

BETTY McCOLLUM  
4TH DISTRICT, MINNESOTA

1714 LONGWORTH HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING  
WASHINGTON, DC 20515  
(202) 225-6631  
FAX: (202) 225-1968

165 WESTERN AVENUE NORTH  
SUITE 17  
ST. PAUL, MN 55102  
(651) 224-9191  
FAX: (651) 224-3056

[www.house.gov/mccollum](http://www.house.gov/mccollum)



UNITED STATES  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS  
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GLOBAL HEALTH CAUCUS,  
CO-FOUNDER  
CONGRESSIONAL  
NATIVE AMERICAN CAUCUS,  
CO-CHAIR

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Betty McCollum" with "MN 4th" written below it.

**McCollum Statement in Opposition to the McKeon Amendment to H. J. Res. 124  
September 17, 2014**

Mr. Speaker, yesterday, Defense Secretary Hagel stated, "We are at war with ISIL." He also said, "this will not be an easy or brief effort."

The current debate on the McKeon amendment does not address the "war with ISIL," but rather solely training, arming, and supporting Syrian fighters. The CIA is already training and arming Syrian fighters in Jordan, without congressional approval. How well has that worked? We are not discussing that as a body because this is a policy debate that has been rushed. The Republican majority in the House is determined to adjourn on Friday so their Members can return home and campaign for re-election.

Yes, Congress needs to pass a continuing resolution to keep the federal government funded and prevent another government shutdown before the start of the new federal fiscal year on October 1st. But, a "must pass" continuing resolution should not be the legislative vehicle for sanctioning the training of Syrian fighters in what is certainly to be a long war against the Islamic State's terrorist army.

Over and over during the debate on this amendment we have heard how ISIL is a threat to the United States, expanding its reach into Iraq and strengthening its hold in Syria, while committing brutal and widespread acts of extreme violence. All Members agree that ISIL has grown into a vicious terrorist army that must be stopped and destroyed. Yet, this chamber's response is to vote on the McKeon amendment to train and arm Syrian fighters, and then leave town for seven weeks?

I have heard over and over again Republican colleagues condemning ISIL and then going on to disparage President Obama efforts. Based on this rhetoric it appears that before this House can become fully engaged in authorizing a military campaign to defeat ISIL, campaigning against our President prior to Election Day comes first.

Yes, the mid-term election will take place on November 4<sup>th</sup> and many of us are on the ballot. But until then, we have an obligation to do our jobs which in this case is a matter

of committing to U.S. military operations in Iraq and Syria based on an authorization that is outdated and demands Congressional action.

I want President Obama to conduct airstrikes against ISIL – in Iraq and in Syria if need be. I want Iraqi forces trained and equipped so they are confident and competent to take the fight on the ground to remove ISIL from Iraq. I want a broad coalition of nations sharing intelligence, working to stop the flow of foreign recruits into Syria, and cutting off the financing of ISIL.

All of this should be done based on an updated authorization approved by this Congress for the use of military force against ISIL. I voted for the 2001 authorization following the attacks on September 11<sup>th</sup> and I opposed the 2002 authorization which took the U.S. into Iraq. But today more than half of the Member in this House were not in Congress for those votes. The war against ISIL is not the war against Saddam Hussein. This Congress has an obligation to define the scope, duration, and oversight of what will require a significant and long-term use of military force and resources.

With regard to the McKeon amendment, I have serious misgivings about training and arming some thousands of Syrian fighters with the belief that they will defeat ISIL while they are also intent on removing the Assad regime from power. The *New York Times* on September 11, 2014 (“U.S. Pins Hopes on Syrian Rebels With Loyalties All Over the Map”) said the plan to train Syrian rebels “leaves the United States dependent on a diverse group riven by infighting, with no shared leadership and with hard-line Islamists as its most effective fighters.” This description of the fighting force at the foundation of our anti-ISIL policy leaves me profoundly disturbed.

The Government of Germany is training and arming the Kurdish pesh merga forces in Iraq, but refused to train the Syrian forces. They are concerned that providing arms to the Syrian rebels could end up in the hands of ISIL. According to Germany’s ambassador to the United States, “We can’t control the final destination of these arms.”

