AUTHENTICATED
U.S. GOVERNMENT
INFORMATION
GPO

COUNTERING THE VIRTUAL CALIPHATE

HEARING

BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED FOURTEENTH CONGRESS

SECOND SESSION

JUNE 23, 2016

Serial No. 114–192

Printed for the use of the Committee on Foreign Affairs

Available via the World Wide Web: http://www.foreignaffairs.house.gov/ or http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/

U.S. GOVERNMENT PUBLISHING OFFICE

20–531PDF WASHINGTON : 2016

For sale by the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Publishing Office
Internet: bookstore.gpo.gov Phone: toll free (866) 512–1800; DC area (202) 512–1800
Fax: (202) 512–2104 Mail: Stop IDCC, Washington, DC 20402–0001

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

EDWARD R. ROYCE, California, *Chairman*

CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH, New Jersey
ILEANA ROS-LEHTINEN, Florida
DANA ROHRABACHER, California
STEVE CHABOT, Ohio
JOE WILSON, South Carolina
MICHAEL T. MCCAUL, Texas
TED POE, Texas
MATT SALMON, Arizona
DARRELL E. ISSA, California
TOM MARINO, Pennsylvania
JEFF DUNCAN, South Carolina
MO BROOKS, Alabama
PAUL COOK, California
RANDY K. WEBER SR., Texas
SCOTT PERRY, Pennsylvania
RON DESANTIS, Florida
MARK MEADOWS, North Carolina
TED S. YOHO, Florida
CURT CLAWSON, Florida
SCOTT DESJARLAIS, Tennessee
REID J. RIBBLE, Wisconsin
DAVID A. TROTT, Michigan
LEE M. ZELDIN, New York
DANIEL DONOVAN, New York

ELIOT L. ENGEL, New York
BRAD SHERMAN, California
GREGORY W. MEEKS, New York
ALBIO SIRES, New Jersey
GERALD E. CONNOLLY, Virginia
THEODORE E. DEUTCH, Florida
BRIAN HIGGINS, New York
KAREN BASS, California
WILLIAM KEATING, Massachusetts
DAVID CICILLINE, Rhode Island
ALAN GRAYSON, Florida
AMI BERA, California
ALAN S. LOWENTHAL, California
GRACE MENG, New York
LOIS FRANKEL, Florida
TULSI GABBARD, Hawaii
JOAQUIN CASTRO, Texas
ROBIN L. KELLY, Illinois
BRENDAN F. BOYLE, Pennsylvania

AMY PORTER, *Chief of Staff* THOMAS SHEEHY, *Staff Director*
JASON STEINBAUM, *Democratic Staff Director*

CONTENTS

Page

WITNESSES

Mr. Seamus Hughes, deputy director, Program on Extremism, Center for Cyber and Homeland Security, George Washington University 5
Aaron Lobel, Ph.D., founder and president, America Abroad Media 13
Peter Neumann, Ph.D., director, International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation, Department of War Studies, King's College London 26

LETTERS, STATEMENTS, ETC., SUBMITTED FOR THE HEARING

Mr. Seamus Hughes: Prepared statement 7
Aaron Lobel, Ph.D.: Prepared statement 16
Peter Neumann, Ph.D.: Prepared statement 28

APPENDIX

Hearing notice 42
Hearing minutes 43
The Honorable Eliot L. Engel, a Representative in Congress from the State of New York: Prepared statement 45

COUNTERING THE VIRTUAL CALIPHATE

THURSDAY, JUNE 23, 2016

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
Washington, DC.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10 o'clock a.m., in room 2172 Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Edward Royce (chairman of the committee) presiding.

Chairman ROYCE. This hearing will come to order and the subject here is combating what we call the virtual caliphate on the Internet.

Unfortunately, there is an irony in the effort to combat ISIS recruitment online and that is that the United States, which is the world's leader in technological innovation, is hardly in the game.

To protect Americans at home and abroad, this has to change. So great has been the explosion of slick and professional ISIS videos online that, as I indicated, a lot of people are referring to this as the virtual caliphate. Because within seconds, ISIS can reach a global audience using popular social media sites, disseminating hateful propaganda to recruit new fighters and promote its extreme ideology.

And more and more, the virtual caliphate is calling on its followers not necessarily to go to Syria or Iraq or Libya now but to take up arms and attack where they are at home.

"The smallest action you do"—in their words—"the smallest action you do in their homeland is better and more enduring to us than what you would if you were with us." That is the refrain. That is the message being pounded into would-be jihadists and it is a message that is being pounded into many Americans and we know that terrorists consumed Islamist propaganda over the Internet. The attacks in Brussels, San Bernardino, Orlando, Paris, those are tied to ISIS' online efforts based on the sites visited by those undertaking these terrorist attacks.

Indeed, ISIS' online dominance is just as critical to that organization as the large amounts of territory that it controls in Iraq or Syria or Libya or other training bases that they have set up.

Unfortunately, the pace of our "cyber bombs," as we sometimes call them—the counter battery work that we do, that we are dropping on ISIS' virtual sanctuary to take out these Web sites—is like our campaign on its physical territory. It is slow and it is inadequate to this task.

The State Department's efforts to respond to extremist content online are woefully inadequate. Its Center for Strategic Counter

Terrorism Communications was designed to identify and respond to extremist content online. Yet because its communications were "branded" with the official State Department's seal, they fell on deaf ears. It is not effective to use the State Department seal when you are doing a counterterrorism narrative.

In March, the President issued an Executive order to revamp this effort, renaming it the Global Engagement Center and giving it the mission to lead the government-wide effort to "diminish the influence of international terrorist organizations," as we said. The committee will soon hear from the administration how this effort differs from past failures.

But unfortunately, in public diplomacy as we know—and this is pretty widely the view—our public diplomacy efforts on electronic media, on social media have really been pretty much a bust—dysfunctional in the analysis of former State Department personnel who have taken a good long look at this.

At a basic level, key questions remain, including the type of message that would be most effective in the face of this virulent ideology. Some suggest that the voices of disaffected former jihadists are particularly potent in deterring future jihadists. These are individuals who quickly discovered that life under ISIS is not the utopia they were promised. Or the voices of former radicals—Ed Husain with his book "The Jihadist." I read that lively account and it is clear that it is having quite an impact with young people, creating a lot of second thoughts about where this ideology is leading.

But if this is the message, how should it be delivered? Should the Federal Government produce and disseminate content? Is the Federal bureaucracy equipped for such a fast-moving fight? Does any association with the State Department mean this message is dead on arrival, as we found with the, you know, State Department indicia or the State Department title put out there as part of the narrative?

A more effective approach could have the U.S. Government issuing grants to outside groups to carry out this mission. This would have the advantage of allowing the U.S. Government to set the policy, but put those with the technical expertise and credible voice in the driver's seat here in delivering the message. After all, such separation and distance from the U.S. Government have helped our democracy promotion programs through the National Endowment for Democracy work in areas of the globe where official U.S. support just isn't feasible.

We also want to make use of emerging technologies that can automatically detect and remove extremist content online. I am aware that the private sector is working quickly to develop these types of programs, and admittedly, all this isn't easy. If it was, we'd be much better positioned going forward. But if we don't come to grips with the virtual caliphate now, this long struggle against Islamist terrorism will extend even longer, with great loss of life.

So I now turn to our ranking member, Mr. Brad Sherman from California, for any statement he may have.

Mr. SHERMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. There are events going on the floor yesterday and today. It is not the House at a high point of bipartisanship and order, and we can argue about who's to blame.

But when we come into this room, Mr. Chairman, we do see a high point of bipartisanship and order and the credit, clearly, goes to you and the ranking member. The ranking member cannot be here, at least at the beginning of this hearing, and I have an improvised opening statement. I had nothing prepared walking in so let us see whether any of these comments are helpful.

First in this issue we face the issue of whether to take down the terrorist message or leave it up and monitor, and I want to say almost always take it down.

First, the theory of fast and furious, let them take the guns and we will monitor what happens with the guns did not work then and the idea of let them leave the dangerous site up and let us monitor what happens may not work in the future.

But in addition, the terrorists know we are watching and they have decided—and they have been pretty good at this—that putting their message up publically is helpful notwithstanding the fact that we are monitoring it.

We ought to take it down. That means we need the coordination and cooperation of the industry. It was just about a year ago that Chairman Royce, Ranking Member Eliot Engel, Ted Poe, and I called upon Twitter to update its terms of service and take the terrorist message off Twitter.

Twitter was reluctant a bit at first but in April 2015 Twitter announced changes to their terms of service, added a new language to its stance on abusive behavior and adding the words "threatening or promoting terrorism" and they have substantially improved.

I should note that since Twitter changed its policies the terrorists have been forced onto other systems. Their tactic now involves direct messaging. I view that as a step forward. We closed off an efficient way to reach many people and now they have to try to use a less efficient system. But we now have to stop these direct messages.

We also have to focus on their encrypted chat apps—Telegram, Surespot, Theema—which seemed to have been created precisely for the market of people who want to evade law enforcement and I wonder why such products exist.

Next issue, and one that I have talked in this room an awful lot about, is the need to have people who know the language of the people we are trying to influence and I don't just mean studied Arabic in college. I mean a cultural understanding and an understanding of Islamic theology, Islamic jurisprudence, and Islamic history. Again and again the State Department has testified in this room that they don't have anybody who they have hired specifically because that person has the expertise in those areas whereas they have dozens of experts in arcane European diplomatic law as if the Austro-Hungarian Empire is the greatest concern of American foreign policy.

I am not saying that we should be issuing fatwas out of the State Department but we ought to have somebody who has read 1,000 fatwas working in the State Department and someone who knows the difference between what is accepted as a good hadith and what is not.

And the reason for this as our target audience is people who think they might want to kill innocent women and children. These are people who start from a very bizarre mindset. They are thinking of becoming terrorists.

They don't necessarily see the world the way we do translated into Arabic or translated into another language. These are people for whom evil consists—the word evil may not include killing a Yazidi family or torturing people or throwing gay people off of tall buildings.

They may live in a world where they think the Koran says that is what you're supposed to do. We have to have people that can go into that world. Not just the cyber world but the psychological world, and demonstrate to them that this is a perversion of Islam that has been focused by the terrorists.

For staffing, we need to look at whether it should be uniform military or civilian or some new status that is in between. And finally, Mr. Chairman, what happens over there comes over here. What happens in Raqqa doesn't stay in Raqqa.

An important part of turning back the cyberterrorist threat is to deal with ISIS on the ground and that will require changing and the administration is beginning to change the rules of engagement so that we can hit strategic targets, doing our best to avoid civilian casualties but not with the view that a single civilian casualty—the possibility of one stops any particular attack.

The ranking member has a statement prepared for delivery and I request that we make it part of the record.

Chairman ROYCE. Without objection.

Mr. SHERMAN. I yield back.

Chairman ROYCE. Thank you very much.

This morning we are pleased to be joined by a distinguished panel. We have Mr. Seamus Hughes. He is the deputy director of the George Washington University Program on Extremism. Mr. Hughes previously served at the National Counter Terrorism Center.

We have Dr. Aaron Lobel. He is the founder of America Abroad Media, a nonprofit dedicated to promoting the exchange of ideas to critical thinking and to self-government worldwide. Prior to founding this organization, Dr. Lobel was a research fellow and professor at multiple institutions.

