancing climate change, which imperils not just our nation but our very planet. There are failing states, a global refugee crisis, and insidious diseases like Ebola

and Zika. Two weeks ago, the President hosted a Nuclear Security Summit to galvanize the world to work together to prevent nuclear terrorism. So, when I brief the President, it is not a brief briefing.

This evening, I'd like to focus on one threat in particular—the threat at the very top of President Obama's agenda—and that is ISIL. We, of course, remain vigilant against the full range of terrorist threats confronting our country. In fact, in recent weeks, we removed two key al Qaeda leaders in Syria, hit a training camp used by al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula in Yemen, and took out a senior al-Shabaab leader in Somalia. But today, ISIL is the most dangerous terrorist organization we face.

As we were tragically reminded by last month's attacks in Brussels, ISIL threatens our partners and allies, the United States, and people around the world. Our hearts break for the victims of those attacks—including Air Force Lieutenant Colonel Kato Martinez, his four children, and his wife Gail, who was tragically killed. We've seen horrific attacks around the world, from Paris to Istanbul, and from Nigeria to Jakarta. We've seen ISIL use chemical weapons on Syrians and Iraqis as recently as a few weeks ago. It is horrifying to witness the extreme brutality of these twisted brutes who slaughter innocents, execute prisoners, and enslave women and rape children. It tears at our common humanity.

What makes ISIL especially dangerous, however, is that ISIL is present both on the ground—attempting to function as a state—and online. It is essentially a hybrid: a terrorist organization and an insurgency, which exploited the chaos in Syria and Iraq to occupy large swaths of territory—at one point, more than a third the size of Colorado. Holding territory provides ISIL with financial resources and manpower. It buttresses their false claim to a so-called caliphate, granting them a unique and powerful appeal to potential followers. At the same time, they have harnessed the power of social media to recruit fighters and inspire lone-wolf attacks.

So, ISIL poses an enormous danger to civilians under their brutal reign. It is a destabilizing force in the Middle East. It is a threat to people around the world. But let's be clear. As President Obama has emphasized, ISIL does not pose an existential threat to our nation. We have faced down and defeated much greater adversaries. ISIL is not Nazi Germany. It is not the Soviet Union at the height of the Cold War. This is not World War III or the much-hyped clash of civilizations. On the contrary, we alienate our Muslim friends and allies—and dishonor the countless Muslim victims of ISIL's brutality—when people recklessly and wrongly cast ISIL as somehow representative of one of the world's largest religions. ISIL is a twisted network of murderers and maniacs, and they must be rooted out, hunted down, and destroyed.

As President Obama told the nation following the San Bernardino attacks, "We will prevail by being strong and smart, resilient and relentless, and by drawing upon every aspect of American power." And, that's exactly what we're doing. For the past year and a half, the President has been leading a comprehensive strategy to destroy ISIL and its ideology of hate. And, I do mean comprehensive. When we're sitting around the

Situation Room table, we're using all aspects of our power—military, diplomacy, intelligence, counterterrorism, economic, development, homeland security, law enforcement. Ours is truly a whole-of-government campaign.

It is a multi-faceted effort, but not one conducted only by the United States. At the heart of this campaign are the robust partnerships that we're building and leveraging around the world. We've assembled a broad coalition of 66 partners—from Nigeria and the Arab League to Australia and Singapore. As the President said at the outset of this effort, "This is American leadership at its best: We stand with people who fight for their own freedom, and we rally other nations on behalf of our common security and common humanity."

This campaign represents an evolution in our broader strategy of how we think about and confront the threat of terrorism. As a nation, we've learned a lot in the past 15 years. And, one of the things we've learned is that not every conflict requires the deployment of large numbers of U.S. ground forces. That's not always the best way to achieve our goals. So, our fight against ISIL is not like Afghanistan or the Iraq War. In Syria and Iraq, we're helping to strengthen and support local forces, because gains on the ground have to be sustainable. And, this increasingly dynamic campaign is ideally suited for airpower and the Air Force, utilized smartly in support of our partners on the ground.