Secretary Hagel is aware of this danger and assured Congress yesterday that, “We will monitor them (Syrian forces) closely to ensure that weapons do not fall into the hands of radical elements of the opposition, ISIL, the Syrian regime, or other extremist groups. There will always be risks in a program like this, but we believe the risks are justified.” While I respect Secretary Hagel immensely, I must disagree with him. The risks in this instance are significant and out weight the prospects of success.

The McKeon amendment’s concept of vetting focuses solely on ensuring that recruits are not known terrorists themselves. That is hardly a standard of conduct the U.S. should be proud of. No one should be naïve about this, there is no mention of human rights or international standards of conduct because these recruits will be sent back to a war in which they will likely be committing barbarous acts of violence. And how is this in the interest of U.S. national security?

Another issue that profoundly concerns me is the porous border between Syria and Turkey in which foreign fighters and recruits are allowed to pass freely. A *New York Times* report on September 15, 2014 in an article entitled, "ISIS Draws a Steady Stream of Recruits From Turkey", highlights this serious problem.

ISIL has grown into a force of between 20,000 and 30,000 fighters according to published CIA estimates and it appears their numbers will continue to grow, far outpacing the modest numbers to be trained by agreeing to this amendment. Unless Turkey, our NATO ally, shuts off the flow of fighters and commits to preventing the stream of new recruits from crossing into Syria, ISIL will only grow stronger in numbers.

Yesterday, in testimony before a Senate committee, General Martin Dempsey said that if airstrikes were not effective against ISIL he would recommend to the President the deployment of U.S. troops on the ground. Now, as the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Dempsey has an obligation to make recommendations that will allow U.S. policy goals to be achieved. In this case that means the destruction of ISIL.

We should all expect that there will be some U.S. boots on the ground in Iraq and quite possibly Syria. Special operations forces, military trainers, and spotters to direct air strikes may all be required to enter the battle field at great risk. They need our support to achieve their missions. But a full commitment of U.S. troops on the ground to directly engage ISIL is unacceptable. This fight needs to be won on the ground by Iraqis and the Arab allies who know the risk ISIL poses to the entire region.

There is no reason why Congress cannot work with the administration, military leaders, and intelligence experts over the coming weeks to develop and approve the necessary authorization for the use of military force to demonstrate to the American people that we are united in this fight against ISIL and there are clear limits to our engagement in Iraq and Syria.

I want our Commander-in-Chief to have Congress' full support for a strategy to destroy ISIL, but I will not write a blank check to any president. Unfortunately, this amendment and the decision by Republican leadership to prioritize campaigning for re-election rather than passing a clear authorization to take the fight to ISIL should give the American people great concern about the priorities of this Congress.

Right now millions of people in Iraq and Syria are living under the oppressive, violent rule of ISIL. It is in our national interest to join the fight to stop their reign of terror. But we need real, credible allies with military forces willing to take on the fight, the fight on the ground. This amendment does not require a commitment by any other allied nations, only desperate Syrians and U.S. taxpayers. That is not enough to earn my support.

I yield back my time.



EUROPE | NYT NOW

# ISIS Draws a Steady Stream of Recruits From Turkey

By CEYLAN YEGINSU SEPT. 15, 2014

ANKARA, Turkey — Having spent most of his youth as a drug addict in one of the poorest neighborhoods of Turkey’s capital, Can did not think he had much to lose when he was smuggled into Syria with 10 of his childhood friends to join the world’s most extreme jihadist group.

After 15 days at a training camp in the Syrian city of Raqqa, the de facto headquarters of the group, the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, the 27-year-old Can was assigned to a fighting unit. He said he shot two men and participated in a public execution. It was only after he buried a man alive that he was told he had become a full ISIS fighter.

“When you fight over there, it’s like being in a trance,” said Can, who asked to be referred to only by his middle name for fear of reprisal. “Everyone shouts, ‘God is the greatest,’ which gives you divine strength to kill the enemy without being fazed by blood or splattered guts,” he said.

Hundreds of foreign fighters, including some from Europe and the United States, have joined the ranks of ISIS in its self-proclaimed caliphate that sweeps over vast territories of Iraq and Syria. But one of the biggest source of recruits is neighboring Turkey, a NATO member with an undercurrent of Islamist discontent.

