

Statement on Syria

 defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/622610/statement-on-syria

Immediate Release

Oct. 9, 2015

Pentagon Press Secretary Peter Cook provided the following statement:

Last year the Department of Defense received authorization from Congress to train and equip moderate opposition forces in Syria as one of several lines of effort to fight the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). From the program's inception, we have reviewed our progress, acknowledged challenges, and worked to determine how we can improve our efforts in support of our partners on the ground.

Throughout this period, working with our coalition partners, we have also pursued other efforts to partner with and enable capable ground forces motivated to take back Syrian territory from ISIL. For example, we supported the counter-ISIL fighters in Kobane, allowing them to take back a key border crossing and press deeper into Syrian territory controlled by ISIL.

Building on that progress, Secretary of Defense Ash Carter is now directing the Department of Defense to provide equipment packages and weapons to a select group of vetted leaders and their units so that over time they can make a concerted push into territory still controlled by ISIL. We will monitor the progress these groups make and provide them with air support as they take the fight to ISIL. This focus on equipping and enabling will allow us to reinforce the progress already made in countering ISIL in Syria.

"I remain convinced that a lasting defeat of ISIL in Syria will depend in part on the success of local, motivated, and capable ground forces," Secretary Carter said. "I believe the changes we are instituting today will, over time, increase the combat power of counter-ISIL forces in Syria and ultimately help our campaign achieve a lasting defeat of ISIL."

We thank our coalition partners who have supported counter-ISIL efforts thus far, and we will continue to work with them on ways in which we can broaden and deepen our cooperation. We will continue to evaluate this program and expect to make refinements

and adjustments over time as appropriate. As we have said from the beginning, the fight against ISIL will take time. Working with local partners to win back territory taken by ISIL will continue to be a long and arduous process.