Dr. Peter Neumann is professor of security studies at the Department of War Studies at Kings College London. He served as director of the International Centre for the Study of Radicalization since its founding in early 2008.

So without objection, the witnesses' full prepared statements will be made part of the record and members will have 5 calendar days to submit statements and questions and any extraneous material for the record.

Mr. Hughes, we will start with you. If you could please summarize your remarks in 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF MR. SEAMUS HUGHES, DEPUTY DIRECTOR, PROGRAM ON EXTREMISM, CENTER FOR CYBER AND HOMELAND SECURITY, GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

Mr. HUGHES. Thank you. Chairman Royce, Ranking Member Sherman, distinguished members of the committee, it is a privilege to be invited to speak here today.

There are at least 900 active ISIS investigations in all 50 States. An estimated 250 Americans have attempted to or have travelled to Syria and Iraq to join groups like ISIS. The program in extremism has identified 91 people who have been charged with ISIS-related offenses in the last 2 years.

Homegrown terrorism is an apt description, as the overwhelming majority of these individuals are U.S. citizens born and raised here. There is no typical profile of an ISIS recruit. They are old. They are young. They are rich. They are poor. College educated and they are high school dropouts.

The United States, with its notable exceptions, does not have extremist organizations providing in-person ideological and logistical support to individuals drawn to the jihadi narrative.

As a result, American ISIS sympathizers are forced to find like-minded communities online. ISIS sympathizers use the online environment in a variety of ways.

First, of course, they use it to push the propaganda. Second, ISIS recruiters act as spotters to identify and groom would-be recruits. Third, they provide logistical support for would-be recruits. Finally, they encourage Americans to commit attacks here in the homeland.

ISIS supporters are very active and persistent online. Despite repeated removal from social media sites for violating terms of service, sympathizers routinely return to these platforms with new accounts.

A prime example of that is a recently arrested American woman who operated at least 97 Twitter accounts before her arrest.

There is a well-used but decentralized system that provides a level of resiliency to these online social networks. Using Twitter as an example, there is an ISIS shout-out account that announces newly created accounts of previously suspended accounts, allowing a person to essentially build back their network online.

However, it is important to note that ISIS network on Twitter has declined substantially since 2014 as a result of sustained suspensions. An overt English language ISIS-support network is nearly gone from Facebook but they still use it occasionally to mount campaigns and for person-to-person communications.

The English language ISIS echo chamber is now mostly concentrated on Telegram where they can more easily congregate. ISIS radicalization is by no means limited to social media. In-person relationships still matter a great deal.

It is an over simplification to say that Internet radicalization is the main factor driving American ISIS supporters. Rather, in most cases online and offline dynamics complement one another.

In 1998, Osama bin Laden faxed his declaration of war to the West. It would rightly be seen as naive to contend that fax machine radicalization was a key driver for al-Qaeda's early recruitment.

A similar dynamic plays out 18 years later. The State Department and USAID have released a countering violent extremism

strategy. The State Department has also expanded the mission of the Bureau of Counter Terrorism to now include proactive CVE programs.

While a step in the right direction, time will tell whether this new focus on preventative programming will result in a tangible shift in resources and personnel.

Recently, the State Department also reorganized to address the changing nature of ISIS vis-a-vis the Internet. The newly-formed Global Engagement Center—the GEC—represents a recognition that previous efforts needed to be adjusted. However, the bureaucratic and structural issues that hampered and plagued GEC's predecessor are still present. The GEC may be limited in its online engagement by legal restrictions on collecting personal information. Working with civil rights and civil liberties groups, the committee should consider legislative fixes that allow the GEC some limited exemptions from the Privacy Act requirements.

There is also a noticeable push to empower local partners to provide counter messaging. In conversations with these partners, many have expressed a concern that engaging with known or suspected terrorists online may unduly place them under law enforcement suspicion.

The administration should consider providing the legal guidance to potential counter messengers, religious leaders around the country so they can make informed decisions on whether and how to engage online.

And technology companies have in the past been pushed by Congress and the public to expand and enforce their terms of service. That is right.

But the U.S. Government should use its convening authority to bring together civil society partners who want to perform counter messaging but don't understand the technology with social media providers who understand their platform but don't understand the nuances of counter messaging.

Thank you for an opportunity to testify. I welcome your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Hughes follows:]

Program on Extremism

THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

Countering the Virtual Caliphate

Written testimony of:

Seamus Hughes
Deputy Director, Program on Extremism
Center for Cyber and Homeland Security
The George Washington University

Before the U.S. House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee

June 23, 2016

Chairman Royce, Ranking Member Engel and distinguished Members of the Committee, it is a privilege to be invited to speak on countering ISIS' use of the online environment.

Overview of Threat in U.S.

FBI Director Comey stated that there are at least 900 active investigations into homegrown violent extremism across all 50 states.[1] Intelligence officials have also estimated that upwards of 250 Americans have traveled or attempted to travel to Syria and Iraq to join groups like ISIS.[2] The Program on Extremism at the George Washington University has identified 90 people who have been charged with ISIS-related offenses in the United States.[3] "Homegrown terrorism" is an apt description, as the overwhelming majority of these individuals are U.S. citizens born and raised in the homeland. That being said, there is no typical profile of an ISIS recruit. While, among those charged, the average age of an American recruit is 26, one was as young as 15 and another was as old as 47. The majority are male, but 11 women have been charged with ISIS-related offenses.

The United States, for a variety of reasons and with some notable exceptions, does not have extremist organizations providing in-person ideological and logistical support to individuals drawn to the jihadi narrative. This is in contrast to some European countries where Salafi-jihadi groups can provide ideological underpinnings and, in some select cases, help facilitate travel to Syria and Iraq. As a result, many American ISIS sympathizers are forced to find like-minded communities online. U.S. authorities estimate that several thousand Americans consume ISIS propaganda online creating what has been described as a "radicalization echo chamber."[4] American ISIS sympathizers are active on a variety of platforms, from open forums like Facebook, Twitter, Google+, and Tumblr, to more discrete messaging applications such as Kik, Telegram, and surespot.

American ISIS sympathizers can ask questions about travel, religion, and current events. American ISIS supporters online broadly divide into two sets: those who locate themselves in Syria and Iraq and those still in America but aspiring to assist ISIS in a number of ways. Those in the former group often maintain their network of friends in the U.S. after arriving in ISIS territory. They post near real-time updates of ISIS-led attacks and life in the Caliphate, encouraging their fellow Americans to make the trek and, at times, scolding their offline and online friends for their lack of commitment to the cause.

ISIS sympathizers use the online environment in a variety of ways. First, of course they use the internet to spread their propaganda. Second, in some cases, ISIS recruiters act as spotters to identify and groom impressable, and often young, men and women into supporting the group. Numerous media reports such as the *New York Times* story of 'Alex' have explained this

---

[1] Kevin Johnson, "Comey: Feds have Roughly 900 Domestic Probes About Islamic State Operatives, Other Extremists." *USA Today*, October 3, 2015.
[2] Testimony of James B. Comey, Director of Federal Bureau of Investigation, Statement Before the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs. October 8, 2015.
[3] Program on Extremism, "May Update," June 2, 2016.
[4] Pierre Thomas, Mike Levine, Jack Date, and Jack Cloherty, "ISIS: Potentially 'Thousands' of Online Followers Inside US Homeland, FBI Chief Warns," *ABC News*, May 7, 2015.

approach. The young woman from Washington State was, over the course of months, slowly groomed into supporting ISIS.

Third, they provide logistical support for would-be recruits. In the case of Illinois-based Mohammad Khan and his two siblings, ISIS supporters they met online offered guidance on what to pack for their journey to the so-called Caliphate and provided phone numbers belonging to local facilitators who could assist them in crossing the border from Turkey to Syria.

Fourth, ISIS recruiters act as what the FBI Director has termed the "devil on the shoulder," encouraging American ISIS supporters to commit attacks in the homeland. Perhaps the starkest example of this dynamic is the online encouragement provided to Americans Elton Simpson and Nadir Soofi prior to their attempted attack on the "Muhammad Art Exhibit and Cartoon Contest" in Garland, Texas.

While social media allows ISIS to push its message to a larger audience, the use of these platforms alone does not fully explain the group's powerful draw. Another component driving the unprecedented number of U.S.-persons charged with terrorism-related offenses in the last two years is ISIS' narrative. The group's message of territorial control and the declaration of the so-called Caliphate, among other reasons, has clearly resonated with individuals within our borders.

Resiliency

ISIS supporters are very active and persistent online. Despite repeated removal from social media sites for violating terms of service, sympathizers routinely return to these platforms with new accounts, much like Yassin. A prime example of this is Safya Yassin, a 38-year-old from Missouri who, until her recent arrest, was allegedly a key player among English-language ISIS supporters online. She allegedly operated as many as 97 Twitter accounts.[5]

There is a well-used but decentralized system that provides a level of resiliency to these online social networks. Using Twitter as an example, ISIS "shoutout" accounts announce the newly created accounts of previously suspended users, to a degree allowing returning users to reconnect with their social networks. Another example of this dynamic is illustrated by the case of Terrence McNeil, a young man from Ohio who was charged with solicitation to commit a crime of violence.[6] When the Program on Extremism began passively monitoring his account, his Twitter handle was 'Lone14Wolfe.' Each time he was suspended from Twitter for violating the terms of service, he would return as Lonewolfe15, 16, 17, and so on. When he came back online, ISIS shoutout accounts announced his new account which provided two primary benefits: (1) verification from accounts of trusted ISIS sympathizers; and (2) the ability to regain some of his previous followers. By the time he was arrested, Mr. McNeil was 'lonewolfe_21.' We have seen this dynamic play out time and time again.

---

[5] *United States of America vs. Safya Roe Yassin*, Affidavit (February 17, 2016), 9.
[6] *United States of America vs. Terrence Joseph McNeil*, Criminal Complaint and Affidavit (February 24, 2015).

However, it is important to note that the ISIS Twitter network has declined substantially Twitter since 2014 as a result of sustained suspensions.[7] An overt English-language ISIS support network is nearly gone from Facebook, but they occasionally mount campaigns and use it for person-to-person communication.

At the same time, we have observed ISIS supporters spreading to other more permissive online environments while continuing to use mainstream sites with a larger audience that more forcefully enforce terms of service violations. The English-language ISIS echo chamber is now mostly concentrated to Telegram, where ISIS supporters can more easily congregate.

Accelerant, Not Necessarily the Starter

ISIS-related radicalization is by no means limited to social media. While instances of purely web-driven, individual radicalization are numerous, in several cases U.S.-based individuals initially cultivated, and later strengthened, their interest in ISIS' narrative through face-to-face relationships. It is an over-simplification to say that "internet radicalization" is the main factor among American ISIS supporters. Of course, the online environment allows for greater interactivity between would-be recruits, but in many ways the online personas ISIS supporters assume is simply a reflection of their offline beliefs. Rather, in most cases online and offline dynamics complement one another. In 1998, Osama Bin Laden faxed his declaration of war on the West. It would rightly be seen as naïve to contend that fax machine radicalization was a key driver of al-Qaeda's early recruitment. A similar dynamic continues to play out 18 year later. In-person relationships still matter a great deal. A review of the 90 legal cases in the U.S. shows that, with some exceptions, friends, families, and even romantic partners played a role in the radicalization process.