As many as 1,000 Turks have joined ISIS, according to Turkish news media reports and government officials here. Recruits cite the group’s ideological appeal to disaffected youths as well as the money it pays fighters from its flush coffers. The C.I.A. estimated last week that the group had from 20,000 to 31,500 fighters in Iraq and Syria.

The United States has put heavy pressure on Turkey's president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, to better police Turkey's 560-mile-long border with Syria. Washington wants Turkey to stanch the flow of foreign fighters and to stop ISIS from exporting the oil it produces on territory it holds in Syria and Iraq.

So far, Mr. Erdogan has resisted pleas to take aggressive steps against the group, citing the fate of 49 Turkish hostages ISIS has held since militants took over Iraq's second-largest city, Mosul, in June. Turkey declined to sign a communiqué last Thursday that committed a number of regional states to take "appropriate" new measures to counter ISIS, frustrating American officials.

For years, Turkey has striven to set an example of Islamic democracy in the Middle East through its "zero problems with neighbors" prescription, the guiding principle of Ahmet Davutoglu, who recently became Turkey's prime minister after serving for years as foreign minister. But miscalculations have left the country isolated and vulnerable in a region now plagued by war.

Turkey has been criticized at home and abroad for an open border policy in the early days of the Syrian uprising. Critics say that policy was crucial to the rise of ISIS. Turkey had bet that rebel forces would quickly topple the Syrian president, Bashar al-Assad, but as the war evolved, the extremists have benefited from the chaos.

Turkish fighters recruited by ISIS say they identify more with the extreme form of Islamic governance practiced by ISIS than with the rule of the Turkish governing party, which has its roots in a more moderate form of Islam.

Hacibayram, a ramshackle neighborhood in the heart of Ankara's tourist district, has morphed into an ISIS recruitment hub over the past year. Locals say up to 100 residents have gone to fight for the group in Syria.

"It began when a stranger with a long, coarse beard started showing up in the neighborhood," recalled Arif Akbas, the neighborhood's elected headman of 30 years, who oversees local affairs. "The next thing we knew, all the drug addicts started going to the mosque."

One of the first men to join ISIS from the neighborhood was Ozguzhan Gozlemcioglu, known to his ISIS counterparts as Muhammad Salef. In three years, he has risen to the status of a regional commander in Raqqa, and locals say he frequently travels in and out of Ankara, each time making sure to take back new recruits with him.

Mehmet Arabaci, a Hacibayram resident who assists with distributing government aid to the poor, said younger members of the local community found online pictures of Mr. Gozlemcioglu with weapons on the field and immediately took interest. Children have started to spend more time online since the municipality knocked down the only school in the area last year as part of an aggressive urban renewal project.

“There are now seven mosques in the vicinity, but not one school,” Mr. Arabaci said. “The lives of children here are so vacant that they find any excuse to be sucked into action.”

Playing in the rubble of a demolished building on a recent hot day here, two young boys staged a fight with toy guns.

When a young Syrian girl walked past them, they pounced on her, knocking her to the floor and pushing their toy rifles against her head. “I’m going to kill you, whore,” one of the boys shouted before launching into sound effects that imitated a machine gun.

The other boy quickly lost interest and walked away. “Toys are so boring,” he said. “I have real guns upstairs.”

The boy’s father, who owns a nearby market, said he fully supported ISIS’s vision for Islamic governance and hoped to send the boy and his other sons to Raqqa when they are older.

“The diluted form of Islam practiced in Turkey is an insult to the religion,” he said giving only his initials, T.C., to protect his identity. “In the Islamic State you lead a life of discipline as dictated by God, and then you are rewarded. Children there have parks and swimming pools. Here, my children play in the dirt.”

But when Can returned from Raqqa after three months with two of the original 10 friends he had left with, he was full of regret.

“ISIS is brutal,” he said. “They interpret the Quran for their own gains. God never ordered Muslims to kill Muslims.”

Still, he said many were drawn to the group for financial reasons, as it appealed to disadvantaged youth in less prosperous parts of Turkey. “When you fight, they offer \$150 a day. Then everything else is free,” he said. “Even the shopkeepers give you free products out of fear.”

ISIS recruitment in Hacibayram caught the news media’s attention in June when a local 14-year-old recruit came back to the neighborhood after he was

wounded in a shelling attack in Raqqa. The boy's father, Yusuf, said that the government had made no formal inquiry into the episode and that members of the local community had started to condemn what they saw as inaction by the authorities.