Broadly speaking, our strategy to destroy ISIL is focused on four main dimensions: we're relentlessly attacking ISIL's core in Syria and Iraq; we're targeting ISIL's branches; we're disrupting its global network; and we're working around the clock to protect our homeland. It is a complex effort. It will not be accomplished fully in just a few weeks or months or even a few years. But day by day, mile by mile, strike by strike, we are making substantial progress. And, as the President outlined in his remarks yesterday at the CIA, we're going to keep up the momentum.

So, let me lay out where this campaign is going—since you, as tomorrow's Air Force leaders, will play a critical role.

First, we'll continue to hammer ISIL's core in Iraq and Syria. Coalition forces have conducted more than 11,500 strikes—nearly 90,000 sorties. These are precision strikes, because how we win matters—strategically and because of who we are. Two thirds of the United States' airstrikes, by the way, have come from the Air Force. Of course, it's not all dropping JDAMS and Hellfire missiles. We're deploying Air Force assets in space and cyberspace. Air Force pilots are delivering fuel, cargo, and humanitarian aid. And, as we build a more complete picture of ISIL's operations in a highly-complex environment, the Air Force has been providing absolutely critical intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capabilities.

To its credit, the Air Force has rapidly ramped up both manned and unmanned ISR capacity. In the past decade, the Air Force has increased remotely piloted aircraft capacity nearly five-fold. Just since 2014, the Air Force has almost doubled the number of ISR sorties flown. From Nevada to Qatar, roughly 11,000 airmen are dedicated solely to piloting and supporting Predator and Reaper drones. This ISR is the best in the world, and it has enabled countless strikes and other operations.

At the same time, it's no secret that we need more. More ISR. More RPA pilots to get us that ISR. It's a real challenge, and I want to applaud the Air Force for its leadership in institutionalizing this capability. In recent months, we've seen some important changes that will help train and retain more pilots. That includes improving quality of life for RPA pilots. It includes bigger bonuses to those who stick around. And RPA aircrews are now eligible to log combat time when flying in hostile airspace.

I know not everybody grew up dreaming of piloting a drone. But as General Welsh has said, "Aerial warfare continues to evolve. Our great RPA Airmen are leading that change. They are in the fight every day." RPAs have taken more strikes against ISIL than any aircraft but the B-1 and F-15. Drone warfare is even finding its way into the upcoming *Top Gun* sequel. These ISR capabilities are essential to this campaign and future ones. So, as you consider career options, know that ISR is a sure-fire way to get into the fight.

Due, in large part, to our unprecedented visibility of the battlefield, our coalition campaign is having a real impact. Every few days, we're taking out another key ISIL leader, hampering ISIL's ability to plan attacks or launch new offensives. We've removed Hajji Mutaaz, ISIL's number two; Hajji Iman, ISIL's finance chief; Abu Sayyaf, another top leader; and Junaid Hussain, a key online recruiter and plotter, among many others.

These strikes are also squeezing ISIL's finances, which flow from their control of vast oil resources, their extortion and taxation of local populations, and their looting and illicit sale of our cultural heritage. We've launched waves of strikes against ISIL's oil infrastructure. We've even taken out their cash storage site in Mosul. As the President has said, ISIL's money is quite literally going up in smoke. As we shrink the territory it controls, ISIL is feeling the pinch. Its oil revenues are down. And, ISIL fighters are making about half the salaries they did a year ago.

Meanwhile, we'll continue to support local forces in Iraq as they roll back ISIL. So far, they have retaken more than 40 percent of the populated territory that ISIL once held. Local forces have routed ISIL from Tikrit, from Ramadi, from Sinjar, and from Baiji. Iraqi forces are making progress in Hit. They have begun moving toward Mosul. As Iraqi forces advance, we will continue to support Iraqi authorities as they work to rebuild the devastated communities left behind, and to support an inclusive government that will invest in all of Iraq's people. This fight will continue to require the courage and perseverance of the Iraqi people. It will also require the sustained financial support of the international community. It is not enough to win this fight; we must also win the eventual peace.

In Syria, local forces—including forces backed by our Special Operators—recently recaptured the strategic town of Shaddadi. The operation took just six days, and it severed a vital link between Mosul and ISIL's stronghold in Raqqa. We continue laying the groundwork for Syrian forces to root ISIL out of Raqqa. And, we will keep up the pressure.

