

# BEYOND IRAQ AND SYRIA: ISIS' GLOBAL REACH

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## HEARING

BEFORE THE

### COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS UNITED STATES SENATE

ONE HUNDRED FIFTEENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

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JUNE 8, 2017  
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## **BEYOND IRAQ AND SYRIA: ISIS' GLOBAL REACH**

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**THURSDAY, JUNE 8, 2017**

U.S. SENATE,  
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS,  
*Washington, DC.*

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:01 a.m., in room SD-419, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Bob Corker, chairman of the committee, presiding.

Present: Senators Corker [presiding], Johnson, Flake, Young, Isakson, Paul, Cardin, Murphy, Kaine, and Merkley.

### **OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. BOB CORKER, U.S. SENATOR FROM TENNESSEE**

The CHAIRMAN. The Foreign Relations Committee will come to order. We thank you for being here.

There are some other things happening this morning, so my guess is this may not be particularly well-attended, but I know that you know that the record is useful for us in developing policy.

We thank you both for being here. And Ben and I are pulled in multiple directions this morning in addition to the fact that there are other conflicts. But we again thank you so much for being here.

We had a classified briefing earlier this week to walk through some of the things that cannot be discussed publicly, so building on that and having you here today is going to be something very beneficial to all of us.

So the committee has now come to order.

We are going to examine, as you all know, the transnational threat posed by ISIS. This is an important time to talk about ISIS and its global reach. In the last few weeks, we have all witnessed the disturbing violence ISIS is inspiring, enabling, and directing outside the Middle East: the attacks in London and Manchester, the violence against Coptic Christians in Egypt, the attempted seizure of a city in the Philippines. Here in the U.S., we have faced our own ISIS-inspired attacks.

A lot of these attacks have occurred as ISIS has lost increasing amounts of territory in Iraq and Syria. This reality does beg the question of what more should be done and do our tactics need to evolve, particularly as the operation to retake Mosul nears an end and Syrian opposition forces begin to enter Raqqa.

You might expect the threat to diminish as ISIS loses its capital, but recent events indicate that may not be the case. The wars in Iraq and Syria have served as a training ground for terrorists, and ISIS has a media operation unrivaled by its peers.

Tens of thousands of foreigners have fought on behalf of ISIS, including thousands of Westerners. They can return home. They can also regroup and fight in another country.

The affiliates are also holding territory and continue to conduct operations, despite increased counterterrorism pressure in places like Libya. The affiliates are, after all, the perpetrators of many of these attacks and a threat to stability in many parts of the world.

So we welcome you today. We have challenging issues to deal with. We want to thank you for appearing before our committee. I look forward to your testimony.

And I will now turn to our distinguished ranking member, Ben Cardin.

**STATEMENT OF HON. BENJAMIN L. CARDIN,  
U.S. SENATOR FROM MARYLAND**

Senator CARDIN. Mr. Chairman, thank you very much for convening this hearing.

You are correct. There is a lot going on today, including the hearing in the connected building that is getting a lot of attention. And we have a major bill on the floor dealing with Iran sanctions, and we are also looking at sanctions against Russia.

So there is a lot going on, but this hearing is extremely important, and I thank you for convening it, as we look at the impact of ISIS beyond just Iraq and Syria.

The recent attacks, as the chairman pointed out, in London, Manchester, Paris, Melbourne, Tehran, is a reminder ISIS's reach is well-beyond just the countries of Syria and Iraq. The ongoing violence of Marawi also points out the danger of a growing influence.

Yes, we have been successful in shrinking the self-proclaimed caliphate that started with a strategy under the Obama administration, is continuing under the Trump administration, as we have been able to take Mosul, and Raqqa is not far behind. We see the shrinking of the caliphate.

We also see the shrinking in the number of fighters that ISIS has been able to accumulate. It had, we believe, as high as 30,000. It could be now as low as 12,000. So we are having a major impact.

But there has been intensification of concerns globally, and we have seen that. Affiliate groups are popping up in Pakistan, Afghanistan, the Caucasus, West Africa, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, the Philippines, and elsewhere. So we should have major, major concerns.

Of course, we have the lone wolf attacks, and we have the radicalization of individuals in many countries, some claiming affiliation with ISIL. Whether they are or not, we don't know, but they are certainly motivated by ISIL.

So what should our strategy be? Yes, we need to utilize the military, intelligence, and law enforcement. That is a very important part of it, and we have certainly put attention to that. But the U.S. leadership must go beyond that.

First, we need to work with our partners, so they understand how to distinguish between their efforts to get after terrorists versus the civilian population. Too many of our strategic partners have been extremely careless, dangerous, in the manner in which they have gone after these extremists, causing major resentment

and loss of life within the civilian population. We must do better there.

We must use best practices of integrating cooperation, especially with the intelligence community. There is still too much falling through the cracks.

And we must have robust attention to good governance, human rights, anticorruption, and development efforts. Otherwise, you create a void in which extremist groups just come back.

Mr. Chairman, as we said in many hearings, it would be good to have the administration come forward and articulate their policy, because, quite frankly, I have not heard the President articulate a coherent policy in this area. We do need to be concerned about the Trump administration moving to relationships with authoritarian regimes that are repressive to peaceful opposition that has long-term costs to American security interests. The travel ban on Muslims obviously affects our ability to deal with this issue. And the fiscal year 2018 budget submitted by the President, one which both Democrats and Republicans have rejected, would also compromise our ability to deal with this.

Let me just conclude on this. Earlier this week, I participated in a celebration on the 70th anniversary of the Marshall Plan. The Marshall Plan was really a turning moment for the United States. It is where the United States picked engagement versus isolation within the framework of democracy, human rights, good governance, that we would help rebuild Europe for those countries that were interested in maintaining those values. As an end result, with a very modest investment, I believe it was \$13 billion, we were able to form the transatlantic partnership, which has been so critically important to United States' national security interests.

We need to figure out ways that we can build upon that model in order to deal with the challenges we have against ISIS. And I think we can learn from our two witnesses that are here, and I look forward to your testimony.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much.

We will now turn to our witnesses.

Our first witness is Dr. Lorenzo Vidino, director of George Washington University's Program on Extremism. Our second witness is Dr. Daniel Byman, senior associate dean of Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service.

We thank you both for being here. I think you all know we would appreciate it if you would summarize your written comments in about 5 minutes, and then we will have questions.

Without objection, your written testimony will be part of the record.

If you would just begin in the order introduced, again, with our appreciation for you being here.

**STATEMENT OF LORENZO VIDINO, PH.D., DIRECTOR, PROGRAM ON EXTREMISM, GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY, WASHINGTON, DC**

Dr. VIDINO. Chairman Corker, Ranking Member Cardin, esteemed members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak before you today.

As the Islamic State is losing territory, as you said, we can predict some likely developments. In Iraq and Syria, it is likely to morph into a lethal insurgency force, still planning attacks in the region and here in the West.

I think ISIS is also likely to undergo a geographic repositioning, becoming more decentralized. I can see two developments here, one partially relocating to countries in the region. I would highlight Tunisia and Turkey as two countries of particular concern. And I think as you said, ISIS will rely more on affiliates worldwide.

Allow me to concentrate my remarks more on the dynamics on the West. I know Professor Byman will talk more about global dynamics.

The first issue when it comes to the West is returning foreign fighters. Many of the estimated 6,000 European and North American foreign fighters have already come back, and more will in the future. The first challenge is obviously detecting them, but the second equally severe challenge is determining what to do with them.

Arresting them is the immediate, easy answer. The reality, however, is much more complicated. The example from the U.K. is very telling of the challenge. Of the 400 British foreign fighters who are known to have returned back from Syria and Iraq, only 54 have been convicted.

There are a lot of reasons why that is. It is a dynamic very common to all Western countries, including, to some degree, the U.S. It is a mostly legal challenge to prosecution. There is a lack of actionable evidence. We know of a lot of these people from an intelligence point of view, but we do not often have the evidence that can be used against them in a court of law.

We also have to say that foreign fighters are, indeed, one of the main challenges. But if we look at it from a numbers perspective, not the main one. My center looked at the 51 attacks we have seen in the West over the last 3 years, and we saw that only 18 percent of those attacks were carried out by returning foreign fighters. The vast majority were carried out by individuals who had little or no affiliation whatsoever to ISIS.

If we look at these 51 attacks, we can also see another interesting pattern from an operational point of view, and I think it is telling us what is ahead. Only 8 percent of those attacks were carried out by individuals who were acting under direct orders from ISIS. Those were the big structured attacks, like Paris and Brussels. There is a question whether ISIS will be able to centrally plan sophisticated attacks in the future, as it loses territory. Twenty-six percent of the attacks were carried out by individuals who had no connections whatsoever to ISIS but were only inspired by the ideology. Sixty-six percent of the attacks were carried out by individuals who had some kind of connection to the Islamic State, but acted independently.