"There are clearly recruitment centers being set up in Ankara and elsewhere in Turkey, but the government doesn't seem to care," said Aaron Stein, a fellow at the Royal United Services Institute, a London-based think tank. "It seems their hatred for Bashar al-Assad and their overly nuanced view of what radical Islam is has led to a very short- and narrow-sighted policy that has serious implications."

The Interior Ministry and National Police Department did not respond to requests for comment.

On a recent afternoon in Ankara, Mr. Erdogan and Mr. Davutoglu came to pray at the historic Haci Bayram Veli Mosque, just over 100 yards away from an underground mosque used by a radical Salafi sect known to oversee ISIS recruits.

When news of their visit reached the neighborhood, several residents scurried down the steep hill hoping to catch an opportunity to raise the issue.

At the same time, a 10-year-old boy lingered in his family's shop, laughing at the crowd rushing to get a glimpse of the two leaders. He had just listened to a long lecture from his father celebrating ISIS' recent beheading of James Foley, an American journalist. "He was an agent and deserved to die," the man told his son, half-smirking through his thick beard.

To which the boy replied, "Journalists, infidels of this country; we'll kill them all."

A version of this article appears in print on September 16, 2014, on page A1 of the New York edition with the headline: From Turkey, ISIS Draws Steady Stream of Recruits.



MIDDLE EAST | NYT NOW

# U.S. Pins Hope on Syrian Rebels With Loyalties All Over the Map

By BEN HUBBARD, ERIC SCHMITT and MARK MAZZETTI SEPT. 11, 2014

BEIRUT, Lebanon — President Obama’s determination to train Syrian rebels to serve as ground troops against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria leaves the United States dependent on a diverse group riven by infighting, with no shared leadership and with hard-line Islamists as its most effective fighters.

After more than three years of civil war, there are hundreds of militias fighting President Bashar al-Assad — and one another. Among them, even the more secular forces have turned to Islamists for support and weapons over the years, and the remaining moderate rebels often fight alongside extremists like the Nusra Front, Al Qaeda’s affiliate in Syria.

“You are not going to find this neat, clean, secular rebel group that respects human rights and that is waiting and ready because they don’t exist,” said Aron Lund, a Syria analyst who edits the Syria in Crisis blog for the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. “It is a very dirty war and you have to deal with what is on offer.”

Analysts who track the rebel movement say that the concept of the Free Syrian Army as a unified force with an effective command structure is a myth.

Whatever force the United States can muster, it will face a jihadist army that has surged in size. Todd Ebitz, a spokesman for the Central Intelligence Agency, said Thursday that the agency now believes ISIS has between 20,000 and 31,500 fighters in Iraq and Syria, an increase from a previous assessment of more than 10,000 fighters.

“This new total reflects an increase in members because of stronger recruitment since June following battlefield successes and the declaration of a caliphate,” said Mr. Ebitz.

The Syrian rebels are a scattered archipelago of mostly local forces with ideologies that range from nationalist to jihadist. Their rank-and-file fighters are largely from the rural underclass, with few having clear political visions beyond a general interest in greater rights or the dream of an Islamic state.

Most have no effective links to the exile Syrian National Coalition, meaning they have no political body to represent their cause. And the coalition’s Supreme Military Council, which was intended to unite the moderate rebel forces, has all but collapsed.

“There’s a lot of skepticism about this piece of the president’s strategy,” said Representative Adam B. Schiff, Democrat of California, a member of the House Intelligence Committee. “The so-called moderate rebels have often been very immoderate and ineffective.”

Even as they line up to support Mr. Obama’s strategy against ISIS, some European allies remain skeptical about the efficacy of arming the Syrian rebels. Germany, for instance, has been arming and training Kurdish pesh merga forces in Iraq, but has resisted doing the same for any groups in Syria — partly out of fear that the weapons could end up in the hands of ISIS or other radical groups.

“We can’t really control the final destination of these arms,” said Peter Wittig, the German ambassador to the United States.

The approach — training and arming local fighters — has also not been effective in other arenas, whether Iraq, where the military melted away when ISIS attacked, or in Mali, where forces trained in counterterrorism switched sides to join Islamist fighters.