Individuals do not radicalize in a vacuum. The online environment can help solidify their beliefs and provide support that was unimaginable just a few years ago, but it is not the single cause of, nor the single solution to, terrorist recruitment.

Policy Recommendations

The U.S. State Department and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) have taken an important step with the release of a first-of-its-kind countering violent extremism (CVE) strategy.[8] The strategy outlines five objectives: expanding international partnerships, encouraging partner governments to adopt CVE policies, employing foreign assistance tools, empowering and amplifying local credible voices, and strengthening the capabilities of government and non-government actors to rehabilitate and reintegrate radicalized individuals. The State Department has also expanded the mission of its Bureau on

---

[7] J.M. Berger and Jonathon Morgan, "The ISIS Twitter Census: Defining and Describing the Population of ISIS Supporters on Twitter," *The Brookings Institution Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World*, March 2015; J.M. Berger and Heather Perez, "The Islamic State's Diminishing Returns on Twitter: How Suspensions are Limiting the Social Networks of English-Speaking ISIS Supporters," *Program on Extremism*, February 2016.
[8] United States Department of State and United States Agency for International Development, "Department of State and USAID Joint Statement on Countering Violent Extremism." May 2016.

Counterterrorism to now include proactive CVE efforts.[9] While a step in the right direction, time will tell whether this new focus on preventive programming will result in a tangible shift in resources and personnel.

Recently, the State Department has also reorganized to address the changing nature of ISIS' use of the Internet. The newly formed the Global Engagement Center (GEC) represents a recognition that previous efforts needed to be adjusted. However, the bureaucratic and structural issues that hampered the GEC's predecessor are, to a very real extent, still present. The Committee should consider a number of policy and legislative options to assist the U.S. Government in focusing its efforts.

The Committee should encourage the Administration to take a more targeted and interactive approach to counter- and alternative-messaging. It is difficult to measure the effectiveness of broad-based messaging. Further, the small number of users attracted to jihadi ideology relative to the total number of Internet users suggests that a broad-based approach may not reach its intended audience. Greater interaction between State Department employees and ISIS supporters would likely yield better results. This is not to say that a State Department tweet will dissuade a hardened supporter, but the goal of online engagement should be to introduce seeds of doubt so that in-person interventions can be more successful. Additionally, there are some operational benefits to the State Department muddling the online efforts of ISIS supporters via counter-messaging.

There are many barriers to this approach. As demonstrated in reactions to the State Department's "Think Again Turn Away" campaign, there is little appetite for the trial and error necessary for effective counter-messaging. Successful counter-messaging campaigns need the political capital to operate with flexibility. Messengers can and should adjust based on feedback, but they need to be given the latitude to make mistakes and to learn from said mistakes without fear of professional reprisal.

In order to perform targeted messaging, the GEC may be limited in its online engagement by legal restrictions on collecting personal information. Working with civil rights and civil liberties groups, this Committee should consider legislative fixes that allow the GEC some limited exemptions from Privacy Act requirements.

There has been a noticeable push to empower local partners to provide counter- and alternative-messaging. In conversations with civil society partners, many have expressed concern that engaging with known or suspected terrorists online may unduly place them under law enforcement suspicion. The Administration should consider providing legal guidance on the material support statute and recommend best practices so potential counter-messengers can make informed decisions on whether and how to engage.

ISIS supporters are true believers who see it as their mission to amplify the group's narrative. Any attempt to "counter the virtual caliphate" will have to accept that the opposing side has a passion to push out their message. Encouraging that level of fervor in anti-ISIS messaging will

[9] Justin Siberell, Acting Coordinator for Counterterrorism, United States Department of State, Remarks at the Program on Extremism at George Washington University, May 25, 2016.

require collaboration between actors from government, civil society, and technology companies as well as increased resources (whether from the government or private entities).

Technology companies have in the past been pushed by Congress and the public to expand and enforce their terms of service. But technology companies are much more comfortable with providing training and expertise on how to use their platforms for counter- and alternative-messaging and much less comfortable when it comes to removal of content. The U.S. government should seize this window of opportunity. It should use its convening authority to bring together civil society partners who want to perform counter-messaging but do not understand the technology, and social media companies that know their platforms but do not understand the nuances of counter-messaging.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you. I welcome your questions.

Chairman ROYCE. Thank you, Mr. Hughes.
Dr. Lobel.

STATEMENT OF AARON LOBEL, PH.D., FOUNDER AND PRESIDENT, AMERICA ABROAD MEDIA

Mr. LOBEL. Thank you, Chairman Royce, Ranking Member Sherman and distinguished members of the committee for inviting me to testify today, and thank you for your leadership and the example of bipartisanship you set on this committee.

It is so critical because in the long run America will only be successful in countering the ideology of Islamic extremism if our policies have bipartisan support.

As the founder of America Abroad Media, I have spent almost a decade and a half developing partnerships with major media channels in the greater Middle East. Based on my experience, I would like to summarize my written testimony and underscore two main points today.

First, the focus of U.S. strategy should be on enabling, supporting, and amplifying the indigenous voices for progress in the greater Middle East. This approach will yield far better results than trying to manage a counter messaging campaign from Washington.

Second, the best way for the U.S. Government to support those in the Middle East who share a vision for positive change is by mobilizing the creative power of America's leading institutions—Hollywood, Silicon Valley, our philanthropy, our NGOs, and our universities—so they can collaborate directly with their counterparts in the region.

From my own experience, I can tell you there are many people in the Middle East today pushing for greater progress and pluralism and there is a critical mass of them in the media.

The most popular TV channels in the region reach tens of millions of people and have the highest credibility with their audience. Several of these channels are producing programs that seek to promote the values of pluralism and counter extremist narratives.

For example, one of our partners is the largest Pan-Arab channel—the largest—the Saudi-owned Middle East Broadcasting Center (MBC). It is currently developing a large scale, 20-plus episode, anti-ISIS drama series based on real stories of young men and women who left their homes to join ISIS only to discover the reality behind their propaganda.

Last year, MBC aired a hit anti-ISIS comedy called "Selfie" which used the power of satire to expose ISIS hypocrisy. It was the number-one Ramadan show in the Gulf and had an audience exceeding 25 million.

Simply put, no U.S. Government channel or program in the Middle East, no matter how well intentioned or well produced, can come close to delivering this kind of reach or impact.

Young people in the Arab world today watch all the Hollywood movies and Turkish soap operas. But what they really want are more of these MBC-style shows, original Arabic language drama and comedy that reflects their own cultural storylines and meets the highest international standards.

And the creative community there have told me directly they want Hollywood support and guidance in order to develop more shows that meet their audiences' expectations.

They are asking for Hollywood writers to help them hone the storytelling and script writing skills that make American shows so successful. They want to learn from Hollywood's experience in order to develop world class Arab television and film.

My organization has already begun to help with this effort. I recently returned from a trip to Abu Dhabi with three of Hollywood's best storytellers, the award-winning producers and writers Ben Silverman, Greg Daniels, and Howard Owens. Happy to tell you more about them.

They led workshops with Arab TV and film writers and met with more than 100 of their counterparts in the creative community to share ideas for producing world class Arab drama and entertainment.

With more collaborations of this kind, we can unleash the creativity of Hollywood to help the Middle East develop a transformative entertainment industry that reaches tens of millions of people—of their people—with stories of hope and aspiration and advances the values we share.

In fact, the State Department has already taken some promising initial steps to catalyse greater Hollywood involvement in the Middle East. Last month, under the leadership of Under Secretary Rick Stengel and Assistant Secretary Evan Ryan, the State Department convened a meeting of high-level Hollywood talent, including our partners Ben Silverman and Greg Daniels, to discuss these very issues.

In addition to this convening power, catalytic funding from the U.S. Government could also make a tremendous difference. Due to low advertising rates, the entertainment market in the Middle East today is not commercially sustainable.

The U.S. Government could play a vitally important role by providing significant funding through grants and contracts that will enable the best creative content to succeed and become commercially sustainable.

With high-level attention, our Government can also inspire America's best philanthropic institutions to play a key role. For example, the John Templeton Foundation is already engaged in the Middle East through its well-respected Islam Initiative.

Several of our other leading foundations, such as Carnegie Corporation and the MacArthur Foundation, could all join together and have an enormous impact.

The vision I am outlining here is not new. In 2002, the Advisory Group on Public Diplomacy for the Arab and Muslim World, chaired by former U.S. Ambassador Ed Djerejian, wrote,

> "An attractive, less costly alternative or supplement to U.S. Government broadcasting would be the aggressive development of media programming in partnership with private firms, nonprofit institutions, and government agencies both in the United States and the Arab and Muslim nations."

This programming can then be distributed through existing channels in the region. In the aftermath of the horrific Orlando at-

tack, our country sorely needs a nationwide effort catalysed by our Government to counter the ideology of extremism.

But rather than trying to fight this ideology on our own, we should be empowering and amplifying voices that speak to the Muslim world more authentically and more directly. These voices exist and the media of the Middle East are ready to broadcast them. The United States should reach out to support and catalyse such programming.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before your committee today.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Lobel follows:]

Dr. Aaron R. Lobel

Founder and President, America Abroad Media

House Committee on Foreign Affairs

"Countering the Virtual Caliphate"

10:00AM June 23, 2016

Chairman Royce and Ranking Member Engel:

Thank you, Chairman Royce, Ranking member Engel, and distinguished members of the Committee for inviting me to testify today on a subject of such critical importance to the security of the United States, and indeed the world.

Let me begin by expressing my gratitude to both of you for the model of bipartisanship you exemplify through your work on this Committee. Much of my own work takes place "beyond the water's edge," and there is no doubt in my mind that we will only succeed over the long term in addressing the ideological challenge posed by ISIS and other extremist groups if our policies are designed in a bipartisan manner and with bipartisan support.

Our country, especially in the aftermath of the horrific attack in Orlando, needs more positive examples of bipartisanship like this House Foreign Affairs Committee under Chairman Royce and Ranking Member Engel. Thank you for your leadership and thank you to all the members of this Committee.

The Ideological Challenge

Let's make no mistake: to address the challenge we face today from Islamic extremism we need to design a strategy for the long term. It has been almost 15 years since 9/11 and 12 years since the 9/11 Commission issued its report. That report captured the essence of the challenge and was unfortunately prescient about the future:

> "Our enemy is twofold: Al Qaeda, a stateless network of terrorists that struck us on 9/11; and a radical ideological movement in the Islamic world, inspired in part by Al Qaeda, which has spawned terrorist groups and violence across the globe... the first enemy is weakened, but continues to pose a grave threat. The second enemy is gathering, and will menace Americans and American interests long after Osama Bin Laden and his cohorts are killed or captured. Thus our strategy must match our means to two ends: dismantling the Al Qaeda network, and prevailing in the longer term over the ideology that gives rise to Islamist terrorism."[1]

In my testimony today, I'd like to draw on my experience as founder of the non-profit organization, America Abroad Media (AAM), which for the last decade and a half has developed relationships and partnered with the leading media channels in the greater Middle East.

Based on that experience, there are two principal points I would like to underscore. To counter and defeat the ideology behind Islamic extremism, the focus of the United States' strategy should be on enabling, supporting and amplifying the best local partners and indigenous voices in the greater Middle

[1] Kean, Thomas H., and Lee H. Hamilton. *The 9/11 Commission Report*. Rep. N.p.: United States Government, 2004.