Let me highlight here a phenomenon, which I think we are going to see much more frequently in the future, which is that of the virtual planners or virtual entrepreneurs. These are individuals who live in ISIS-controlled territory and use social media and encryption to connect with jihadist sympathizers worldwide, guide them through the planning and execution of attacks. We saw that

dynamic play out here in Garland, Texas, and in many attacks in Europe.

Looking ahead, it is likely that the caliphate will disappear, but ISIS will endure and evolve. The so-called virtual caliphate, ISIS's presence online, also ensures its future.

In this environment, we also see a resurgent Al Qaeda. As much as we focus on ISIS, we have to see that Al Qaeda has gained ground in parts of the Middle East. And I think it is debatable what the relationship between the two groups will be. I think talk about potential, if not merger, a more peaceful coexistence and cooperation between the two at least in some parts of the world is that not unlikely.

But what is clear also is that we face not necessarily just a group or a collection of groups, but rather an ideological movement. This movement is plagued by division and rivalries, which needs to be exploited.

Ultimately, however, it has a clear vision, and it is guided by a strong doctrine. ISIS is just the latest and, arguably, most successful incarnation of this movement.

But even its hypothetical demise is unlikely to cause the end of the global jihadist movement. And I think as we get to recommendations, I think that is why the ideological part is crucially important. We have been somewhat timid over the last few years in tackling the ideological appeal not just of one specific group, but of jihadist ideology in general.

I see some encouraging signs in some Middle Eastern countries where a lot of our allies, even countries with a rather ambiguous relationship with some jihadist groups in the past, have taken a very proactive approach in confronting them and in confronting the ideology. And I think the U.S. should support these efforts and work with them.

At a tactical level, of course, there are many things that can be done. I wrote some of them in my written testimony. It goes from preventing the flow of foreign fighters from coming back, to having countries have more resources, to challenge the issue of returning foreign fighters, to developing sound CVE programs.

I know my time is up, so I want to thank you for the opportunity, and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Dr. Vidino follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF LORENZO VIDINO

Chairman Corker, Ranking Member Cardin, esteemed members of the Committee, it is a privilege to speak before you today, thank you for the opportunity.

As the self-declared Islamic State slowly but steadily loses ground in Iraq and Syria, questions about what lies ahead are of paramount importance. Without clairvoyance, countless factors, some foreseeable and some not, will influence future developments. Regarding the former, one can reasonably argue that:

- 1) Even in the most optimistic of post-Daesh scenarios the territories previously occupied by the group in Iraq and Syria are highly unlikely to enjoy socio-political stability and cohesion. It is also likely that Daesh will revert to what it was in its early days, some ten years ago: a lethal insurgent force using tactics ranging from pure terrorism to guerrilla warfare. Its priorities will be to regain the territory it has lost (something it might occasionally be able to do in some areas) and undermine the Iraqi government and the various forces it is battling in Syria, by exploiting sectarian tensions. But it is also likely that it will still seek to plan terrorist attacks throughout and outside the region, including in the West.

- 2) It is likely that, with time, Daesh will become a more decentralized, amorphous organization operating in a more asymmetric fashion around the world. This could entail various dynamics:
- a. Some of its leaders and cadres might relocate to bordering countries. Jordan and Lebanon, with their massive Syrian refugee populations and large indigenous Salafist scenes, are likely to experience severe problems. But arguably even more worrisome is the situation in Turkey, where over the last few years Daesh and other jihadist groups have built an extensive network with very little interference from Turkish authorities. It should be noted that the Turkish government's crackdown after last year's coup has led to purges within the intelligence and law enforcement communities that have arguably weakened the country's counterterrorism capabilities.
  - b. Daesh might also rely more on its affiliates worldwide. The group has established official provinces (wilayat) in Libya, Afghanistan, Yemen, the Sinai Peninsula, Nigeria, the North Caucasus, and East Asia and small groups worldwide have pledged allegiance to Abu Bakr al Baghdadi, the group's leader and self-proclaimed caliph. Many of the regions where Daesh affiliates operate are ungoverned territories or, at best, rife with the conditions conducive to full-scale insurgencies. Clearly, varying local factors in each of these areas can drastically increase or reduce the chances of a regional Daesh resurgence, and the organization's devotion to each region in terms of strategy, resources, and ideological investment varies. However, a situation where Daesh invests considerable support in its affiliate organizations could escalate already simmering conflicts in several countries around the world and the group's ability to plan attacks from there.
  - c. Many Daesh operatives might establish clandestine networks in more politically stable countries in the region and engage in terrorist activities with the goal of destabilizing them. Tunisia, like several other North African countries, is particularly vulnerable to this risk because of the recent and unprecedented Caliphate-bound mobilization of its citizens. Gulf countries might also experience this blowback. In addition, Russia, the Caucasus, and various Central Asian countries are also areas of concern, especially considering the large number of foreign fighters they have provided to Daesh and the prominent role they have played on the battlefield.

#### THE WEST

In the context of this hearing, the threat to the West deserves a separate, more in-depth analysis. A critical concern for counterterrorism authorities is that Daesh members fleeing Syria and Iraq, particularly those holding Western passports, will travel to Europe and North America. While figures vary, the most reliable estimates suggest that 6,000 European and North American residents have joined Daesh in Iraq and Syria, with the FBI estimating 200–250 having traveled or attempted to travel from the United States. A significant number of these 6,000 will either a. die or be captured in Syria/Iraq b. be captured while trying to leave Syria/Iraq, or c. be arrested while entering Europe or North America. However, it is also equally clear that not all foreign fighters will meet any of these fates. Some will arrive in the West illegally or posing as refugees, as demonstrated by the path into Europe taken by some of the November 2015 Paris attackers. Some will return legally, often using their (real) Western passports.

Detecting returning foreign fighters is only one of the challenges facing Western counterterrorism officials. An entirely different, yet no less daunting challenge, is determining what to do with those identified upon return. Arresting them is the immediate, easy answer. The reality, however, is significantly more complicated. The experience of our British allies thus far is instructive and exemplifies the difficulties European countries have been experiencing in dealing with returning foreign fighters, although with different degrees of intensity (in that regard, it must be said that the United States appears to be better equipped to tackle the challenge). Recently, in fact, the Home Office disclosed that of the 400 British foreign fighters who have returned from Syria/Iraq only 54 have been convicted of an offence.<sup>1</sup>

What is returning authorities from arresting, prosecuting and convicting returning foreign fighters? It is mostly a legal matter, with lawmakers struggling to keep up with a constantly shifting threat environment. While legislations vary from country to country, they share some common problems. In some countries, joining a terrorist organization or fighting in a foreign conflict were not criminal offences at the time when most individuals traveled to Syria. Several countries have since introduced new laws which, however, cannot be retroactively applied. Even in countries where those behaviors have long constituted criminal offences, authorities experi-

ence enormous difficulties in gathering the appropriate evidence needed to build a strong criminal case. Having actionable intelligence may not be sufficient to meet the legal standard in court.

Not all returning foreign fighters will be interested in carrying out attacks, with some abandoning the ideology altogether. But some will, and sorting out who poses a real threat and who does not will be a daunting task. Therefore, returning foreign fighters, many of whom will be fervent believers, battle-hardened, armed with a rolodex of dangerous contacts, and equipped with the know-how to carry out attacks, are understandably seen as a significant security threat. And, indeed, the most lethal attack against the West in recent years, namely the November 2015 Paris attack, was carried out by a network of returning foreign fighters dispatched by Daesh.

Yet, an analysis of all recent jihadist-motivated attacks carried out in the West shows some noteworthy dynamics. A soon-to-be released report by the George Washington University's Program on Extremism, the Italian Institute for International Political Studies (ISPI) and the ICCT The Hague examined the 51 successful attacks carried out throughout Europe and North America from June 2014, following the declaration of the Caliphate, until June 2017. One interesting finding showed that of the 65 attackers responsible for 51 attacks, only 18% were known to have fought with the group in Iraq or Syria. Individuals who had not traveled to Daesh-controlled territory, including some with no connections to the group at all, conducted most of the attacks.

#### TYPES OF ATTACKS

The analysis of the 51 attacks carried out in the last three years also shows an important operational pattern that could, to some degree, indicate what may lie ahead. In fact, from an operational perspective the attacks can be divided into three macro-categories:

- a) terrorist attacks carried out by individuals acting under direct orders from Islamic State leadership: 8% of attacks;
- b) terrorist attacks carried out by individuals with no connections to the Islamic State or other jihadist groups, but were instead inspired by their message: 26% of attacks;
- c) terrorist attacks carried out by individuals who were somehow connected to the Islamic State or other jihadist groups but ultimately acted independently: 66% of attacks.