Since ISIL thrives on chaos and violence, the best way to destroy ISIL's core is to end the war in Syria. We know full well how challenging that will be. The conflict in Syria is not only a civil war between a ruthless regime and its opposition; it is also a sectarian proxy war between regional powers. Moreover, it is a catastrophic humanitarian crisis that has killed more than 270,000 and displaced 12 million. But as my friend and colleague, Secretary Kerry, likes to say, recalling the words of another friend and hero of mine, former Israeli President Shimon Peres: "There are no hopeless situations; only hopeless people."

Thanks to the tireless efforts of Secretary Kerry and an interagency team of diplomats, military and intelligence officers, working alongside Russia and other international partners, we helped facilitate a cessation of hostilities between the Assad regime and its backers, and the Syrian opposition. This cessation has largely held, but in recent days, we've seen a significant uptick in fighting. We're increasingly concerned that the regime's persistent violations of the cessation, and Al-Nusrah's hostile actions, will undermine efforts to quiet the conflict. Despite our very real differences, the United States now interacts almost daily with Russia—our co-chair in this process—to investigate and address violations, de-conflict our respective military efforts in Syria, and help build common ground among Syrians.

Assad may continue trying to disrupt and delay the good-faith efforts of the international community and the Syrian people to broker a political transition. But he cannot escape the reality that the only solution to this conflict—the only way this ends—is through a political process that brings all Syrians together under a transitional government, a new constitution, and credible elections that result in a new government without Assad. This is the vision enshrined in the UN's roadmap for Syrian peace. That is the vision that negotiators are working to facilitate. And, the United States will continue to do all we can to maximize the chances that this cessation holds, that humanitarian aid gets to those in need, and that we embark on a political transition that will lead to the end of this wrenching conflict.

Second, beyond ISIL's core, we'll continue to ramp up efforts with our partners to degrade ISIL's existing branches and prevent the emergence of new ones. Regardless of what happens in Syria and Iraq, ISIL will continue trying to carve out territory in fragile states and lawless regions. Already, they've declared eight branches, from Libya and West Africa to Yemen and the Caucasus. They've sent envoys to provide their affiliates with money, fighters—even media training. By aligning with ISIL, local fighters try to appropriate ISIL's brand and resources, while ISIL tries to expand its reach. These emerging ISIL branches destabilize countries and can provide safe havens for ISIL to retreat, even as we degrade its core. And, where ISIL does take hold, so do their most brutal tactics. Over the past year and a half, ISIL has attempted roughly 150 attacks outside of Syria and Iraq.

That's why, as the President has said, "we continue to go after ISIL wherever it tries to take root." In Libya, ISIL threatens not only North African stability, but Sub-Saharan Africa and Europe as well. Along with regional allies, we're working to combat ISIL in Libya and prevent it from expanding across Libya's borders. We've launched strikes,

including taking out ISIL's Libyan leader Abu Nabil and a training camp. But, just as importantly, we're helping to stand up the new Libyan Government of National Accord, so that Libyans can secure and stabilize their own country.

In Nigeria, today marks exactly two years since Boko Haram terrorists kidnapped more than 200 girls from a Chibok school. Since then, the girls have tragically not been freed, but Boko Haram has affiliated with ISIL in West Africa and become the group's deadliest branch. Building on our longstanding ties with Nigeria, we're working closely with President Buhari to degrade ISIL. We're sharing intelligence and training security forces. We're contributing to a multi-national joint task force that is cooperating to break the grip of Boko Haram across northeast Nigeria. To help secure Nigeria for the long term, we're supporting efforts to reduce violent extremism and reintegrate low-level fighters, while also working to strengthen the rule of law and boost the government's ability to provide essential services.

Meanwhile, in Afghanistan and Pakistan, ISIL has established a branch calling itself ISIL in the Khorasan—largely composed of former Afghan and Pakistani Taliban members. While ISIL Khorasan has had to contend with rival extremist groups—such as al Qaeda and the Afghan Taliban—they remain a dangerous and destabilizing force. They've gained territory in the east and launched attacks in major cities like Jalalabad, though a combination of U.S., Afghan, and Taliban pressure has limited ISIL's gains. As part of the U.S. counterterrorism mission in Afghanistan, President Obama has authorized the Department of Defense to target ISIL in the Khorasan. American forces removed a Khorasan deputy last year, and we have launched a series of strikes and joint operations, killing hundreds of militants and regaining ISIL-held territory. And, we're not going to let up.