East. This approach will yield far better results than trying to manage an information or counter-messaging campaign from Washington.

Second, the U.S. government should make it a top priority to mobilize, catalyze and unleash the creative power of all of America's leading institutions that have tremendous capacity to engage positively with the world -- Hollywood, Silicon Valley, private philanthropy, NGOs and our universities. These institutions can and must play a central role working together with their counterparts in the Middle East who share a vision for positive change. The U.S. government can take the lead in propelling and stimulating these public-private partnerships, providing venture capital funding for those projects that have the potential to become commercially sustainable.

I will return to this issue shortly, with specific reference to how we can unleash the creativity of Hollywood to help transform the Arab drama and entertainment industry.

Our Experience in the Cold War

In many ways, the challenge we face today is not as new as some might think. Ideas have always mattered, and the media has always played an especially critical role in helping shape ideas. Indeed, Napoleon famously stated that "In war, four hostile newspapers are more to be feared than a thousand bayonets."[2]

In the Cold War, the United States grasped the significance of ideology and designed a strategy to address the ideological challenge posed by Communism. In April 1950, as several million Soviet and NATO troops faced off in the heart of Europe, President Harry Truman delivered an historic speech that outlined America's strategy for a battle of ideas.

Addressing the American Society of Newspaper Editors, President Truman emphasized that the emerging Cold War was not primarily a military or geopolitical conflict. It was, he said, "above all, a struggle for the minds of men."[3] President Truman certainly appreciated the importance of military power. But to defeat the Soviets, he argued, the United States and its European allies should recognize that "fighting Communist propaganda [is]...as important as armed power or economic aid."[4]

There were many instances when the United States helped amplify liberal voices in Western Europe or behind the Iron Curtain. When Italy's democracy was under threat from Communists in 1948, for example, the U.S. government undertook a range of activities to support democratic forces. But so did Italian-American groups, who organized a massive letter writing campaign to their families and friends in Italy. And, so did Hollywood, flooding the country with feature and

---

[2] Kaplan, Tema. *Democracy: A World History*. New York, NY: Oxford UP, 2015. Google Books. Oxford University Press. Web. 22 June 2016.

[3] Truman Library - Public Papers of the Presidents: Harry S. Truman." *Truman Library - Public Papers of the Presidents: Harry S. Truman*." Truman Library, n.d. Web. 22 June 2016

[4] *Ibid.*

documentary films that supported the values of freedom. It was a success because so many different facets of American society got involved.

Similarly, in 1947, the Advertising Council -- which was formed by leading companies from the advertising industry -- created a steering committee to advise the State Department on how to communicate a vision of inspiration and hope behind the Marshall Plan, America's massive effort to help Europe's economic recovery. In numerous European languages, the Advertising Council's public service announcements instilled values and relayed messages to foster a cultural climate favorable towards the Marshall Plan and opposed to Communism. Here, the U.S. government saw the value of harnessing the tremendous talent of America's private sector to serve the interests of postwar peace and stability.

There are many other examples that could be cited here. But, what is striking about this history is how many of the projects that were launched during the Cold War involved America's private sector and America's civil society.

Countering Islamist Ideology Today

Looking back at the 15 years since 9/11, can we honestly say that our government has devoted the same amount of attention, energy and resources to "the struggle for the minds of men" – to use President Truman's terminology – as it has to "armed power"? This imbalance in resources, ironically, has been well understood and commented on by many of our finest military leaders, from former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, to former NATO Supreme Commander Admiral James Stavridis, to former Deputy Commander of CENTCOM, General John Allen, who was also Special Presidential Envoy for the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL. As Secretary Gates put it in 2008, "Non-military efforts — these tools of persuasion and inspiration — were indispensable to the outcome of the defining ideological struggle of the 20th century. They are just as indispensable in the 21st century — and perhaps even more so."[5]

Perhaps one reason why we've been unable to respond as effectively to the ideological challenge we face today is because in many ways it is more complicated than the threat posed by Communism, which was at its heart a Western ideology rooted in the philosophy of a German, Karl Marx.

By contrast, our country has struggled to understand the ideology that fuels extremism in the Muslim World and how deeply this extremism is connected to the religion of Islam, to the politics of Islamism, to Sunni and Shia sectarianism or to the broader societal ills affecting that part of the world.

In reality, all these factors combine to create a combustible mix.

In the words of Egyptian intellectual Mamoun Fandy:

---

[5] Gates, Robert M. "Remarks by Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara, September 18, 1967." *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 23.10 (1967): 26-31. US Global Leadership Campaign. US Global Leadership Campaign. Web. 22 June 2016.

> "True Islam has nothing to do with terror, but there is a visible link between terror and the culture prevailing among Muslims today, especially among the youth – and nobody disputes this. The first step towards resolving the crisis of violence and extremism is to recognize that we have a problem... It is not enough to condemn [violence] and feel sad for a little while. What the Muslims need is to 'upgrade their software,' which is programmed mainly by our schools, television and mosques... There is no choice but to dismantle this system and rebuild it in a way that is compatible with human culture and values."[6]

Without understanding the nature of this ideology, its roots, the source of its attraction and the methods by which it is propagated, we cannot begin to counter it.

The Need to Support and Amplify Indigenous Voices

However, to be clear, countering this ideology is first and foremost a task that must be undertaken by the people of the greater Middle East. As one U.S. official said recently, "It's not the U.S. government that's going to break the [ISIS] brand. It's going to be third parties."[7]

Since 9/11, the US government does not appear to have made it a priority to identify and help support those indigenous voices in the Middle East who believe in the values of pluralism and civil discourse and who are trying to counteract extremist narratives. This may stem in part from the belief that very few such voices exist in the region, or that they lack any influence.

If this is the belief, it is profoundly mistaken. It is important to understand that there are many voices that oppose extremism -- both the violent or nonviolent varieties -- and who support positive change in the Arab and Muslim World. From my own experience working in the region, I can tell you that these partners exist in greater numbers than many in Washington may be aware of, and their work will have greater credibility and impact than anything the U.S. government can do.

Indeed, my colleague Joseph Braude, one of the most thoughtful experts on the Middle East, has pointed out that the public discontent expressed in the failed Arab Spring has led some regimes in the Middle East, particularly in the Gulf, to allow more space for what he calls "liberal incrementalists" to develop and express their ideas:

> "Contrary to popular belief, the situation in some Arab autocracies is beginning to turn in Arab liberals' favor: Following the disappointments of the Arab spring, continuing domestic disaffection has been joined by threats from jihadist enclaves and Iran-backed militias in

---

[6] Friedman, Thomas L. "We Need Another Giant Protest." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 13 Jan. 2015. Web. 22 June 2016.

[7] Miller, Greg. "Panel Casts Doubt on U.S. Propaganda Efforts against ISIS." *Washington Post*. The Washington Post, 2 Dec. 2015. Web. 22 June 2016.

> neighboring states that have collapsed. Confronted with these threats, Arab leaderships are looking for ways to boost their populations' commitment to the survival of the state — by promoting reforms that remedy the causes of discontent. They understand that doing so successfully means enabling civil society, reforming the economy, legitimizing pluralism, and instilling equal treatment under the law. Within this framework, indigenous Arab liberals who champion such principles on the basis of incremental rather than revolutionary change have achieved a space in which to pursue their agenda."[8]

The Potential in Middle East Media

One sector where there is real potential for positive change and positive impact in the Middle East is the media. Several of the most popular channels, reaching tens of millions of people, are now managed by liberal voices, who wish to communicate values of pluralism and civil discourse and counter extremist narratives. These channels have the highest credibility with their audiences. No U.S. government channel or program in the Middle East, no matter how well-intentioned or produced, can deliver this level of reach or impact.

The executives who lead these media institutions are designing or commissioning programs that can help catalyze change. For example:

One of AAM's partners in the region and the largest Pan-Arab channel, the Saudi owned Middle East Broadcasting Center (MBC), is currently developing a large-scale anti-ISIS drama series. One of the lead producers of the show, a Saudi, was an extremist in his youth. The drama is based on real stories of young men and women from different parts of the Arab World who left their homes and previous lives to join ISIS. The series examines their motivations and expectations, and it follows a journey in which they discover that behind the propaganda and façade of ISIS lays a dystopian reality. Once they realize that they are being exploited as a tool to enable ISIS's expansionism, they begin to examine how they can break free and serve as champions of the struggle to roll it back.

Second, last year MBC aired the hit anti-ISIS comedy, *Selfie*. It was the number one Ramadan show in the Gulf, with an audience viewership exceeding 25 million. The show's lead actor, comedian Nasser Al Qassabi, previously starred in *Tash Matash,* a Saudi satire show that ran for nearly a decade and has been credited with helping to weaken the extremist strand in Saudi society over time. Qassabi has a long-term vision to build on the successes of *Tash Matash* through *Selfie* and other programs now in the works. He will be coming to Washington this fall to be honored by AAM at our annual Awards Dinner.

Third, one of our media partners in Abu Dhabi, Image Nation, has developed the first-ever 'Law and Order"-style television series, called *Justice* (in English), which is currently in post-production. To develop and write the series, Image

[8] From Joseph Braude's forthcoming book, *Air Cover: Strategic Support for Change Through Arabic Media.*

Nation teamed up with award-winning producer Walter Parkes and the Emmy Award-winning writer of Law and Order Bill Finkelstein. According to Image Nation, "the series follows the ups and downs of a passionate young Emirati lawyer and her father, one of the region's top attorneys, as they deal with challenging legal cases while navigating personal and family dramas."[9] In cooperation with the UAE Department of Justice, the program portrays real-life legal cases and will spark a public discussion of the role of society in strengthening good governance.

Hollywood Partnerships in Arab Drama and Entertainment

The examples above are reflective of the growing demand among audiences in the Middle East, especially young people, for original Arabic drama and entertainment programming. While tens of millions of Arabs watch Western entertainment programs, Bollywood films and Turkish soap operas, more than ever before these audiences want their own entertainment programs -- shows that originate in Arabic, emanate from the Middle East, and reflect their own cultural storylines and themes.

They want to build a new Golden Age of Arabic drama and entertainment. They want, as every part of the world wants, to develop shows they can export successfully to the rest of the world.

And in their pursuit, leading Arab media executives and their counterparts in the creative community in the Middle East are asking for America's help. They are asking us for training in the storytelling and scriptwriting skills that make American shows so successful. They want Hollywood's help to develop shows with better pacing, better story arcs and with more inherent tension and drama. And they want to know how Hollywood, historically, helped galvanize Americans and their allies to meet some of the world's great challenges.

This means the United States has a tremendous opportunity to unleash the talent, creativity and ingenuity of Hollywood to help the Middle East develop a successful entertainment industry that tells stories of hope and aspiration and advances the values we share. Nobody is better at emotional, narrative-driven story telling than Hollywood. And where Arab entertainers aspire to be thought leaders and proponents of progress in their societies, Americans can and must stand with them and support them.

There is enormous potential for the U.S. to work with the creative community in the Middle East to jointly convene workshops bringing together Arab and Hollywood writers, producers and directors to support the next generation of storytellers in the Middle East. And this can be complemented by an array of new co-productions and collaborations in which the creative community in Hollywood can work with local content creators to help produce original large-scale drama and entertainment programming in Arabic.