The first typology, terrorist attacks carried out by individuals acting under direct orders from the Islamic State's leadership, follows a model frequently utilized by al Qaeda throughout the 1990s and the 2000s. Osama bin Laden's organization selected individuals from its recruitment pool with characteristics which would have made them particularly suitable to carry out attacks in the West, trained and then dispatched them to complete their mission. After their departure, many planners maintained contact with the dispatched team, coordinating logistical matters and providing suggestions in case of unforeseen problems. Upon completion of the mission, al Qaeda would immediately claim responsibility, often through a so-called "martyrdom video" featuring the attackers explaining their motivations. The attacks of July 7, 2005 in London are the archetypal example of this externally directed attack approach.<sup>2</sup>

By the second half of 2014, as it became clear that the Islamic State was involved in planning attacks in the West, the debate on whether the group possessed al Qaeda's ability, sophistication, and patience to plan externally directed attacks raged among experts. The first attacks that had some connections to the group seemed to suggest it did not. They appeared to be the work of isolated individuals who possessed few of the skills and planning abilities of a more experienced terror cell. Therefore, many assumed that the group had focused all of its energy on the Middle Eastern front and, where the West was concerned, it was satisfied with haphazard attacks carried out by sympathizers.

Many of those assumptions were proven wrong on the night of November 13, 2015, when an Islamic State sleeper cell conducted three separate and near-simultaneous attacks in Paris. Roughly four months later, on March 22, 2016, the remnants of the very same cell conducted a series of coordinated suicide bombings on the Brussels metro system and airport. Not all of the details regarding the Paris and Brussels attacks are known today. Yet, with time, it has become clear that the attacks were conceived and planned abroad by a francophone unit within the Islamic State's foreign operations service, known as the Emni. The formation of this francophone faction within the Emni is likely the main reason why France and Bel-

gium have suffered a disproportionate number of attacks, as the members of the unit have leveraged their own personal contacts (both online and offline) in those two countries.

While their details are, at this stage, largely unknown, it appears that Daesh had planned additional complex and remotely controlled terrorist attacks in Europe (at the same time, there are no publicly available indications that similar operations have ever been planned in North America). Fortunately, these plots have all been thwarted, thanks largely to the improved levels of information sharing among intelligence agencies. The major question currently puzzling the counterterrorism community is whether the Islamic State, having suffered significant territorial losses and spending most of its energy on preventing more, has still maintained the ability to centrally plan sophisticated attacks.

In some cases, operational linkage to the Islamic State was uncovered by investigators months after the attack, but 26% of the attacks examined for the study appear to have been carried out by individuals whose connection to the Islamic State was merely ideological. In some cases, perpetrators belonging to this category leave messages declaring their allegiance to the Islamic State. Yet these individuals carry out the attacks without any form of support or even the knowledge of any individual linked to the Islamic State. Some of them might have at one time interacted, whether online or in the physical space, with members of the group. But once they carry out the attack, the group provides no operational support whatsoever, and the entirety of the planning and execution process is left to the perpetrator(s).

Some of the attacks carried out by individuals with no operational connections have been difficult to categorize as motivated solely by support for the Islamic State. In some cases, while perpetrators' sympathies for the Islamic State were clear, additional evidence suggests that their actions have been additionally motivated by: a. other ideologies, b. personal reasons, and/or c. psychological and psychiatric issues (note that these three factors, but often to a lesser extent, play a role also in the other two typologies).

One final necessary clarification regarding many of the attacks belonging to this category is that they do not seem to be motivated solely by support for the Islamic State, but by jihadist ideology writ large. The contemporary global jihadist movement is highly fragmented, with the various groups often switching between co-operation and outright confrontation. In particular, the rivalry between the Islamic State and al Qaeda, which was borne out of the Syrian conflict, has created fissures that have often transcended into violence between jihadist groups worldwide. Yet, when it comes to most aspiring jihadists in the West, particularly those who have not developed operational ties to an established group, rifts are of minor significance. It is therefore not surprising that many attacks were carried out by individuals who declared their devotion to a variety of jihadist figures and groups.

A quintessential (but hardly isolated) example of attackers' seemingly contradictory allegiances is the case of Omar Mateen, the man responsible for the June 12, 2016 mass shooting at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Florida that killed 49 and wounded 53 people.<sup>3</sup> During the attack, Mateen pledged allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and the Islamic State in an emergency call, and later Daesh media outlets claimed responsibility for the attack.<sup>4</sup> However, Mateen's loyalties were indicative of the "choosing and fusing" of ideologies often demonstrated by attackers without tangible connections to any group.<sup>5</sup> Mateen, despite his final pledge of allegiance, had previously expressed support for Daesh and Jabhat al-Nusra on social media, and also claimed to be a member of Hizbullah.<sup>6</sup> While changes in affiliation between Daesh and al-Nusra, two groups with generally similar ideologies but different strategies and leadership disputes are more common amongst Western jihadists, the Hizbullah claims put Mateen on both sides of the Sunni-Shi'a divide.

Like many other Western jihadists, Mateen was attracted to the broader jihadist ideology more than to a specific group. From a counterterrorism perspective, understanding, and eventually exploiting, the complex dynamics within the global jihadist movement is of paramount importance. However, those leadership fissures should not be overemphasized when it comes to the grassroots level, particularly in the West. Most aspiring jihadists simply want to fight jihad and regard squabbles between jihadist leaders as distant, confusing, annoying, and counterproductive. In many cases, they join or sympathize with a jihadist group not because they have a clear preference for one over the others, but rather because of chance encounters and logistical circumstances. Group affiliation is in most cases less important than identification, albeit to varying degrees, with the central tenets of Salafi-jihadist ideology.<sup>7</sup>

The majority (66%) of the attacks seen throughout the West over the last three years fall within a hybrid category, not externally directed but also not completely independent. Dynamics are at this stage difficult to assess, given the lack of detailed

information on many cases. However, several attacks appear to be crowd sourced, meaning they are carried out by individuals who possess some degree of operational connectivity to the Islamic State, but act with almost complete autonomy when carrying out the attack. This dynamic allows the Islamic State to obtain a high return in terms of publicity despite the low investment in resources. By the same token, perpetrators who associate themselves to the Islamic State amplify the propaganda value of their actions and boost their chances of being glorified within the global jihadist community.

Mounting evidence suggests that this hybrid dynamic has been further bolstered by the growth of the phenomenon of “virtual entrepreneurs”. The Islamic State’s virtual planners are individuals who, using social media and encrypted online messaging platforms, connect with would-be attackers in countries outside of Islamic State-held territory and guide them through the planning and execution of terrorist attacks.<sup>8</sup> By directing attacks from abroad, the Islamic State drastically expands its reach and its ability to manage and plan attacks overseas.<sup>9</sup>

The Islamic State’s virtual entrepreneurs are usually located in the territory the group holds, are skilled in the use of cyber resources, and have ties to the leadership of the organization. They are divided by nationality and language skills, and are tasked with identifying and grooming potential attackers who speak the same language online. The identification process for attackers includes virtual planners finding vocal supporters of the Islamic State on social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, initiating contact and conversation with them via encrypted messaging platforms like Telegram, SureSpot, Kik, and Whatsapp, and instilling them with the operational knowledge necessary to begin planning an attack.<sup>10</sup> Individuals like Rachid Kassim and Junaid Hussain in the French and English speaking scene respectively are perfect examples of virtual planners.

#### FUTURE SCENARIOS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As seen, a hypothetical demise of the Caliphate is not likely to mean that Daesh will disappear. Some members of the group will stay in Syria and Iraq and continue to fight. Others will export their violence to other areas, from ungoverned territories to urban centers, in other parts of the Middle East and North Africa, and the West.

The Daesh brand and the emotional appeal of its declared Caliphate are also unlikely to vanish any time soon. The existence of a territorial entity with a self-declared religious significance made Daesh the world’s most notorious jihadist group, somewhat eclipsing al Qaeda, and simultaneously allowed the group to establish a global network and plan operations worldwide. Although the loss of territory may undermine the legitimacy of the organization to some extent, the so-called virtual Caliphate ensures a future for Daesh. Despite critical challenges, their digital efforts may rekindle commitment and support for the group’s cause among sympathizers worldwide and prompt some to carry out terrorist attacks in its name.

It should also be noted that various indications also point towards a resurgent al Qaeda. Despite its uneasy relationship with al Qaeda Central, Jabhat Fateh al Sham (previously known as Jabhat al Nusra), has quietly but surely carved out a de-facto mini-state in parts of Syria. Furthermore, al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) has been experiencing ups and downs during the ongoing Yemen war, and while it no longer controls a sizeable region (as it did at some point), it is still a vibrant branch of the global organization actively planning attacks against the West. There are also rumors of a revamped leadership structure within al Qaeda Central. While all these dynamics need to be carefully assessed, it would be erroneous to treat al Qaeda as obsolete.

The counterterrorism community is currently debating what the relationship between a declining Daesh and a seemingly resurgent al Qaeda is and will be. Over the last few years the competition between the two groups has played out on a global scale. It is not currently clear whether these dynamics will continue or whether, as some have argued, the two groups, having a common history, ideology and aims, will reconcile their differences, work together, and even merge. It is also likely that these dynamics might play out in different ways in different places. Understanding and eventually exploiting the complex and ever-fluctuating chasms within the global jihadist movement is crucial.