The Obama administration’s plans to arm Syrian rebels have been troubled by false starts since April 2013, when Mr. Obama first authorized the C.I.A. to begin a secret training mission in Jordan.

Months after the authorization, the White House still had not delivered details to Congress about the C.I.A.’s plans, and it was not until September 2013 that the first American-trained rebels returned to Syria from Jordan.

To date, the C.I.A. mission in Jordan has trained 2,000 to 3,000 Syrian rebels, according to American and Arab officials.

To expand the training, Mr. Obama announced a plan in June to spend up to \$500 million for scores of American Special Forces troops to train up to 3,000 rebels over the next year. But the proposal languished on Capitol Hill as lawmakers complained that the plans lacked specific details. A revised plan now calls for as many as twice that number of fighters, analysts said.

Even if Congress approves the Pentagon plan, as now appears likely after Mr. Obama's speech on Wednesday, military planners said it would be months before the fighters, to be trained at a base in Saudi Arabia, would be battle-ready.

Fatigue from three years of war has left most of those forces exhausted and short of resources. Since pushing ISIS from parts of northern Syria early this year, Syria's rebels have few military advances to point to and in many areas have lost ground, to Mr. Assad's forces and to ISIS. But in many places they remain busy fighting Mr. Assad and are not eager to redirect their energies to ISIS — even while many say they hate the group.

"The priority is the regime," Ziad Obeid, who heads a small rebel faction in Aleppo, said through Skype. "But it is ISIS that is preventing any progress on the ground, so we have to get rid of it, too."

Still, he added, he would not pull fighters from battles with the government to fight ISIS. "People on the fronts with the regime can't leave to fight ISIS," he said. "That won't work."

American involvement with the rebels so far has largely been through so-called operations rooms in Jordan and Turkey staffed by intelligence officials from the United States and other countries that have provided arms to limited numbers of vetted rebels. So far, the support provided has included light arms, ammunition and antitank missiles, which have helped the groups destroy government armor but have not resulted in major rebel advances or helped control the spread of ISIS.

"The United States can probably work with them to some extent, but they haven't been hugely effective so far, which is why the Islamic State is there in the first place," said Mr. Lund, the Syria analyst.

The support so far has been limited, leaving many rebels feeling that the aid is prolonging the war, not helping them win. And the fluidity of battlefield alliances in Syria means that even mainline rebels often end up fighting alongside the Nusra Front, whose suicide bombers are relied on by other groups to soften up government targets.

“Even the groups that the U.S. has trained tend to show up in the same trenches as the Nusra Front eventually, because they need them and they are fighting the same battles,” Mr. Lund said.

The operations rooms — known as the Military Operations Command — also have had their influence sapped by the spread of extremists.

Ahmed Naimeh, the top Syrian official in the operations room in Jordan, was captured by rebels during a visit to Syria this year, ironically while trying to unify local rebel groups. He has not been heard from since, and many suspect that the Nusra Front killed him.

An operations room in Turkey has provided support to a number of moderate groups in northern Syria, shifting the balance of power away from the Islamists, according to a report published this week by the International Crisis Group. But this, in addition to a decline in direct support from Persian Gulf states, has not strengthened the rebels, instead causing “a weakening of overall rebel capacity to halt regime gains in Aleppo and hold ISIS at bay to the east,” the report said.

Current and former American officials acknowledge the government’s lack of deep knowledge about the rebels. “We need to do everything we can to figure out who the non-ISIS opposition is,” said Ryan C. Crocker, a former United States ambassador to Iraq and Syria. “Frankly, we don’t have a clue.”

The operations rooms, which require beneficiaries to provide information on their members, may have helped identify fighters and groups that the United States will channel greater aid through in the future.

Some rebels appear ready to join the fight against ISIS. A video posted online this week showed Jamal Maarouf, a rebel commander in northern Syria, addressing a gathering of hundreds of fighters. “God willing, we will fight two states: the state of Bashar al-Assad, the unjust tyrant, and the state of Baghdadi, the aggressor tyrant,” he said, referring to the head of ISIS, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.

Ben Hubbard reported from Beirut, and Eric Schmitt and Mark Mazzetti from Washington. Anne Barnard contributed reporting from Beirut.

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