In Yemen, ISIL affiliates have taken advantage of ongoing instability to attack mosques and nursing homes. In Saudi Arabia, ISIL has targeted security forces and civilians. To address these offshoots, we are deepening our security cooperation with countries in the region. When President Obama attends the U.S.-Gulf Cooperation Council Summit in Riyadh next week, ISIL will be at the top of our agenda.

We'll also continue to work closely with countries where ISIL aspires to grow, like Mali, Somalia, Bangladesh, Indonesia and the Philippines. With smart, sustained investments, we have a chance to prevent ISIL from taking root in these disparate corners by assisting our partners in ways as varied as improving local law enforcement, promoting development, and countering ISIL's nefarious narrative.

And, to be clear, even as we address ISIL's emerging branches, we haven't taken our eye off al Qaeda and its affiliates. Over the past 15 years, we have decimated al Qaeda's leadership in Afghanistan and Pakistan—and continue to pressure the remnants of their murderous organization. The group's beleaguered leader, Ayman al-Zawahiri, is in hiding and exercises little influence over remaining al Qaeda affiliates in Syria, Yemen, Africa, and South Asia. And, while these affiliates continue to pose threats, we are working with our partners relentlessly to target and diminish their capabilities.

In Somalia, we removed the leader of al-Shabaab, and we continue to support the African Union Mission. In the Sahel region of Africa, we're working with the French and local partners to destroy al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, which has launched a series of deadly attacks on regional capitals, even as the group faces strong pressure in Algeria and Mali. In South Asia, Pakistani forces are working to push al Qaeda out of Waziristan, while U.S. and Afghan forces target fighters who cross over into Afghanistan. In Yemen, conflict and chaos have created a vacuum filled by al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. We aim to degrade and ultimately defeat AQAP, and that effort includes a recent airstrike on a training camp whose fighters posed an imminent threat to Americans in the region. Whether the terrorists are al Qaeda or ISIL, our message, as the President has said, is clear: you cannot hide. You are next.

This brings me to the third element of our strategy against ISIL—dismantling its global network. The attacks in Paris highlighted the threat of ISIL fighters returning home—especially ones with Western passports. After the Paris attacks, we sent teams to Europe to strengthen our counterterrorism cooperation. These Foreign Fighter Surge Teams are assisting our European allies as they implement long-term structural reforms to improve intelligence-sharing and prevent future attacks. At the same time, the United States is enhancing our own aviation security and screening, and working with INTERPOL to share thousands of profiles of suspected fighters. Roughly 45 countries have established mechanisms to identify and flag terrorist travel to Iraq and Syria, and dozens of countries have arrested fighters or aspiring fighters. Together with our partners, we're slowing the flow of foreign terrorist fighters into and out of Iraq and Syria—including sealing almost all the border with Turkey. Still, since 2011, nearly 40,000 foreign fighters have traveled to Syria from more than 120 countries—including 6,900 who traveled from the West. We will continue to do everything in our power to prevent them from returning and launching attacks in our countries.

ISIL's web of terror is extremely well-funded. So, we are cracking down on ISIL's finances. Part of that, as I mentioned, is the airstrikes we've launched against their oil infrastructure and cash storage sites. But, along with our partners, we're degrading ISIL's financial infrastructure on a range of fronts. The UN Security Council has passed a resolution targeting ISIL's abuse of the international financial system. We've established a Counter-ISIL Finance Group—co-led by the United States, Italy, and Saudi Arabia—which is working to block ISIL's ability to raise and receive funds or use other countries' banks to store and rout their illicit earnings. And, the raid last year against Abu Sayyaf, ISIL's finance chief, yielded a wealth of information on ISIL's financial vulnerabilities—7 terabytes of flash drives, CDs, papers, and other data. That's more than we got out of the bin Laden raid. And, we're going to continue using that information and other tools to turn off the ISIL funding tap.