What is clear though is that what we have faced, are facing and will be facing in the future is not a group or a collection groups, but, rather, an ideological movement, namely the global jihadist movement. This movement is not homogenous but, rather, plagued by divisions and rivalries. Ultimately however, it has a clear vision and is guided by a strong doctrine. Daesh is just the latest and arguably most successful incarnation of this movement. Daesh’s vicissitudes are hugely important in

shaping the future of this movement. But even its hypothetical demise is unlikely to cause the end of the global jihadist movement.

It is exactly because of the paramount importance of the ideological component, that in briefly providing my recommendations on how to better prevent terrorist attacks worldwide and in the United States, I will begin with the centrality of tackling the ideology that motivates Daesh, al Qaeda, their affiliates, and unaffiliated jihadis worldwide. Over the last few years we have been somewhat timid in fighting this admittedly daunting battle. I do see encouraging signs from the Middle East, where various countries (even some that previously had not recognized the problem or even contributed to its expansion) have engaged in a full-fledged ideological battle against not just Daesh and jihadist ideology, but the broader Islamist ideology as well. Likely, these efforts will not bear fruit for a number of years as the jihadist ideology has been sustained for and solidified by countless socioeconomic, religious, and political factors. And while this complex battle has multiple, overlapping layers, it is noteworthy that most Middle Eastern countries recognize that religious engagement is one of its key aspects.

At the tactical level, more immediate results can be achieved through a combination of international and local efforts. Of the many, let me emphasize four:

- Prevent foreign fighters from leaving Syria/Iraq. This goal could be better achieved through aggressive military tactics that prevent Daesh fighters from fleeing the battlefields and from sealing Syria and Iraq's external borders. Turkey's role in these efforts is crucial.
- Improve information sharing among intelligence and law enforcement agencies (internationally but also domestically within each country). In an ideal world, the goal would be the creation of a global database of foreign fighters and their milieus which countries would update in real time. However, in reality, countless factors, including political rivalries and bureaucratic sluggishness make information sharing, even among close allies, very challenging.
- Increase resources for law enforcement and intelligence agencies. From the Paris attacks to, more recently, the London Bridge van ramming, from the San Bernardino shooting to the Manchester suicide bombing, the vast majority of terrorist attacks carried out in the West over the last three years were perpetrated by individuals who were known to authorities. In most cases these individuals had appeared on the authorities' radar only peripherally and were not of high priority. One of the main reasons why officials cannot conduct further investigations and surveillance on known extremists who have not yet crossed the threshold of criminally relevant behavior is the limited resources they possess in order to keep tabs on a burgeoning number of jihadist sympathizers. An increase in resources will not constitute a silver bullet but will allow authorities to expand the number of known extremists it can monitor.
- Implement Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) initiatives. As it is now almost universally accepted throughout the counterterrorism community, repressive methods alone are unlikely to defeat terrorism. Whether they entail counter-messaging campaigns, grassroots activities or tailored interventions aimed at de-radicalizing specific individuals (an especially important endeavor when trying to tackle the issue of returning foreign fighters), CVE activities are a necessary complement to traditional counterterrorism work. They are hardly infallible and indeed many need to be perfected (and some, to be honest, completely scrapped). CVE programs will not always work perfectly, and realistically, the goal of CVE should be threat reduction, not threat elimination. However, it has also become increasingly clear that CVE needs to be part of any comprehensive counterterrorism strategy.

Chairman Corker, Ranking Member Cardin, esteemed members of the Committee, these are just some initial thoughts on this very important and complex matter. I thank you again for this opportunity and look forward to your questions.

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#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Robert Mendick and Robert Verkaik, "Only one in eight jihadists returning to UK is caught and convicted," *Telegraph*, May 21, 2016.

<sup>2</sup> "Report of the Official Account of the Bombings in London on 7th July 2005." 2006. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/11-05-06-narrative.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Steve Visser, "Orlando Killer Repeatedly Referenced ISIS," *CNN*, September 24, 2016.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Paige Pascarelli, "Ideology Á La Carte: Why Lone Actor Terrorists Choose and Fuse Ideologies," *Lawfare*, October 2, 2016.

<sup>6</sup> Adam Taylor, "Omar Mateen May Not Have Understood the Difference between ISIS, Al-Qaeda and Hezbollah," *Washington Post*, June 13, 2016.

<sup>7</sup>Sarah Gilkes, Not Just the Caliphate: Non-Islamic State-Related Jihadist Terrorism in America, GW Program on Extremism, 2016.

<sup>8</sup>Alexander Meleagrou-Hitchens and Seamus Hughes, "The Threat to the United States from the Islamic State's Virtual Entrepreneurs," CTC Sentinel 10 (3), 2017.

<sup>9</sup>Daveed Gartenstein-Ross and Madeleine Blackman, "ISIL's Virtual Planners: A Critical Terrorist Innovation," War on the Rocks, January 4, 2017.

<sup>10</sup>Meleagrou-Hitchens and Hughes, "The Threat to the United States from the Islamic State's Virtual Entrepreneurs"

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much. That was very, very helpful.

Go ahead, sir.

**STATEMENT OF DANIEL BYMAN, PH.D., PROFESSOR AND SENIOR ASSOCIATE DEAN, GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF FOREIGN SERVICE; SENIOR FELLOW, CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST POLICY, BROOKINGS INSTITUTION, WASHINGTON, DC**

Dr. BYMAN. Chairman Corker, Ranking Member Cardin, members of this distinguished committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify.

In the past, the Islamic State focused on protecting its territory and trying to expand it. As it has been hit hard in the last 2 years, the growth in international terrorism is, unfortunately, somewhat predictable. This is a sign that the organization is under pressure, and we should expect continued attempts at terrorism as the organization seeks to stay relevant and as it tries to exercise a certain degree of revenge against those who have attacked it and those it blames for the loss of the caliphate.

One bit of good news in all this horror is that attacks on the United States have been less than many people anticipated. Several factors explain this, in my judgment.

One is simply distance. It is harder to get to the United States from Syria and vice versa, and that distance helps protect the United States.

Another is the relatively small number of Americans who sympathize with the Islamic State or its ideology compared to many of our allies.

A third is an American Muslim community that is generally well-integrated and cooperates regularly with law enforcement. Many plots are disrupted because this community works closely with the FBI and police.

The aggressive campaign abroad, I will single out the drone campaign, has also made it harder for the Islamic State to plot sophisticated attacks on the United States.

And last has been aggressive security service action in the United States. The FBI, at times, catches individuals whose plans might have gone nowhere, but they also stop some potential attacks before they manifest.

One thing that is often ignored is that the Islamic State poses a direct danger also to U.S. interests in the Middle East. The Islamic State has made a home in warring or ungoverned areas in the Middle East, exploiting conflict there. And the wars and associated terrorism, and decreased stability in the Middle East, can harm U.S. interests there.

The United States, unfortunately, is not fully prepared for the group's defeat or the loss of its territory in the caliphate. But the

Islamic State is preparing for this already. It has quite publicly told its followers that it is preparing to go underground, and it calls up its efforts at the end of the last decade in Iraq where, in response to the success of the U.S.-led surge, it went underground, conducted a campaign of assassination and subversion, and was able to wage, over time, a successful insurgency and then come roaring back when the moment came.

Our current allies in Iraq and Syria at the local level and the national level in Iraq are not prepared to govern. They are not prepared to conduct counterinsurgency operations on their own. And, indeed, in the long term, it is very unclear who exactly these allies will be, as the durability of the U.S. coalition in both countries is uncertain. And as my colleague has pointed out, it is unclear if the United States or its allies are prepared for the likely return of many foreign fighters.

President Trump has continued several positive counterterrorism policies but also undertaken several initiatives that risk aggravating the terrorism problem.

The administration has improved relations with important allies like Saudi Arabia and continued and even accelerated the military campaign begun under President Obama, which is driving the Islamic State from its strongholds. However, President Trump's blanket embrace of the Saudi position in the Middle East will heighten sectarianism, which feeds the Islamic State.

In addition, the administration's anti-Muslim rhetoric, and policies that alienate some American Muslims, increase the risk of radicalization, and also discourage cooperation between these communities and police and intelligence services. The President's criticism of key allies in moments of crisis, such as his public criticism of London's mayor as that city grieved after a terrorist attack, miss opportunities to bring our allies closer together under U.S. leadership.

One area where our country needs to make broader progress, and this crosses administrations, is institutionalization. Since 9/11, the executive branch has been the one executing counterterrorism policy and designing it, with some modification by the courts. Under Presidents Bush and then President Obama, new and controversial counterterrorism instruments—targeted killings, aggressive FBI sting operations, detention without trial—they became the center of U.S. counterterrorism with no congressional or little congressional input. Congress needs to participate in this policy process to ensure that U.S. counterterrorism is on a lasting footing.