---

[9] "Filming Wraps for Image Nation Abu Dhabi's Landmark Legal Drama." *Image Nation Abu Dhabi*. Image Nation Abu Dhabi, Mar. 2016. Web. 22 June 2016.

AAM has already begun partnering with leading media institutions in the UAE and other parts of the Middle East, along with top tier Hollywood producers and writers, to develop these workshops and design new co-productions. We recently returned from a trip to Abu Dhabi with three of Hollywood's finest -- Ben Silverman, Greg Daniels and Howard Owens. Ben Silverman is the Emmy, Golden Globe, and Peabody Award-winning executive producer of *The Office, Ugly Betty, The Tudors, Jane the Virgin,* and *Marco Polo*; Greg Daniels is a leading comedy writer, producer, and director on shows such as *Saturday Night Live* and *The Simpsons* and co-creator of *The Office, King of the Hill,* and *Parks and Recreation;* and Howard Owens, Founder and co-CEO of Propagate Content and the former CEO of National Geographic Channels. Daniels led a workshop with 15 local writers, including from MBC, and Silverman and Owens met with more than 100 of their counterparts in the Arab creative community.

Ben Silverman, Howard Owens and Greg Daniels are three of America's best storytellers, and they have a track record of creating television formats for different local markets, then adapting and exporting them to the world. They are globally-minded and attuned to the needs of different cultures. In short, they are exactly the kind of top-tier Hollywood talent who can make a difference.

The Need for Public-Private Partnership and the Role of the USG
Empowering the media and creative community in the Middle East will be the most effective way to counter extremism, because they will always understand the nuances and needs of their market better than we can in Washington. And in the Middle East especially, counter-messaging with a U.S. government stamp on it will never have the same credibility as something authentically produced by a local director, writer or filmmaker in the Arab world.

There are already media companies and content creators in the Arab and Muslim Worlds ready to take on this challenge and to produce programming that can inject the ideas of pluralism, tolerance and the rule of law into societies too long dominated by extremist voices. And some of our best Hollywood talent -- like Ben Silverman – is already engaged in trying to teach their Middle Eastern counterparts the art of telling moving stories and producing world class content.

But what this recipe is still missing in order to be successful is funding. The drama and entertainment market as it currently exists in the Middle East is not commercially sustainable. The advertising revenues are not high enough to offset the risk for multinationals to invest in the region. And without the capital to make the sort of high production value, multi-platform content that today's sophisticated Middle Eastern media consumers expect, and that would compete directly with extremist narratives, the efforts of the region's best and brightest media companies and their Hollywood partners will not bear fruit. Overcoming this challenge is a role uniquely suited to the U.S. government.

Already, the State Department has taken some very promising initial steps to advance efforts of this kind by leveraging its convening power to serve as a powerful dynamic force. Last month, under the leadership of Under Secretary Rick Stengel and Assistant Secretary Evan Ryan, the State Department

convened a meeting of high-level Hollywood talent, including our partners Ben Silverman and Greg Daniels, to discuss these very issues. We look forward to further discussions with the State Department about how we can synergize with and complement each other's efforts, as this could become a great example of a public-private partnership.

Catalytic funding from the U.S. government would make a tremendous difference going forward. In light of the national security stakes, this is a case where -- to borrow from the commercial sector -- the government can play a vitally important venture capital role. It can provide the seed funding that will enable the best creative content to succeed and become commercially sustainable. Then government funds will no longer be needed.

But the government should not be alone in this venture. Its involvement will also help stimulate America's philanthropic sector, including foundations and patriotic Americans with the resources to make a difference.

The John Templeton Foundation, for example, has an Islam Initiative that supports and works with leading theologians, religious institutions and media figures around the Muslim World. The Foundation has a demonstrated interest in the relationship between science, modernity and all the major religions, and its Board of Trustees involves leading Muslim scholars and scientists from the Middle East. The Templeton Foundation has high stature around the world, including in the Middle East. In other words, there is little 'blowback,' and often a gain in credibility, for an institution or media host in the Middle East to receive funding from the Templeton Foundation.

I believe that several of our great philanthropic institutions, including Carnegie Corporation, the MacArthur Foundation and others, could have a similar impact, especially if these foundations banded together. Here is another area where sustained involvement and encouragement from the highest levels of our government could make a real difference.

Conclusion

In the aftermath of the Orlando attack, this country sorely needs renewed bipartisan energy behind our public diplomacy. The emphasis must be on new ideas stemming from bipartisan cooperation and which address the grave threat facing us and the entire world.

I believe the United States of America has a vital national security interest in helping to build a successful creative industry in the Middle East that will shape the culture of the region for decades to come. That industry will be driven, as it should be, by the finest writers, directors, producers, actors and filmmakers in the region, with the vital support of and partnership from our finest creative minds in Hollywood.

The concept I am advocating is not mine, and it is not new. In 2002, the Advisory Group on Public Diplomacy for the Arab and Muslim World, named the "Djerijean Commission" for its Chairman former Ambassador Edward Djerijean, called for:

> "...the aggressive development of programming in partnership with private firms, nonprofit institutions and government agencies – both in the United States and the Arab and Muslim nations. This programming can then be distributed through existing channels in the region."[10]

The Commission had it right 14 years ago, and it is critical that we begin this effort in earnest now. With the leadership of our government, combined with the creativity and dynamism of Hollywood and the generous spirit of our philanthropic sector, we can draw on the best of our country to help the Middle East and the world defeat this threat. America has risen to the challenge posed by dangerous ideologies before, and we can certainly do so again.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify before your Committee today.

[10] Djerejian, Edward. "Changing Minds Winning Peace." *Changing Minds Winning Peace* (n.d.): n. pag. *US Department of State*. US Department of State. Web. 22 June 2016.

Chairman ROYCE. Thanks, Dr. Lobel.

STATEMENT OF PETER NEUMANN, PH.D., DIRECTOR, INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF RADICALISATION, DEPARTMENT OF WAR STUDIES, KING'S COLLEGE LONDON

Mr. NEUMANN. Thank you, Chairman Royce, Ranking Member Sherman, distinguished members of the committee. I appreciate the opportunity to talk about countering the propaganda of groups like I saw on the Internet.

My team and I in London have dedicated the past 4 years to understanding why young Muslims from Western countries are fighting with the jihadist groups in Syria and also why some of them are staying home, becoming inspired by jihadist propaganda, and end up attacking their own countries.

Based on this research and based on our accumulated knowledge about these people, some of whom are very dangerous, let me use this opportunity to make a couple of points each on the way that ISIL is using the Internet, how to counter their narrative, and finally what government needs to do to be more effective in this space.

Let me start by addressing how ISIL is using the Internet. ISIL has been more successful in exploiting the Internet than any group I have seen in 17 years of researching terrorism.

As many have pointed out, the sophistication of some of its products, the range of platforms it uses, the way it segments according to audiences, and how it has succeeded at times in dominating the conversation, all of this is unprecedented.

But—and that is my second point—the online ecosystem of ISIL goes beyond the group itself and includes more than just the videos that we are always talking about. What gives ISIL so much punch online are also, for example, individual fighters who facilitate one-on-one conversations.

It is also what we call the cheerleaders and fan boys and wannabes—people who aren't actually members of ISIS who are not based on Syria but are essentially freelance supporters often based in the West. They are the ones who are giving the group its online oomph. As far as online is concerned, what we are taking about is not just a group. It is what one of my colleagues, Dr. Nico Prucha, described as a swarm.

So how do we counter this swarm? I want to focus on the question of counter narratives. First point, there isn't one counter narrative and there isn't one counter narrator. Just like ISIL is segmenting its message according to audiences, you need to recognize that people are becoming attracted to ISIL for different reasons, have different interests, and are different points along the path of radicalization.

Some will indeed listen to a Salafi sheikh. Others are more receptive to a former jihadist and yet others are receptive to a movie star. Credibility, though, ultimately comes from authenticity and that is why the most credible messengers, in my view, are young people who are just like the ones whom ISIL is trying to recruit. We need more of them online.

And that brings me to my next point. To counter a swarm, you need a swarm. What's needed is scale. Scale, in my view, is more important than message.

Even if we found the perfect message, the perfect messenger—even if we managed to produce the perfect video, it would still be a drop in the ocean. There still wouldn't be enough oomph.

This is the Internet. People are exposed to thousands of things every day. To get your message through, you need to be loud, you need volume and you can't be on your own.

Rather than getting every single thing right, the emphasis should be on getting stuff out. I want to close with two quick observations on how government can be more effective in this space.

First, government alone will never be able to create the volume that is needed. It is not a credible messenger in this space and, worst of all, government is by definition risk averse, which is the opposite of what you need to have—what you need to be online.

For that reason, I wholeheartedly support the change of approach that's happened earlier this year—away from government-centered messaging toward empowering and working with partners—industry, NGOs, media companies, grassroots organizations, maybe even philanthropists who, by the way, haven't been doing enough in this space to sponsor hackathons, competitions, training, campaigns or setting up an independent online fund where people can go for small grants and lots of them.

Facebook recently set up an organization in Germany called OCCI, the Online Civil Courage Initiative, which has been designed precisely to counter extremist speech online. We need more of that and whatever government can do not to run them but to help them bring about it should do.

My final point—we need more data. It is almost an embarrassment. It is an embarrassment for everyone who works and is interested in this area. But we really still do not know what works. The initiatives that have happened have been so small scale and few in number they haven't generated enough data to make meaningful assertions.

This must be a priority for industry, for government, for NGOs running programs, and for all of them together.

Many thanks.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Neumann follows:]

TESTIMONY BY DR. PETER NEUMANN BEFORE THE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, U.S: HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

June 23, 2016

Chairman, Ranking Member, Members of the Committee,

My name is Peter Neumann, I am a Professor of Security Studies at King's College London, and also serve as Director of the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation (ICSR).

I appreciate the opportunity to talk about countering the propaganda of groups like ISIL on the internet.

My team and I have dedicated the past four years to understanding why young Muslims from Western countries are fighting for jihadist groups in Syria, as well as why some of them are staying home, become inspired by jihadist propaganda and end up attacking their own countries.

Based on this research, and based on our accumulated knowledge about these people, let me use this opportunity to make two quick points each on:

(1) The way that ISIL is using the internet;
(2) How to counter their narrative;
(3) What government needs to do to be more effective in this space.

How ISIL is using the internet

Let me start by addressing how ISIL is using the internet:

1) ISIL has been more successful and effective in exploiting the internet than any group I have seen in 17 years of researching terrorism. The sophistication of some its media products, the range of platforms it uses, the way it segments according to audiences, and how it has succeeded – at times – in dominating the conversation, all this is unprecedented.

But, and that's my second point:

2) The online ecosystem of ISIL goes beyond the group itself, and it includes more than just the videos that everyone is always talking about. What gives ISIL so much punch online is also for example individual fighters, who facilitate one on one conversations. It's also what we call the cheerleaders and fanboys and wannabes – people who aren't actually members of ISIL, who aren't actually in Syria, but are, essentially, freelance supporters, often based in the West. They are the ones who are giving the group its online oomph. As far as online is concerned it's not just a group, it's what one of my colleagues, Dr Nico Prucha, described as a swarm.