Ultimately, this is also a battle for hearts and minds. As President Obama has said, "Ideologies are not defeated with guns; they're defeated by better ideas." So, we're working hard to expose ISIL's twisted interpretation of Islam and underscore that ISIL is not defending Muslims; they are killing many innocent Muslims. Recognizing that the United States is not the best messenger, we're working with partners across the globe,

including in Saudi Arabia and Malaysia. The State Department's new Global Engagement Center is amplifying anti-ISIL voices internationally, from religious leaders to ISIL defectors. We've brought together government and private sector leaders from Silicon Valley, Hollywood, and Madison Avenue to explore innovative ways to counter ISIL's poisonous propaganda. And, week by week, these voices are eroding ISIL's appeal. A new poll shows that nearly 80 percent of young Muslims—from Saudi Arabia to Egypt to Tunisia—are now strongly opposed to ISIL.

To defeat ISIL's ideology for good, however, we must acknowledge the conditions that help draw people to ISIL's destructive message in the first place. Around the world, countries and communities—including the United States—must continue working to offer a better, more compelling vision. We must demonstrate, as President Obama has said, that the future belongs to those who build, not those who destroy. That includes promoting sustainable development and economic opportunities. It means letting people express themselves freely and participate in the political process. It means responsible governance and protecting the dignity and human rights of all people. Where ISIL offers horror, countries around the world must offer hope.

Fourth and finally, as we fight this battle on all fronts, we continue to do all we can to protect our homeland. We've hardened our defenses—strengthening borders, airports, ports, and other critical infrastructure. We're better prepared against potential bioterrorism and cyber attacks—thanks, in part, to Air Force leadership and capabilities. Our CVE Task Force is coordinating efforts across the U.S. government to counter violent extremism at home, including engaging with local communities from Boston to Minneapolis. The United States has the best counterterrorism, law enforcement, and intelligence professionals on the planet, devoted to connecting the dots to prevent attacks and take the fight to ISIL, every single day.

Our borders will remain strong. Our counterterrorism experts will remain hyper-vigilant. The enduring source of America's strength, however, comes from upholding our core values—the same enduring values embodied in each one of you at this Academy. It is when people feel persecuted or disempowered that extremism can take hold. So, our commitment to the dignity and equality of every human being must remain iron-clad. Especially in challenging times, we must continue to reaffirm those beliefs and strengthen protections for all our people—whether refugees, immigrants or native-born Americans. Our obligations, like our rights, apply equally to all Americans, no matter what they look like, where they came from, or how they worship. In the face of ISIL's barbarism, America must remain resilient and defiant in our freedom, our openness, and our incredible diversity.

This is our strategy, informed by hard-won experience, to put ISIL on the path to lasting defeat. Destroying ISIL's core. Degrading its branches. Dismantling ISIL's global network of terror. And, protecting the homeland, including our values and diversity. As we embrace this increasingly multi-faceted approach to fighting terrorism and destroying ISIL, we will continue applying all elements of our power to sustain this fight.

This long campaign won't end with a statue toppled or a flag raised. But make no mistake, we're in a real fight. And, through the strength of our partnerships and the power of our values, America is leading the way.

America is leading when a B-1 squadron spends four months over the city of Kobani, providing air support while Kurdish and Arab fighters battle ISIL below. You had ISR, refueling, and command and control assets all involved. You had air controllers working with the local forces who were calling in targets; the B-1 crews "going Winchester;" and the fighters on the ground confirming hits. That is how our local partners recaptured Kobani.

America is leading when three young Americans—including an Army Specialist and an Airman, Staff Sergeant Spencer Stone—spot the flash of an AK-47 on a train in France, spring into action, and thwart a deadly attack. Because that's the kind of vigilance and quick response that helps us secure our own homeland and support our partners and allies.

America is leading when we welcome refugees who enrich our nation. That includes the Syrian headed to Missouri who says, "America is the country of freedom and democracy—there are job opportunities, there is good education, and we are looking forward to having a good life."

That is the kind of leadership we need to fight not only the ISIL of today, but also the security challenges of tomorrow. It's the kind of leadership this Academy has instilled in each of you. General Eaker, the man for whom this lecture is named, once said that "there are no reluctant leaders. A real leader must really want the job." As we look to the challenges we face in the 21st century, the United States of America leads and still really wants the job. And, so, I know, do all of you. Thank you and God bless you.