Last, the United States needs to improve public resilience when it comes to counterterrorism. It remains easy for a terrorist group to sow fear in the United States. And the current public expectation that there will be no terrorist attacks is unrealistic. There were significant attacks on U.S. forces around the world, U.S. civilians, under President Reagan, and he is correctly seen as strong on counterterrorism.

We should return to the recognition that some terrorism is likely and that a small attack will not damage American morale.

Thank you for this opportunity.

[The prepared statement of Dr. Byman follows:]

## PREPARED STATEMENT OF DANIEL BYMAN

Chairman Corker, Ranking Member Cardin, members of this distinguished committee, and committee staff, thank you for the opportunity to testify.

The terrorism threat posed by the Islamic State is real but at times exaggerated and even more frequently misunderstood. From the Islamic State's peak in 2015, the group suffered numerous setbacks, losing much of its territory in Syria and Iraq while most of its so-called "provinces" elsewhere in the Muslim world also lost territory or stagnated. The Islamic State, however, has demonstrated the capability to launch a range of deadly terrorist attacks in Europe, Asia, and elsewhere, some orchestrated by the group's senior leaders and others carried out by low-level supporters. "Lone Wolves," individuals embracing the Islamic State's call for violence but largely acting alone, have also attacked the United States. Fortunately, the United States has proven less vulnerable than many of its allies due to its geographic distance from the conflict, the small number of Americans who sympathize with the group, an American-Muslim community that works well with law enforcement, disruption of the Islamic State's infrastructure abroad, and aggressive security service action at home. Nevertheless, we should expect at least some level of jihadist terrorism against the United States and especially Europe in the years to come.

The Islamic State poses a direct danger to U.S. interests in the Middle East. The Islamic State has made a home in warring or ungoverned areas of the greater Middle East, exploiting conflict and weak governance in Afghanistan, Egypt, Libya, and elsewhere. The Islamic State and other jihadist groups feed on civil wars, making them more brutal, more deadly, and harder to resolve. These wars and their associated terrorism further decrease stability in the Middle East, posing a threat to regional U.S. allies and U.S. interests.

Although U.S.-led advances against the Islamic State's base in Iraq and Syria will likely continue, the United States is not fully prepared for the group's defeat. After losing control of key territory, the Islamic State may repeat its previous actions when the U.S.-led surge brought its predecessor organization in Iraq to the edge of defeat: go underground, disrupt politics in these countries, wage an insurgency, and then come roaring back. Current local allies in Iraq and Syria are unprepared to govern and conduct effective counterinsurgency operations, while the very identity of long-term U.S. allies are unclear as Washington lacks a durable coalition in Iraq, let alone in Syria. Nor are American regional or Western allies prepared for the likely diaspora of returning foreign fighters.

President Donald J. Trump has continued several positive counterterrorism policies but also undertaken initiatives that risk aggravating the terrorism problem. The administration has improved relations with important allies like Saudi Arabia and continued the military campaign that began under former President Barack Obama, which is steadily driving the Islamic State from its strongholds in Iraq and Syria. However, the administration's anti-Muslim rhetoric and policies will likely alienate some American Muslims, increasing the risk of radicalization and discouraging cooperation between these communities and police and intelligence services. In addition, the administration's blanket embrace of the Saudi position in the Middle East will heighten sectarianism, which feeds the Islamic State. Finally, declines in foreign aid, the State Department budget, and national security personnel diminish U.S. diplomacy and the United States' ability to resolve conflicts, which are necessary for fighting the Islamic State and preventing it from spreading to new areas.

The remainder of my statement has three sections. I first provide an overview of the Islamic State threat and why I judge the danger to the U.S. homeland to be real but manageable but the danger to be Europe and especially the Middle East far greater. Second, I describe several problems that I believe will likely manifest in the current administration's unfolding counterterrorism policy. In the third section, I offer recommendations for U.S. counterterrorism policy.

## UNDERSTANDING THE THREAT

The Islamic State poses a real but manageable threat to the U.S. homeland. Since the September 11th attacks, 95 Americans have died in jihadist-related attacks in the United States. The two deadliest attacks, in San Bernardino in 2015 and in Orlando in 2016, which together killed 63 Americans, involved individuals who claimed some allegiance to the Islamic State but acted independently of the group—often referred to as "Lone Wolves."

Although any death from terrorism is unacceptable, it is worth noting several positive aspects of these numbers. First, the number of deaths—95—is far lower than many experts, both inside and outside of government, predicted. Second, the individuals involved in both the Orlando and San Bernardino attacks did not travel

abroad to fight with the Islamic State, were not controlled by Islamic State leaders, and their violence seemed to mix personal and psychological issues with traditional terrorism, suggesting they might have embraced violence for other reasons had the Islamic State not existed. Third, although their targets—a workplace holiday party in a community center and a gay nightclub—show they might strike anywhere, they are hardly the high-profile, well-guarded targets that gained Al Qaeda popularity. Fourth, deaths from terrorism and terrorist plots on the U.S. homeland in the post-9/11 era are often below levels for the pre-9/11 era.

Multiple factors likely explain this relatively low level of violence. First, senior U.S. officials overestimated the number of radicals in the United States after 9/11 when they spoke of thousands of Al Qaeda terrorists in the United States.<sup>1</sup> Second, the American Muslim community regularly works with law enforcement, leading to many arrests. As former FBI Director James Comey explained, “They do not want people committing violence, either in their community or in the name of their faith, and so some of our most productive relationships are with people who see things and tell us things who happen to be Muslim.”<sup>2</sup> Almost half of all tips on potential extremist individuals come from the American Muslim community.<sup>3</sup> (Indeed, a member of the local Muslim community reported the Pulse nightclub shooter to the FBI before the attack.) Additionally, U.S. efforts abroad, notably targeting terrorist leaders in their sanctuaries, exacerbates the leaders’ ability to organize, train, and plot attacks, particularly “spectaculars” that require years to plan and orchestrate. This disruption also hinders the group from accessing the United States. Finally, the massive increase in funding and aggressiveness of the FBI and foreign-oriented intelligence agencies enabled a broader effort to disrupt potential attackers, foreign fighters, and other radicals. Global intelligence cooperation in particular resulted in the identification and disruption of numerous potential terrorist plots. Similarly, the FBI’s efforts at home, while at times leading to arrests of individuals who had little or no chance of conducting an attack, led to the early disruption of some plots that might have killed many people.

Europe presents a grimmer situation, however, as demonstrated by recent attacks in London, Manchester, Nice, Paris, and elsewhere. In Europe, there are more radicalized Muslims relative to their overall population, as suggested by the dramatically higher number of foreign fighters from European states relative to their populations. Indeed, if we were to count only European Muslims as citizens (i.e. to focus on the relative percentage of Muslims radicalized), Europe would have a higher number of foreign fighters in Syria per capita than any Arab country.<sup>4</sup> In addition, many European Muslims integrate poorly into their broader communities, which discourages them from cooperating with intelligence and law enforcement services. Furthermore, jihadis and returning foreign fighters from Iraq and Syria can more easily travel to Europe than the United States based on distance alone. Finally, European intelligence services vary in skill: some, including France and the United Kingdom, are highly skilled while others, such as Belgium, are under-resourced and less capable of responding to terrorism threats.

Even in Europe, however, the situation is often less dire than commonly portrayed. Europe experienced considerable acts of terrorism in the pre-9/11 era. By most analyses, the European terrorism problem in the 1970s and 1980s was significantly worse than it is today. State sponsors like Iran and Libya, nationalist groups like the Provisional Irish Republican Army and Basque separatists, and left-wing groups like Greece’s November 17 all carried out numerous attacks that killed hundreds of Europeans. Indeed, the biggest terrorist attack in the modern era in Europe occurred in the pre-9/11 era: the bombing of Pan Am 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland in 1988 that killed 270 people.<sup>5</sup>

The Islamic State, Al Qaeda, and the broader jihadist movement pose a yet bigger threat in the Middle East. These groups did not cause the civil wars in Iraq, Libya, Syria, and Yemen, but they have exacerbated them, transforming local struggles based on parochial grievances to wars with a strong jihadist component. In addition, the Islamic State introduced especially bloody and horrific tactics, such as beheadings, and enforced a grim and brutal interpretation of Islamic law in areas that they control. Furthermore, the group uses massive amounts of terrorist-type tactics in war: they claimed over 100 suicide attacks in Iraq and Syria in May 2017 alone. The Islamic State’s horrific violence complicates negotiations as they are not an acceptable voice at the negotiating table yet remain a force on the ground. In addition, they further complicate negotiations by trying to regionalize or internationalize local conflicts. For example, the Islamic State’s province in Gaza downed a Russian airplane in 2015, and the central Islamic State reportedly carried out terrorist attacks in Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Lebanon. In addition to being deadly, these attacks often degrade politics in these countries, lead to additional meddling in the

Syria conflict, or otherwise worsen regional stability and hurt U.S. interests in the region.