How to counter the narrative

So how do we counter this swarm?

1) There isn't one counter-narrative, and there isn't one counter-narrator. Just like ISIL is segmenting its message according to audiences, we need to recognize that people are becoming attracted to ISIL for different reasons, have different interests, and are at different points along the path of radicalization. Some will listen to a Salafi sheikh, others are more receptive to a movie star. Credibility, though, ultimately comes from authenticity. And that's why the most credible messengers, in my view, are young people who are just like the ones whom ISIL is trying to recruit.

We need more of them online and to engage in this battle, and that brings me to my next point:

2) What's needed is scale. Scale, in my view, is more important than message. Even if we found the perfect message, the perfect messenger, and even if we managed to produce the perfect video, it would still be a drop in the ocean. There still wouldn't be oomph. This is the internet. People are exposed to thousands of things every day. To get your message through, you need to be loud, you need volume, and you can't be on your own.

What government can do

I want to close with two quick observations on how government can be more effective in this space.

1) Government alone will never be able to create the volume that's needed; it's not a credible messenger in this space; and worst of all Government is by definition risk averse, which is the opposite of what you have to be online. For that reason, I wholeheartedly support the change of approach that's happened last year. Away from government centered messaging towards empowering and working with partners: industry, NGOs, media companies, grassroots organization, maybe even philanthropists. To sponsor hackathons, competitions, and campaigns. Facebook recently set up an organization in Germany called OCCI – the Online Civil Courage Initiative. We need more of that, and whatever government can do not to run them but to help bring them about, it should do.

My final point:

2) We need more data. It's almost an embarrassment. It's an embarrassment for everyone who works and is interested in this area. But we really don't know what works. The initiatives that have happened have been so small scale and few in number, they haven't generated enough data to make meaningful assertions. This must be a priority for industry, for government, and for NGOs running programs. And for all of them together.

Many thanks.

Chairman ROYCE. Thank you, panel. Thank you very much for your testimony here and Mr. Neumann, thank you for coming a long way for that testimony.

So I have a couple of questions just in terms of this radicalization process. How important is religion as a motivating force here? Is this a situation where ISIS recruits are often nonreligious or somewhat religious, moderately so, and then they are converted and indoctrinated through a process on the Internet over the course of recruitment?

Or is it more often a case where you have radical young men? I remember talking to one of the French officials after the attack, telling me that 30 percent of their people were French converts, often in prison, that didn't even know Arabic but get converted and sort of the concept here that they were people disposed to violence in the first place, simply susceptible or actively accepting anything that was a rationalization to carry out violence. What are some of the perspectives here?

Mr. HUGHES. The short answer is it depends. We have seen cases in the U.S. where an individual essentially converts to ISIS, not Islamism, and there is a distinct difference between Islam and Islamism.

I think it is important to say that. But when you look at—we've also had cases of people that are, you know, Hafiz and have grown up in the faith and are steeped into it and then decide to join ISIS. So each case is very different on it.

The U.S. context, we've had 91 individuals arrested for ISIS-related activities. Of that data set, 38 percent were converts to the faith, which is a higher percentage than the general population of American Muslims, which are about 23 percent, depending on how the data shakes out.

So there is a phenomenon there that is worth looking at. We have seen from our research of the program on extremism a number of individuals who are recent converts to the faith that are reaching out on Twitter and asking questions and ISIS spotters are realizing they are naive and they are answering those questions in a very innocuous way on religion. And over the course of a few weeks they are answering that and then they slowly introduce Islamic ideology into the conversation. So they have already built in there authenticity in these conversations.

So there is a dynamic in play there and it also in terms of deradicalization or disengagement the role of religion depends on the individual.

Sometimes it may be, like Peter said, the Salafist imam who's the most useful there but it also may be the soccer coach. It really depends on the individual.

Chairman ROYCE. Well, my other question is, how important is the existence of the caliphate itself as an example, as a sort of a vision to their recruiting efforts?

If we were to defeat ISIS on the ground, take out their terrorist training grounds everywhere from Raqqa in Iraq to Libya and east Africa where they have set these things up, if you reclaim those cities, if you occupied with those that were in deep camps now, if they came back and denied them the safe havens would they lose their appeal? Dr. Neumann.

Mr. NEUMANN. Yes. I think it matters, but it matters not on its own. What happened in the summer of 2014 was, of course, that ISIS declared a caliphate.

But whilst it was declaring the caliphate, it was basically running over the Middle East. It was conquering a different province of Iraq every week.

And so a lot of the people who were sitting in Europe or in other countries who were receptive to this were thinking wow, it is actually happening—it is not just a formula—it is not just a matter of words—it is actually action that meets the formulation of words.

And so that is what ISIS has always been about. It has been about the combination of a religious justification, however hollow we may think it is, in combination with the projection of strength and power and success. And I would argue the reason why so many people went in the summer of 2014 is because during that period ISIS really was projecting strength, power, and success and all these young people who were sitting in the suburbs of Paris or in disenfranchised parts of Brussels they were thinking, I can go from zero to hero in nothing if I join that group.

I do think that if the U.S. and the coalition managed to retake Mosul and Raqqa it would be a big blow for ISIS. I don't think it will be that easy to just transfer everything over to Libya or to another place.

Chairman ROYCE. I know, but they have—we were up there in Tunisia talking to the Libyan Ambassador and our Ambassador in Libya. They've got 6,500 or 6,700 fighters that are training there now and then there are other training centers they are setting up.

So they have sort of branched out in the interim. But if we could attack the training centers or some coalition could take out those training camps, my thought or my argument has always been we should have done this at the outset with air power to deny them the opportunity to message that they were on the march and unstoppable.

Let me ask you about emerging technologies out there that could be used to weed out extremist content online, if that offers some hope and maybe throw in for Mr. Hughes here—he made one statement here that seemed contradictory.

You noted in your testimony that State Department employees should have greater interaction with ISIS supporters online. Yet we've—our past experience with that was one that was a disappointing outcome because they didn't have credibility among would-be jihadists. So if I could throw those two questions out to the panel.

Why would that model work now? What should they do differently to make it work?

Mr. HUGHES. A couple reasons why I think that model didn't work before. One was that it wasn't interactive, meaning it was one-off kind of events.

So if you actually want to introduce, you know, some seeds of doubt, what you're doing on that is building a relationship or a rapport back and forth. That takes time.

The reason why that wasn't successful before is because it had to go through six, seven, eight layers of bureaucracy to say, can I

tweet this 140 characters to this individual, right? That's just not how the online environment works.

There's two reasons why I think that the U.S. Government shouldn't completely get out of the game when it comes to interactive back and forth.

One is, again, you need to essentially not cede the space, and two, is there is some benefit when you're talking about hardened ISIS supporters spending their time focussing on the State Department as opposed to focussing on creating content, videos, and things like that. It muddies their time up a little bit and we do see that dynamic play out.

So I would focus the State Department's overt messaging on the guys that raise their hands and say they are ISIS supporters and then there is a whole spectrum of other options between, you know, white overt, State Department to gray, delayed attribution that DoD can do and then the black that CI can do to counter messaging. And we need to make sure those are coordinated a little bit better than they had in the past.

Chairman ROYCE. Quick question to you of the assessment of Dr. Lobel's thesis there because they—what he's doing is televising cinema that challenges extremist ideology and Pakistan—they are doing that, I guess, now in the Middle East trying to promote religious tolerance, trying to hit on this theme of political moderation and pluralism, I guess, and disseminate democratic culture, basically. Your assessment on that?

Mr. HUGHES. I have seen Aaron's work. It is phenomenal. There's a spectrum in terms of communication. You have the targeted messaging just on this issue, right. But there is also broad based messaging that is more in tune and more useful to come from partners that Aaron works with, right, because governments by their very nature are very hesitant to get into this idea of religion, establishment clause, things like that.

It makes everyone very uncomfortable. That's where civil society and partners can play a role. Let's address the mood music that causes people to want to be drawn to the ideology itself and then let us slowly move down the spectrum.

Chairman ROYCE. I am going to ask the panel in writing just for emerging technologies. You can give that to us later. I am out of time and I need to go to Dr. Ami Bera of California.

Mr. BERA. Thank you, Chairman Royce.

You know, fascinating testimony and something that we've talked about in this committee quite a bit. You know, we are—we do feel like we are losing the counter propaganda war. We're losing that battle on social media and on the Internet.

You know, I think—Mr. Hughes and Dr. Neumann, you both touched on how, you know, ISIL and other radical jihadists are able to create this conversation in an ongoing, almost organic way.

Dr. Neumann, you used the term creating the swarm, and the way to counteract that swarm is to have a swarm that is putting a counter narrative out there—that is, dispelling some of these myths, using technology.

Now, Mr. Hughes, you talked about the importance of this—you know, fostering the environment for this to happen but some of it being organic, coming out of the community and, you know,

partnering that with—you know, the community members may not know how best to use technology but partnering that with the technology support so they can get that counter narrative out.

You know, I think a fundamental thing that is breaking down is—I talked to, you know, in Sacramento our homeland security folks, our local law enforcement—is there has to be a partnership between, you know, the Muslim community locally and the folks that are charged with trying to identify folks that may be on a path to getting radicalization but so you can intervene quickly and that seems to be breaking down right now and, you know, some of the rhetoric that we hear out there does not help the Muslim community reach out to others.

You know, perhaps some thoughts on how best we can start to repair that because, again, in my sense if we want to counteract this narrative it is going to take the community that understands our culture, that understands the word and so forth.

Partnering with, you know, whether it is technology support, whether it is local law enforcement, whether it is our homeland security folks, you know, Mr. Hughes, your thoughts.

Mr. HUGHES. Sure. I would just—my previous job was to community engagement with Muslim-Americans around the country. So for about 3 years I would go to mosque community centers and have very difficult but important questions and conversations about radicalization. Sacramento is an interesting case. I have been to Sacramento a number of times working with your local Muslim-American communities and a telling example of that was last year I was there and we were talking about the need to counter ISIS' propaganda.

An imam of a local mosque raised his hand and said, you know, Seamus, I would like to do counter messaging and I would like to do that. And I said well, that is great, sir—what are you going to do. I am going to hold my phone up and I am going to record a lecture of me saying it and I am going to post it online.

Sir, no one's going to watch that. It is going to be 6 minutes long and it is not very interactive. But I tell you what, maybe I can connect you with the guys at Twitter or the individuals at Facebook and let us figure out a way where you have the message, it is very timely, and let us tie your video so it tags next to an ISIS video and things like that.

You have this groundswell of people that want to do counter messaging but don't know how to work the system in a way that I think Congress and DC policymakers can help traverse that.

And then the larger question about community engagement—that is a difficult thing. You know, you don't build relationships 1 day at a time. It takes a very long process and I think the way that the administration is moving on this is that this idea of one-on-one interventions for individuals so instead of just arresting an individual because that is the only choice you have right now. I think if we bring in a third option in interventions you're going to see levels of trust built in between governments and communities.

Mr. BERA. What is that third option of interventions?

Mr. HUGHES. And I would defer to Peter to talk a little bit about the European experience because they have had years of this. But this idea of an intervention space.

So in the U.K. they have a channel program that has been revamped a number of times but it essentially connects the kid they are worried about with a mentor and Germany Hayat with social workers who help kind of train parents on how to talk to their kids.

