

Requirement: <7-Minute speech

Commander United States Central Command's address to the United Nations Office for Counter Terrorism / Government of Iraq High Level Conference on Repatriations from Syria

The Time to Act Is Now

Your Excellencies, and representatives of the international community,

- It is an honor to address this assembly on an issue demanding our **immediate attention**: the repatriation of nearly 29,000 displaced persons and 9,000 detainees from Syria.
- This is a difficult task, but I know that **collectively we can make a difference**.
- Earlier this month I visited al-Hol in person and saw first-hand the need to accelerate repatriations. There has been progress for sure – and I look forward to **supercharging this effort together with all of you**.
- Regarding ISIS today, from the military perspective, I can tell you that we have had **huge success**. Since 2014, 18 nations – *many of whom are represented in this room* – joined under Combined Joint Task Force – Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR) to halt ISIS's brutal caliphate.
- Military pressure continues against ISIS at Large, **but it does not resolve the threats posed by detainees or displaced persons** remaining in these camps.

Requirement: <7-Minute speech

- **ISIS remains significantly influential in displaced persons camps.**
- In the 2022 Hasakah prison break, ISIS succeeded in freeing hundreds of its fighters... and continues efforts to break out more. This is just one example of why **accelerating repatriations is both a strategic necessity and humanitarian imperative – this problem will only get worse with time.**
- At their peak in 2019, al-Hol and al-Roj housed over 73,000 people. Since 2021, over 40,000 displaced persons have been repatriated from Al Hol and Al Roj to their country of origin – **a huge feat.**
- I am grateful to the U.S. Department of State for their leadership in this effort and I laud the efforts of the Government of Iraq for **leading the repatriation effort by example.**
- However, nearly half of those remaining are foreign nationals, and 57% are children. As time goes on, these camps are **incubators for radicalization.**
- Repatriating vulnerable populations before they are radicalized is not just compassion—it is a **decisive blow against ISIS's ability to regenerate.**

Requirement: <7-Minute speech

- Repatriation of detainees is equally urgent. The 9,000 fighters in custody represent a **latent threat** to our homelands.
- Since 2018, more than 70 repatriation missions have returned 1,500 fighters and many hundreds of displaced persons to their home countries.
- Yet, much work remains to be done.
- So today, I join you all in calling on every nation with detained or displaced persons in Syria to **return your citizens**.
- Finally, I am excited to announce that **U.S. Central Command is establishing a special Joint Repatriation Cell in Northeast Syria. The purpose of this Joint cell will be to coordinate the return of displaced or detained persons to their home countries.**
- I implore you to connect with us so we can together directly address the emerging ISIS problem while there is still time. **Inaction is not an option.** Every day without repatriation compounds the risk to all of us.
- Distinguished delegates, **the challenge is immense but surmountable.** This is about justice, security, and humanity. The longer people remain in camps, the greater the danger.

Requirement: <7-Minute speech

- Beginning today, let us **redouble our efforts** to safeguard the vulnerable and deny ISIS the opportunity to rise again.
- The United States will continue supporting the coalition and all nations committed to bringing their citizens home.
- Together, we can **ensure the defeat of terror endures** as a legacy of peace and stability.

Thank you.