The Islamic State's loss of territory in Iraq and Syria has dramatic implications for the terrorism threat. In the long-term, this loss of ground is good news and will deprive it of a haven in which to recruit, organize, and plan attacks. In addition, part of the group's appeal was that it successfully defied the world to "create" a true Islamic State—claims that are now easy to refute. Not surprisingly, the number of foreign volunteers joining the group plummeted in the last year, and its budget, which relies heavily on "taxing" local territory, also declined.<sup>6</sup>

This loss of territory and resources, however, increases the Islamic State's desire to conduct international terrorism. The group has long prioritized creating, maintaining, and expanding an Islamic State; but as this goal becomes impossible, it will require high-profile actions to stay relevant. International terrorism offers a means to strike its enemies and prove to potential supporters that the group remains active and deserves their backing. Thus, it is unsurprising that the group has conducted more international attacks as it has suffered setbacks and shifted from urging its followers to act at home instead of traveling to Syria. This pattern may also apply to its so-called provinces that might focus internationally as their local ambitions fail.

Increased "Lone Wolf" attacks are particularly likely. The trend towards "Lone Wolf" attacks has grown: although the absolute number of attacks remain low, the scholar Ramon Spaaij found that the number of "Lone Wolf" attacks since the 1970s grew nearly 50 percent in the United States and by more than 400 percent in the other countries he surveyed.<sup>7</sup> The Internet and social media explain part of this increase as both aid the Islamic State in inspiring individuals to act in its name. In addition, as "New York Times" reporter Rukmini Callimachi discovered, the Islamic State used social media to provide at least limited guidance to many attackers overseas, bridging the historic gap between a top-down orchestrated attack and a "Lone Wolf" strike.<sup>8</sup> Finally, would-be fighters who do not travel pose a danger: according to one 2015 study of the terrorist plots in the United States, 28 percent of returned foreign fighters participated in a plot, but a staggering 60 percent of those who considered but did not attempt to travel became involved in a terrorist plot.<sup>9</sup>

Although the Orlando attack suggests that "Lone Wolf" attacks can be bloody, most "Lone Wolves" are incompetent; they are unlikely to succeed compared to attacks by trained foreign fighters who return to their home countries.<sup>10</sup> But "Lone Wolves" have a strategic impact by altering politics in the United States and Europe, thus shattering relations between Muslim and non-Muslim communities so vital to counterterrorism and to democracy itself. "Lone Wolf" attacks increase Islamophobia in the West. After attacks in Paris and San Bernardino, concerns about terrorism spiked.<sup>11</sup> In the weeks following the Paris attacks in November 2015, London's Metropolitan Police Service announced that attacks targeting Muslims had tripled.<sup>12</sup> Meanwhile in the United States, assaults against Muslims have increased to nearly 9/11 era levels according to analysis by the Pew Research Center based on FBI crime statistics.<sup>13</sup>

This Islamophobia also can begin a dangerous circle. As communities become suspect, they withdraw into themselves and become less trustful of law enforcement, which results in providing fewer tips. In contrast, if a community has good relations with the police and society, fewer grievances exist for terrorists to exploit and the community is more likely to point out malefactors in their midst. Even though he was never arrested, the attacker in Orlando came to the FBI's attention because a local Muslim was concerned by his behavior and reported him.<sup>14</sup>

Such problems risk fundamental changes in politics and undermine liberal democracy. Far-right movements are growing stronger in several European countries. In the United States, Islamophobia and fears of terrorism—despite the lower level of attacks on U.S. soil than anticipated since the 9/11 attacks—have fueled the rise of anti-immigrant politics.

#### ASSESSING CHANGES IN THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION

In several important areas, the Trump administration continued the policies of its predecessors. The administration has continued the military campaign against Islamic State forces in Iraq and Syria, although it appears to have slightly loosened restrictions on military commanders and deployed additional forces to Syria, nearly doubling the number of previous forces in the fight for Raqqa.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, it maintained the coalition of states and local actors that the Obama administration cobbled together. Furthermore, the aggressive global intelligence campaign begun under President George W. Bush and continued under Obama remains robust. Together such efforts have hindered Islamic State operations and steadily shrunk its

territory. In addition, the group's various provinces have failed to expand and suffered significant blows, as in the case of its most successful province in Libya.

In his first few months in office, however, the President has taken several steps that may impede the struggle against jihadist terrorism. First, in his campaign rhetoric and through actions like Executive Order 13769 (the so-called "Muslim ban"), the Trump administration is demonizing American Muslims and damaging relations between religious communities—a traditional source of American strength, pride, and values. Such actions increase the allure of the Islamic State and other groups that claim that the West is at war with Islam. In addition, these actions increase the likelihood that Muslim communities will fear the police, FBI, and other government institutions, and thus be less likely to cooperate with them.

Overseas, President Trump embraced the Saudi perspective on the Middle East. Saudi Arabia is an important counterterrorism partner, and the United States shares several vital interests with the Saudi regime. Relations with the Kingdom became strained under Obama, and President Trump's efforts to strengthen ties should be commended. However, the Saudi government continues to fund an array of preachers and institutions that promulgate an extreme version of Islam, enabling the Islamic State to recruit and otherwise gain support. In addition, Saudi Arabia promotes an anti-Shi'a agenda that harms regional stability and fosters sectarianism, a key recruiting tool of the Islamic State. More broadly, the disdain for human rights as a foreign policy value adopted by the administration advances the argument that the United States cares little about the well-being of ordinary Muslims and is uncritically on the side of the dictatorial regimes in the Arab world.<sup>16</sup>

At home, administration officials appear highly skeptical of programs to counter violent extremism (CVE). Many such programs are based on weak data and untested theories and demand scrutiny and oversight.<sup>17</sup> However, many of these programs deserve continued support because they offer an often cheap and valuable tool to work with communities and could identify and stop potential terrorists. In addition, the administration proposed dramatic cuts to the already-small foreign aid budget and has not staffed the Department of State, the civilian arm of the Department of Defense, and other key agencies. As a result, the U.S. ability to use a whole-of-government approach to combat terrorism is diminished.

Initial signs suggest that the Trump administration would respond poorly to a terrorist attack on U.S. soil. At a time when a president should provide steady leadership, President Trump's record suggests he might speak or tweet too quickly, without assembling the necessary facts or listening to the views of his advisors. His response to the London attacks earlier in June needlessly aggravated U.S.-U.K. relations at a time when allies should come together. The President has lost credibility among many Americans, which will cause the public to be skeptical of his claims on the nature of any terrorist attack and necessary subsequent actions in the aftermath of an attack.<sup>18</sup> He may seek broad detentions or surveillance or act otherwise in ways that might exacerbate the problem in the long-term. After 9/11, the United States detained over one thousand Muslims, gaining almost no useful intelligence but harming relations with the community. As Daniel Benjamin, a former senior counterterrorism official, recalled, "Repairing the damage from that crackdown took years."<sup>19</sup>

#### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BETTER FIGHTING THE ISLAMIC STATE

One of the biggest challenges for the United States is preparing for the military defeat of the Islamic State. The Islamic State is preparing to go underground and wage an insurgency, but it will nevertheless be diminished in both stature and capabilities. Instead of relaxing pressure, the United States must redouble its efforts. This will require crafting a sustainable coalition of local allies in Iraq and Syria that demands resources, skill, and high-level engagement.

I have long advocated training allied forces, but this must be understood as a limited solution rather than a cure-all. In theory, training allies seems a Goldilocks answer to many policy questions: it is relatively low-cost, it minimizes direct risk to U.S. forces, and it helps reduce terrorism in the long-term when newly capable allies can police their own territory. Yet especially in the Middle East, these efforts often fail. Despite spending nearly \$300 million a year on training programs in Iraq, Syria, and elsewhere, U.S.-trained forces have often crumbled in the face of the adversary.<sup>20</sup> Regime corruption, divided societies, politicized militaries, and other problems plague the region, and U.S. training can only move the needle slightly.<sup>21</sup> Limited progress is better than no progress, but training programs must be paired with other policies.

The United States also must adopt a broader conception of counterterrorism, recognizing the link between jihadist terrorist groups and civil wars. Resolving these

wars is a strategic as well as a humanitarian imperative. Programs for conflict resolution and sustained U.S.-led diplomacy are vital to ameliorate the effects of civil wars. The United States must also support allies on the front line that are vulnerable to jihadist meddling, like Jordan, as well as strengthen nascent democracies that have a significant jihadist problem, like Tunisia.

Many of the Islamic State's foreign fighters are likely to try to disperse. Some may go to Islamic State provinces, while others will go to weakly governed states, such as Lebanon, and worsen civil strife there. Still other foreign fighters may try to return to their homes in Europe, Central Asia, and the Arab world. Washington should coordinate an international response to identify and arrest these fighters. In addition, the United States should identify "best practices" of all aspects of the foreign fighter problem, including: programs to dissuade individuals from traveling in the first place, intelligence to identify fighters before and while they travel, and security service capacity for when these fighters return. In addition, the proper laws are necessary to govern appropriate action (and to avoid overreacting). Each country should be evaluated according to this checklist, and potential shortfalls—legal, political, strategic, and so on—should be assessed.