What we're essentially looking for is a non-law-enforcement approach, right. You bring a social worker, a mental health professional, a religious leader, any number of things—you bring them to the table and say this is a kid we are worried about—I don't have enough to arrest him or I don't want to arrest him because he's under the age of 18—you know, what are other options and everyone kind of gets around the table and figures it out.

Mr. BERA. So we have actually had some of that conversation in Sacramento both with homeland security folks as well as our—the Muslim community locally because it is not just law enforcement approaching them.

It could be that parent who is noticing changes in behavior in their child and, you know, doesn't want to go to law enforcement because they are worried, but they need someplace where they can go and someone who is trusted in the community who can intervene or it could be, you know, an imam. Dr. Neumann, if you want.

Mr. NEUMANN. If I can just add one thing from the European experience because these intervention programs have run in different European countries with mixed successes. I think one lesson you can draw is that it is very important that it is not principally law enforcement and that is because parents will not call that hotline if they think that it is the police that is answering the phone and arresting their kid.

They will call but they will leave it to the very last minute when it is usually too late. If you want them to call early when something can still be done you need to give them the confidence that their kid is not going to be immediately arrested and that is why it is important that in this early phase law enforcement is not involved, as hard as it is for law enforcement to let go.

Mr. BERA. So it has to be someone who's trusted in the community that has that confidence because, you know, it could be a mental health issue that you have to intervene quite early on which, you know, could lead to some consequences down the road.

Mr. LOBEL. Congressman, let me go to a broader point, if I may. You know, when they looked at the radicalization process of one of the San Bernardino killers, her friends said, you know, when she was in college she wouldn't socialize. She spent all her time watching extremist television channels—24-hour television channels. I just want to echo some of the points made here that we should not focus exclusively on the online, and just two factors there.

One, I just want to quote from the Crown Prince of Bahrain who was referring to both Sunni and Shi'a channels. He says, extremists spread their ideological message through a multitude of channels old and new.

Satellite channels unseen by Western audiences and free of either its restrictions or regulations broadcast with far greater impact than the Internet, an almost continuous message of intolerance and venom to the ignorant and the susceptible. Some of the biggest social media successes—sustainable successes are television stars in the region who are on these channels.

So I just wanted to make the point that I think there is a complementarity here between the different types of media and we need to be looking at all of it together.

Mr. BERA. Fantastic. Thank you, and I am out of my time. Thank you.

Chairman ROYCE. Thank you, Dr. Bera.

We now go to Mr. Dana Rohrabacher from California.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and I have watched your career for a number of years and you seem always to have gravitated toward fighting the intellectual battle and making sure that the United States was fighting that part of the battle of ideas and concepts rather than just the battle of who can shoot and kill the enemy.

We have experienced—this is fascinating. Thank you for your testimony from each of you today. We have lived through this before. I mean, it seems that fanaticism and which then accepts violence as a means to achieving fanatic goals is not new to this era of human history and we have—during the French Revolution we had people, you know, all of a sudden things went haywire and the struggle for liberty became the, let us say, guillotine anybody who speaks against the revolution, which then meant anybody who was just in some way opposing some of the concepts that were being discussed. Mao Tse-tung, Pol Pot, you name it—we have had these people who for some reason were able to mobilize large numbers of people to slaughter people who were basically innocent people.

This is—not to mention Hitler and his ilk, and how do we deter that in this modern age. I will tell you that, being a writer myself I especially—is it Lobel?

Mr. Lobel's concepts were very—I had not heard your presentation before. Who actually is paying for these things that you are doing already with this, sending groups of writers and things like that? Who's financing that?

Mr. LOBEL. Over the years our organization has had a range of funders, largely private foundation supporters and we have also received some U.S. Government funding as well.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Okay. So that's—well, that is to be commended, I will have to say. But either we are going to change—what we are up against is, as I say, another type of fanaticism that has emerged and where you have fanatics who are willing to commit violence in order to achieve their ends what you end up with is terrorism and it takes a real fanatic to be able to murder someone who doesn't have a gun and someone who is just there and just a human being who happens to be in the middle of a situation, especially if the ideas you're going to promote what you believe is the truth—the ultimate truth—by terrorizing populations into submission to that truth.

And it seems to me that's what we have here. So I thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, for this. You have been very provocative today. I don't really have any specific questions. That one question is who financed it—can we count on private financing to fight this battle?

Mr. LOBEL. Well, I think the government can play an important role by catalysing that, by—it can mobilize the private sector. It can mobilize patriotic individuals in this country who I think recog-

nize the danger and are willing to step up and I think there are some who feel like they haven't been asked.

So that's why I think there is an important role that can be played here in Washington by our Government in helping. So I think the short answer to that is yes.

But sometimes you need that initial start, that venture capital funding, if you will, particularly because of some of the commercial challenges in the region.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. You know, at times when the government takes over jobs like this they have to reach so many compromises within an editorial concept that everything comes out mush and they are not able to really hit the points that need to be hit.

So I would think that we should be encouraging, Mr. Chairman, as many people in our private sector and throughout academia and elsewhere to actually get directly involved in this effort to reach out to those fanatical elements in the world today that threaten the rest of us and perhaps reach out to them in a variety of different ways. So I sure appreciate your testimony and——

Mr. LOBEL. I would just say quickly, Congressman, that if you look—it is striking when you read the history of the Cold War is how often projects were launched that really directly involved the best of America's private sector and civil society.

That is striking. I don't think we have achieved that equivalent in the 15 years since 9/11.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. One last thought on that.

I remember very well when I thought that we were going to at that point win the Cold War. I mean, at one point in my life I thought—I was sure that Communism would end up dominating this planet including the United States.

But at that moment, Mr. Chairman, when I realized that we were going to win is when they started doing commercials making fun of Russia—of the Soviet Union.

And remember the babushkas were coming out in their swimming suits and then it was their dress suits and it was all the same suit, right? And what we need to do is perhaps reach that point with the fanatics—with religious fanatics—whatever they are, but Islamic in particular because it's there and engaged with that violence as making sure that violent fanaticism is ridiculed—that we ridicule it rather than try to confront it intellectually. Maybe both.

Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman ROYCE. Ridicule took down the KKK, or helped take it down.

Mr. Brad Sherman of California.

Mr. SHERMAN. Thank you. A couple of points I would want to make from the ranking member's opening statements.

The administration has created the Center for Strategic Counter Terrorism Communications. In assessing its success, we have to turn to experts and your guesses because there is no way to count the number of people who might have joined a terrorist organization but for the fact that they were persuaded not to do so.

The CSCC is—the administration now is turning that into the Global Engagement Center. The counter messaging provisions of

Speaker Ryan's new national security action plan echo the administration's efforts and I think demonstrate bipartisanship.

The budget is policy. Since 2013, the budget of this effort has grown from $5 million to a 2017 request for $21.5 million. Is that enough money, realizing that this is just one part of our antiterrorism effort?

So I will ask all three witnesses. Is $21.5 million enough? Anybody think it is too much?

Mr. HUGHES. It depends on how they spend the money.

Mr. SHERMAN. Obviously.

Mr. HUGHES. Yes, I——

Mr. SHERMAN. Give me a quantitative answer. We have to move on to another question. Anybody have a quantitative?

Mr. LOBEL. We should be spending a lot more money on all of these efforts. I think when we look at the ideological challenge and the importance of quote, you know, "soft power" in addressing it, I think it would be clear that there is a great mismatch between the challenge and the resources being allocated overall.

Mr. SHERMAN. Okay. I am going to go back to this theme that we need to understand Islam at the State Department and the organizations that it funds. Just as one example, I was teaching my young daughter the Gettysburg Address, four score and seven.

Now, you can translate that. Any Chinese scholar could translate four score and seven as meaning 87. But only someone who understood Christianity and as it was practiced in the United States at that time and the King James Bible would hear the echoes of religious thought in calling it four score and seven rather than 87.

Are there people engaged in this effort, funded by the State Department, that can really hear the allusions to the similar echoed cadence of Islamic theology in the message that's going out? Or are these people who, when they hear four score and seven, translate that as 87 and figure that's the number between 86 and 88? Dr. Lobel.

Mr. LOBEL. I agree wholeheartedly that not only our Government but our country as a whole has not invested nearly enough in the kind of regional knowledge and expertise required to address this challenge. That includes an understanding of Islam.

So that, to me, is the State Department and the rest of us. So, you know, when we look back at what was invested in Soviet studies probably in the first 15 or 20 years of the Cold War and compare it to where we are today we are failing and that is an important cause of the fail.

Mr. SHERMAN. I want to go—I think both Dr. Neumann and Dr. Lobel have alluded to the idea that we need to get individuals involved and I would say even volunteers involved.

The State Department needs 14 levels of review to send out a tweet. If you're an officially funded by the State Department grantee you only need six levels of review before you can send out a tweet.

If you're a volunteer, you do a tweet. There are many millions of Muslims and people from Muslim countries—Christians, Yazidis and others—who understand the culture who would like to be engaging.

We need to give them the tools and the encouragement. I am not aware of any effort that said, you know, not just if you see something say something but dedicate 5 hours a week of your time.

The other thing that's missing here is if you look at my Web browser and you see that I visited Islamic terrorist chat rooms, I probably don't go on the no-fly list. I am a member of this committee.

My Muslim friends, their browser history has all—so we need a system by which people can register the fact that they are on our side, that they are trying to engage the terrorists, even provide a copy of what they are doing to some agency of government so that they feel free.

Because I assume that any Muslim-American who engaged creatively one on one in a chat room would say some things that a prosecutor could put him in jail for.

You've got to start with the idea of saying well, gee, maybe—I understand that maybe you're thinking of going to Syria and killing lots of people.

Well, I know where you're coming from but have you thought about this? That might be an effective argument. It might also get you in front of a jury saying why did you tell somebody it is reasonable to even consider going to——

So is—I assume our witnesses will confirm there is no organized way for someone who wants to volunteer in this cyber war to make sure they don't go to jail. Dr. Neumann.

Mr. NEUMANN. No, there isn't, and one thing I wanted to highlight is the contrast between what I think needs to be done and what happened in the past with CSCC.

So when CSCC said let us counter ISIL online propaganda they would produce a film, it would take a long time, a lot of people would have to approve and then eventually there would be a film coming out.

Now imagine that instead YouTube was launching a competition and was saying, what's wrong with ISIS? You have 1 week. The prize is an internship with Google. I can guarantee you there would be 5,000 student projects, volunteers, classes from across the country and beyond producing little videos.

Now, of these 5,000, 80 percent would be really awful. Twenty percent would be okay and maybe 2 percent would go viral. That would still be a multiple of the output that CSCC has ever produced.

It would not say State Department and it would be a lot more authentic and it would cost nothing. That's why $21 million is an abstract figure. If those $21 million are being used to foster——

Mr. SHERMAN. Google could just do this on their own because I will tell you right now whoever wins that contest is somebody Google wants as an intern.

So maybe a few of us—maybe you could draft a letter for a few of us to endorse not only to Google but 10 others and let us try to get some internships.

Mr. LOBEL. I would just add very briefly that the 14 layers of review is exactly when you think about yes, there needs to be more money but how that money is spent, you wouldn't want to be spending it on 14 layers of review.

You want it to be going to entities around the country that can really make a difference and are not as risk averse.