"Lone Wolves" cannot be stopped completely, but their numbers can be reduced and the resulting threat diminished. One of the most important measures involves keeping "Lone Wolves" lonely: the less "Lone Wolves" can interact with potential co-conspirators, especially dangerous groups that provide direction and training, the less dangerous they will be. As such, intelligence gathering and arrests of suspected cell leaders and targeting terrorist command and control via drone strikes play an essential role in isolating "Lone Wolves."

The Islamic State's heavy reliance on social media to publicize its message and share information with recruits is a vulnerability as well as a benefit for the group. U.S. intelligence should continue to exploit social media to identify potential group members and to disrupt their activities.<sup>22</sup> Such monitoring is particularly important to identify potential "Lone Wolves" or individuals without a direct international connection, as online operatives may encourage them or they may post their intentions online as a form of bragging and belonging.

One significant problem is institutionalization. Since 9/11, the executive branch has solely executed counterterrorism policy, with some modification by the courts. One branch of government, perhaps the most important in the long-term, has been conspicuously absent under both parties' leadership: the U.S. Congress. Under both Bush and Obama, new and controversial counterterrorism instruments—targeted killings, increased domestic surveillance, aggressive FBI sting operations, detention without trial, and so on—moved to the center of U.S. counterterrorism efforts without significant Congressional input. In addition, the United States is bombing the Islamic State in both Iraq and Syria with only dubious legal justification.<sup>23</sup>

The dearth of public debate and legislation, regardless of one's opinion about the above policies, has created the current environment, where either government lawyers engage in legalistic gymnastics to justify programs or operations become unnecessarily restricted for lack of clear authority. The proper participation of Congress in the policy process will put the executive branch and the courts on a sounder footing and ensure longer-term planning for programs to properly develop.

Resilience is another area of failure. The rise of the Islamic State and its high-profile atrocities have fostered the perception that the terrorist threat to the U.S. homeland has skyrocketed despite evidence to the contrary. It remains easy for a terrorist group or even some lucky amateurs to sow fear and disrupt the nation with even minor attacks—the Boston Marathon bombings, which killed three people, resulted in the shutdown of an entire metropolitan area impacting the whole country. Since 9/11, protecting the U.S. homeland from mass casualty terrorism is an understandable priority by which every president should be judged. But the post-9/11 standard is not simply to avoid mass casualty attacks but rather to stop all attacks on Americans everywhere—an impossibly high bar. For today's Americans, this high bar seems obvious, but it was not the standard for previous presidents: President Ronald Reagan suffered no major political penalty (and people rightly perceive him as tough on terrorism) despite Hizballah attacks on U.S. Marines and diplomats in Lebanon that killed hundreds and the death of 270 people from Libya's downing of Pam Am 103 in 1988. The current American public will not accept that small attacks are difficult to prevent and that a low level of terrorism at home demonstrates success, not failure.

It is my hope that hearings such as these can both identify counterterrorism weaknesses that must be corrected and also educate the public that even the best counterterrorism policies cannot completely end this scourge.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>United Press International, "U.S. Exposes al-Qaeda Sleeper Cells from New York to Florida to L.A.," *Newsmax*, October 31, 2002, accessed June 3, 2017, <http://www.newsmax.com/Pre-2008/U-SExposes-al-Qaeda-Sleeper/2002/10/31/id/668156/>.

<sup>2</sup>Kristina Cooke and Joseph Ax, "U.S. Officials Say American Muslims Do Report Extremist Threats," *Reuters*, June 16, 2016, accessed June 3, 2017, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-florida-shooting-cooperation-idUSKCN0Z213U>.

<sup>3</sup>Daniel Benjamin, "What Comes after the Next Terrorist Attack," *The Wall Street Journal*, February 10, 2017, accessed June 3, 2017, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/what-comes-after-the-next-terrorist-attack-1486740713>.

<sup>4</sup>Clint Watts, "Beyond Syria and Iraq, the Islamic State's HR Files Illuminate Dangerous Trends," *War on the Rocks*, June 1, 2016, accessed June 3, 2017, <https://warontherocks.com/2016/06/beyond-syria-and-iraq-the-islamic-states-hr-files-illuminate-dangerous-trends/>.

<sup>5</sup>The Data Team, "Terrorist Atrocities in Western Europe," *The Economist*, March 23, 2017, accessed June 3, 2016, <http://www.economist.com/blogs/graphicdetail/2017/03/terrorism-timeline>.

<sup>6</sup>Martin Chulov, Jamie Grierson, and Jon Swaine, "ISIS faces exodus of foreign fighters as its 'caliphate' crumbles," *The Guardian*, April 26, 2017, accessed June 3, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/apr/26/isis-exodus-foreign-fighters-caliphate-crumbles>.

<sup>7</sup>Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, "What Does the Recent Spate of Lone Wolf Terrorist Attacks Mean? War on the Rocks," *War on the Rocks*, October 27, 2014, accessed June 3, 2017, <https://warontherocks.com/2014/10/what-does-the-recent-spate-of-lone-wolf-terrorist-attacks-mean/>.

<sup>8</sup>Rukmini Callimachi, "Not 'Lone Wolves' After All: How ISIS Guides World's Terror Plots from Afar," *The New York Times*, February 4, 2017, accessed June 3, 2017, [https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/04/world/asia/isis-messaging-app-terror-plot.html?\\_r=1](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/04/world/asia/isis-messaging-app-terror-plot.html?_r=1).

<sup>9</sup>Michael Jensen, Patrick James, and Herbert Tinsley, "Overview: Profiles of Individual Radicalization in the United States-Foreign Fighters (PIRUS-FF)" (College Park, MD: START, 2016), accessed June 3, 2017, [https://www.start.umd.edu/sites/default/files/publications/local\\_attachments/START\\_PIRUS-FF\\_InfographicSeries\\_April2016\\_0.pdf](https://www.start.umd.edu/sites/default/files/publications/local_attachments/START_PIRUS-FF_InfographicSeries_April2016_0.pdf).

<sup>10</sup>Thomas Hegghammer, "Should I Stay or Should I Go? Explaining Variation in Western Jihadists' Choice Between Domestic and Foreign Fighting," *American Political Science Review* (February 2013): 1–15, accessed June 3, 2017, [http://hegghammer.com/\\_files/Hegghammer\\_-\\_Should\\_I\\_stay\\_or\\_should\\_I\\_go.pdf](http://hegghammer.com/_files/Hegghammer_-_Should_I_stay_or_should_I_go.pdf).

<sup>11</sup>Justin McCarthy, "Worry About Terror Attacks in U.S. High, but Not Top Concern," *Gallup*, March 23, 2016, accessed June 3, 2017, [http://www.gallup.com/poll/190253/worry-terror-attacks-high-not-top-concern.aspx?g\\_source=position1&g\\_medium=related&g\\_campaign=tiles](http://www.gallup.com/poll/190253/worry-terror-attacks-high-not-top-concern.aspx?g_source=position1&g_medium=related&g_campaign=tiles).

<sup>12</sup>Aisha Gani, "Targeting of London Muslims Triples after Paris attacks," *The Guardian*, December 4, 2015, accessed June 3, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2015/dec/04/attacks-against-london-muslims-triple-in-wake-of-paris-attacks>.

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<sup>15</sup>Michael R. Gordon, "U.S. Is Sending 400 More Troops to Syria," *New York Times*, March 9, 2017, accessed June 5, 2017, [https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/09/world/middleeast/us-troops-syria.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/09/world/middleeast/us-troops-syria.html?_r=0).

<sup>16</sup>Rex W. Tillerson, "Remarks to U.S. Department of State Employees," (speech, Washington DC, May 3, 2017), Department of State, accessed June 4, 2017, <https://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2017/05/270620.htm>.

<sup>17</sup>See J.M. Berger, "Making CVE Work: A Focused Approach Based on Process Disruption," *International Centre for Counter-Terrorism—The Hague* (May 2016), <http://icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/J.-M.-Berger-Making-CVE-Work-A-Focused-Approach-Based-on-Process-Disruption-.pdf>.

<sup>18</sup>Jim Norman, "Majority in U.S. No Longer Thinks Trump Keeps His Promises," *Gallup*, April 17, 2017, accessed June 4, 2017, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/208640/majority-no-longer-thinks-trump-keeps-promises.aspx>.

<sup>19</sup>Gartenstein-Ross, "What Does the Recent Spate of Lone Wolf Terrorist Attacks Mean?"

<sup>20</sup>U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Counterterrorism: DOD Should Enhance Management of and Reporting on Its Global Train and Equip Program*, GAO-16-368 (Washington, D.C., 2016), accessed June 3, 2017, <http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-16-368>.

<sup>21</sup>Daniel Byman, "Downbound Training," *Lawfare*, November 28, 2016, accessed June 3, 2017, <https://www.lawfareblog.com/downbound-training>.