Chairman ROYCE. We need to go to Daniel Donovan of New York.

Mr. DONOVAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

It has not been credited to anyone yet but as we sat here within the last hour when the chairman gavelled in there has been a mass shooting in a movie theater in Germany where at least 25 people have been injured. No one has taken credit for that but it is remarkable that we are speaking about this issue now and this occurred during our hearing.

I want to talk a little bit—my friend Brad Sherman spoke about prosecutors. I was a prosecutor for 20 years before I came to Congress and I remember in the days when gangs—street gangs used to recruit prospects for their gangs. And they could visualize—they could see the loner in the school yard. They could see the young person who had low self-esteem. They knew their target.

How do the recruiters for ISIS and other violent extremists find these individuals on the Internet? Because you can't visually see this person in their basement who is on their computer and doesn't have any friends and is a loner, unlike the street gangs.

How does this actually occur? How are they finding these individuals who are susceptible to being recruited? And I leave that to anyone.

Mr. HUGHES. Sure. The same way they do recruitment of gangs online actually nowadays, which is they are looking for individuals who have raised their hand only slightly so much, saying oh, well, what's going on in Syria or what about the Assad atrocities?—things like that.

They realize they have—there is a well-established system of essentially spotting individuals to be drawn into it and once they are drawn in they are in essentially an ISIS echo chamber where they don't hear dissenting voices.

So the conversation runs from the boringly benign banter of everyday life to the violent images that we see on the nightly news.

So they get a sense of community on there and so they talk on mainstream sites, on Twitter and places like that and then they move onto this one-on-one communication whether it be on Telegram or other platforms where they can have a more discreet conversation, figure out how that person's day was.

It is a grooming process online, and a lot of these individuals are also asking for help, right. They are coming to known or suspected terrorists—people on the ground in Syria and Iraq—and saying, I am thinking about joining—what do you think about this?—what do I need to do when I get to Turkey?—what are the four numbers I need to call?—what do I put in my backpack?—what do I not put in my backpack?—how do I cross Customs?

It is essentially allowing a level of interactivity that we hadn't had in the past where if you're three girls from Denver like we had last year, three girls under the age of 18, and you want to figure out how to go to Syria, you're going on to Tumbler, you're reading about it and then you're connecting with a facilitator online who's working that process for you.

Mr. DONOVAN. So the individual has to kind of let the recruiters know that I am a person who has curiosity?

Mr. HUGHES. It depends. So like I said before, we saw a case where a young woman was naive about her faith and was asking questions online and ISIS supporters realized she was naive and answered those questions in an innocuous way.

So each case is particularly different. But there is a concerted recruitment effort online. Now, that has shifted in recent months away from the so-called caliphate and more toward maybe go to Libya or maybe do what you can where you are because of various reasons.

Mr. DONOVAN. I understand it is a romance and it takes time to nurture these individuals. You hit on something I wanted to speak about in my remaining few minutes—the dark space, when they find someone who may be susceptible, who feels they want to belong to something that is greater than they, to have a purpose in life where they never had a purpose before.

And once that recruiter realizes they have someone of that mindset they go into these dark spaces where we can't even follow them. Do you have any insight or any opinion of what government could do about that? I am on Homeland Security too and we struggle with that on a daily basis.

Mr. HUGHES. The issue of encryption and going dark is something that the FBI Directors talked about in numerous occasions. We do see that dynamic play out online and increasingly so.

So think of the evolution of Internet recruitment radicalization this way. We used to have the good old days 5 or 6 years ago where you had password-protected forums, about 12 of them, and everyone raised their hand, you knew who they were and then went in there.

That was—we could collect against that. Then they moved to Twitter and Facebook and places like that, more mainstream sites where you're able to get the fence sitters who—and able to push out the propaganda a little bit more.

Now they have almost reversed course back over to more discreet platforms like Telegram, which allows for end-to-end encryption and other places like that and doesn't give law enforcement that view of it. It is a difficult dynamic.

I don't have policy recommendations on an approach port. I would say that any approach that you did develop needs to be mindful of the technology evolving, meaning that if you asked me 2 years ago about Telegram I would have said don't worry about it right now—let us focus on Twitter and now here we are with Telegram.

Mr. DONOVAN. Anyone else have a comment? Thank you very much. Mr. Chairman, I yield back the time that I no longer have.

Chairman ROYCE. Well, let me just thank our witnesses here. We are going to be contacting you. There are some additional questions that we want to ask that we'd like your answers to.

But I—returning to the observation made by Mr. Brad Sherman in terms of the necessity of the collaborative endeavor here I am sure that dialogue will continue and so you've got a second for your motion.

But thank you all and we thank the members. We stand adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:07 a.m., the committee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

Material Submitted for the Record

FULL COMMITTEE HEARING NOTICE
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6128

Edward R. Royce (R-CA), Chairman

June 23, 2016

TO: MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

You are respectfully requested to attend an OPEN hearing of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, to be held in Room 2172 of the Rayburn House Office Building (and available live on the Committee website at http://www.ForeignAffairs.house.gov):

DATE: Thursday, June 23, 2016

TIME: 10:00 a.m.

SUBJECT: Countering the Virtual Caliphate

WITNESSES: Mr. Seamus Hughes
Deputy Director
Program on Extremism
Center for Cyber and Homeland Security
George Washington University

Aaron Lobel, Ph.D.
Founder and President
America Abroad Media

Peter Neumann, Ph.D.
Director
International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation
Department of War Studies
King's College London

By Direction of the Chairman

The Committee on Foreign Affairs seeks to make its facilities accessible to persons with disabilities. If you are in need of special accommodations, please call 202/225-5021 at least four business days in advance of the event, whenever practicable. Questions with regard to special accommodations in general (including availability of Committee materials in alternative formats and assistive listening devices) may be directed to the Committee.

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

MINUTES OF FULL COMMITTEE HEARING

Day *Thursday* **Date** *6/23/2016* **Room** *2172*

Starting Time *10:00* **Ending Time** *11:07*

Recesses [*0*] (____to ____) (____to ____) (____to ____) (____to ____) (____to ____) (____to ____)

Presiding Member(s)

Chairman Edward R. Royce

Check all of the following that apply:

Open Session [✓]
Executive (closed) Session [ ]
Televised [✓]

Electronically Recorded (taped) [✓]
Stenographic Record [✓]

TITLE OF HEARING:

Countering the Virtual Caliphate

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

See attached.

NON-COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

none

HEARING WITNESSES: Same as meeting notice attached? Yes [✓] **No** [ ]
(If "no", please list below and include title, agency, department, or organization.)

STATEMENTS FOR THE RECORD: *(List any statements submitted for the record.)*

SFR - Rep. Eliot Engel

TIME SCHEDULED TO RECONVENE _____
or
TIME ADJOURNED *11:07*

Jean Marter, Director of Committee Operations

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

FULL COMMITTEE HEARING

PRESENT	*MEMBER*
X	Edward R. Royce, CA
	Christopher H. Smith, NJ
	Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, FL
X	Dana Rohrabacher, CA
	Steve Chabot, OH
	Joe Wilson, SC
	Michael T. McCaul, TX
	Ted Poe, TX
	Matt Salmon, AZ
	Darrell Issa, CA
	Tom Marino, PA
	Jeff Duncan, SC
	Mo Brooks, AL
	Paul Cook, CA
	Randy Weber, TX
X	Scott Perry, PA
	Ron DeSantis, FL
X	Mark Meadows, NC
	Ted Yoho, FL
	Curt Clawson, FL
	Scott DesJarlais, TN
X	Reid Ribble, WI
	Dave Trott, MI
X	Lee Zeldin, NY
X	Dan Donovan, NY

PRESENT	*MEMBER*
	Eliot L. Engel, NY
X	Brad Sherman, CA
	Gregory W. Meeks, NY
	Albio Sires, NJ
	Gerald E. Connolly, VA
	Theodore E. Deutch, FL
	Brian Higgins, NY
	Karen Bass, CA
	William Keating, MA
	David Cicilline, RI
	Alan Grayson, FL
X	Ami Bera, CA
	Alan S. Lowenthal, CA
	Grace Meng, NY
	Lois Frankel, FL
	Tulsi Gabbard, HI
	Joaquin Castro, TX
	Robin Kelly, IL
	Brendan Boyle, PA

Ranking Member Eliot L. Engel Statement for the Record
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
Countering the Virtual Caliphate
Wednesday, June 22, 2016

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for calling this hearing.

I want to welcome our witnesses to the Foreign Affairs Committee. We're grateful for your time and for sharing your expertise on this aspect of the fight against ISIS.

The development of information technology during our lives has changed the way people around the world communicate, share information, and conduct business. It's really remarkable. We're connected on a global scale like never before, and so much good can come of that.

But we know it cuts both ways. This incredible tool can be used for incredible harm. And there's no better example of that than the way ISIS has harnessed technology to spread its hateful message and recruit more fighters into its ranks.

With the click of a button, ISIS can broadcast its shocking violence to virtually anyone with a laptop or a smartphone. With social media, ISIS works to radicalize people around the world, urging so-called lone wolves to attack targets in their communities, urging terrorists to take full advantage of gun laws that make buying a weapon of war as easy as buying a secondhand baseball card.

Though we can't spot it on a map, our efforts to confront ISIS's virtual violence is another major front in our counter-terror campaign. And as the coalition continues to reverse ISIS gains in Iraq, we also need to focus on taking away this recruitment and propaganda tool.

The Obama Administration began focusing on this problem years ago with the creation of the Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications—what we call the CSCC—at the State Department. Diplomats and national-security professionals were given the job of taking online space back from violent groups that had filled it with propaganda. The model followed our traditional approach to public diplomacy: speaking on behalf of the U.S. government.

But, an evaluation of these efforts after a few years showed us some areas that needed improvement. First, we needed better coordination with our outside partners. Second, we needed to provide information from sources that the target audience would consider credible. Lastly, we needed to improve our metrics to measure whether our efforts actually helped prevent radicalization.

These are real challenges, particularly the last one: it's virtually impossible to count the number of people who may have joined a terrorist group, but then decided not to.

To deal with these concerns, the Administration pushed a new plan that reformed the CSCC into the Global Engagement Center, designed to coordinate and integrate all our counter-messaging efforts. It moves away from direct U.S. Government messaging to a partner-driven approach, tapping a global network of NGOs, foreign governments, and individuals who can better deliver our message to the right audience. It aims to encourage ordinary people in at-risk communities to launch grass-roots messaging campaigns of their own. And it places a premium on cutting-edge technology and top talent from the private sector.

I firmly support this approach. I'm glad my friends on the other side do as well: The counter-messaging provisions of Speaker Ryan's new national-security action plan echo the Administration's strategy almost word for word. Both plans explicitly focus on empowering locally credible voices and employing new tools to effectively measure results.

The question now is: how do we see this agenda through? How do we continue to refine our strategy, identify credible actors, improve our metrics, and keep up with ISIS as its online campaign continues to evolve?

I personally think we should be investing a lot more money into this effort. Since 2013, the budget has jumped from less than $5 million to a 2017 request for $21.5 million. That's a good increase, but we should go even farther.

I'm curious to hear from our witnesses about what other steps we should be taking to implement the current plan and keep building on it. I look forward to your testimony.

Mr. Chairman, I thank you again. And I yield back.

###