<sup>22</sup>Daniel Byman and Jeremy Shapiro, "We Shouldn't Stop Terrorists from Tweeting," *The Washington Post*, October 9, 2014, accessed June 3, 2017, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/we-shouldnt-stop-terrorists-from-tweeting/2014/10/09/106939b6-4d9f-11e4-8c24-487e92bc997b\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.ac08d3e0f501](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/we-shouldnt-stop-terrorists-from-tweeting/2014/10/09/106939b6-4d9f-11e4-8c24-487e92bc997b_story.html?utm_term=.ac08d3e0f501).

<sup>23</sup>Jack Goldsmith, "How Administration Lawyers Are Probably Thinking About the Constitutionality of the Syria Intervention (And A Note on the Domestic Political Dangers of Intervention)," *Lawfare*, August 24, 2013, accessed June 3, 2017, <https://www.lawfareblog.com/how-administration-lawyers-are-probably-thinking-about-constitutionality-syria-intervention-and-note>.

The CHAIRMAN. I was planning to go directly to Senator Cardin, like I normally do. I just wanted to ask one question, and then I will do so.

The recent trip, then, to Saudi Arabia, where many of the Arab countries were there, 56 of the leaders were there, was seen by many as pulling together. You seem to think differently about that. I would love just to hear your thoughts.

Dr. BYMAN: For the most part, sir, the trip was positive. Let me stress that. This was an ally that had come to question U.S. leadership in the region under President Obama, and it was good for President Trump to make a personal connection with Saudi leaders.

But Saudi Arabia also heightens sectarianism in the region and, in general, has pushed an agenda that is not always positive for Americans. We need to recognize that, while Saudi Arabia is an important partner, it is not a country with whom we share many interests, and that distance is important as well, and we need to be critical.

Instead, President Trump has seemed to embrace the Saudi position, such as the inter-Arab dispute with Qatar in a way that is, in my view, counterproductive.

The CHAIRMAN. Yes, thank you for that.  
Senator Cardin?

Senator CARDIN. Chairman, that is the point I want to focus on for a few more minutes with both of our witnesses, if I might, because I am trying to figure out what the Trump administration's policy is in regards to the countries in the Middle East.

I did not quite understand the comments in regards to Qatar coming from the administration, with 10,000 American troops in Qatar. And the point about the Saudis and Americans sharing a strategic partnership, but in many areas, we disagree on values, is also true of Qatar and true with almost every country in that region.

So I am not sure what is the most effective policy. Yes, the Saudis are important partners in our campaign against ISIS, but they also have the Wahhabist ideas, which are filtering into some of the extremist debates in the region. They have also been a source of funding of significant terrorist activities globally.

So what should our policy be in regards to these countries, Saudi I would put at the top of the list, in which we have strategic partnerships? They want to work with us. They generally prefer to work with the U.S. rather than any other major powers. But we have some significant differences. How do we develop that type of policy that effectively is targeted against ISIS but does not compromise American values or our partnerships with other countries in that region?

Dr. BYMAN: Unfortunately, sir, there is not going to be a magic solution. We are going to have to live with some contradiction.

Saudi Arabia is a necessary ally. On a day-to-day level, they provide valuable intelligence. And they are part of the broader coalition against the Islamic State, as is Qatar, as is the United Arab Emirates. But Saudi Arabia, in particular, but also other states, also fund an array of causes, preachers who preach sectarianism,

anti-Semitism, anti-Americanism, and, in general, make it easier for the Islamic State and others to recruit.

We have actually made progress, if you look over the last 20 years, on important things like terrorism financing where there is still a problem, but, again, less than there used to be.

I think steady pressure should continue, but, as your question articulates, we need to recognize that there is going to be distance between the United States and our allies, that we should have differences with these countries. We should be criticizing them. We should be pressing them. We should be using what leverage we have. But, at the same time, we cannot expect it to be a perfect relationship, because our interests and values are so different.

Senator CARDIN. So in response, Doctor, if you could—I agree with that response. And the Saudis do things that are against our interests. There is no question. But we have a strategic partnership that is important.

I would make the same point about Qatar. They do things in financing terrorism that we disagree with strongly, and I do not necessarily agree with the Saudi decision, but I can understand the Saudis being so focused on Yemen, and Iran's cooperation in Yemen, that that influences their decision in regards to Qatar.

Why would the United States reinforce that?

Dr. VIDINO. It is not an easy issue. The reality is that, on the visit that President Trump paid to Saudi Arabia, I think the idea that came out, at least in the West, was of an alliance, a Sunni bloc against extremism. And I think we interpreted most of that extremism being ISIS.

In the region, I happened to be in the region that specific week. I was in Saudi. It was mostly interpreted as being Iranian extremism, Iranian influence.

As much as some of those countries, Saudi included, are moving against ISIS, are moving partially against the ideology, I think I have seen a remarkable change in Saudi, not to mention in the UAE, when it comes to going after Wahhabi ideology and going after Islamist ideology, in general, I think there are still some problematic issues there.

Qatar is the country that, to some degree, does not play along on the two issues, at least from a Saudi perspective. It still maintains a cozy relationship with Iran. It still maintains a more than cozy relationship with a variety of Islamist groups on the Sunni side of things.

I think taking, though, a very strong position on this somewhat internal dynamic that is taking place in the gulf, I think is a bit too strong of a position. There are some agreements with all these countries. And, indeed, the strategic value of Qatar is undeniable, from a U.S. perspective.

So I think we should be very careful in how we intervene there. And, to some degree, a neutrality that leads to a recomposition of that bloc, I think, would be the most useful position there.

The CHAIRMAN. For what it is worth, I agree with that.

Senator Young?

Senator YOUNG. Dr. Byman, I would like to pick up on this line of questioning related to sectarianism and the U.S. relationship with Saudi Arabia.

In your prepared remarks, you make a significant and noteworthy charge against the Saudi Government indicating, "The Saudi Government continues to fund an array of preachers and institutions that promulgate an extreme version of Islam, enabling the Islamic State to recruit and otherwise gain support."

This issue recently came up in some conversations with the Saudi Foreign Minister. The Foreign Minister said, if we presented him with the evidence to support these assertions, he would take immediate steps to address it.

Dr. Byman, can you present my office specific evidence, specific evidence that supports your assertion the Saudi Government is funding preachers and institutions that enable ISIS recruitment and support?

Dr. BYMAN: I would be happy to give you an array of newspaper reports, U.S. Government reports, and so on.

I will say, Senator, under President Bush and then President Obama, this has been a fairly steady dialogue, where information has gone about individuals who are seen as dangerous, so I do not think the Saudi Government is short on information.

Senator YOUNG. I want to give the Saudi Ambassador the courtesy of any sources you might have, so I will pass those on. Thank you.

Moving on to another issue, Dr. Byman, in your prepared remarks, you observed that the United States is less vulnerable than our allies on account of geography and a host of other factors, which you identify, to terrorism.

One factor was the American Muslim community and the strong relationship, or at least relatively stronger relationship that they have in this country than in other countries. I am wondering why that is, why it is, in your analysis, that they have a stronger relationship, and whether you would agree that this cooperation between the American Muslim community and law enforcement has prevented terrorist attacks in this country.

Dr. BYMAN: The relationship is strong, in my view, for a number of reasons. Probably the most important is that a historic U.S. tradition of excellence is integrating different communities. This is just something our country has excelled at for several hundred years. So when people come here, they are quickly seen as Americans.

And if I may share just one anecdote, I was talking to a colleague who works with refugees. And in Sweden, there was a Syrian refugee desperate to get to the United States. In Sweden, as a refugee, the first two years are paid for to learn Swedish. In the United States, we do not help that much. And the colleague was asking, "Why on Earth would you want to come to the United States?" And they said, "Well, in Sweden, my kids will never be Swedish. In America, they will be American." That is a tremendous difference right there.

And add to that, sir, the economic success, the educational success of the American Muslim community, and simply the cutting of ties that comes with distance, and this has been vital for counter-terrorism success.

Senator YOUNG. So we want to remain one Nation——

Dr. BYMAN: Yes, sir.

Senator YOUNG.—under God. And this is part of who we are. And to the extent that people who subscribe to the Islamic faith here in the United States feel isolated or ostracized or like they are part of the other, that undermines that notion of one Nation under God. Moreover, would you agree that also would undermine our law enforcement capabilities, our ability to deter future attacks?

Dr. BYMAN: Yes, sir.

Senator YOUNG. Okay.

Well, I think most people who I confer with, most Hoosiers from my State of Indiana, agree that the vast majority of Muslim Americans are patriots. They love this country every bit as much as we do.

Would you agree that treating our fellow Americans who happened to be Muslim with the equality and respect through our words as well as our actions is one of the best ways to oppose ISIS and Al Qaeda's warped ideology and preserve our freedom here in this country?

Dr. BYMAN: Yes, sir.

Senator YOUNG. Okay.

I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Before turning it over, just my first interjection.

I understand you have done a body of work on extremism in our own country, and I think it would be helpful if you would just spend a moment talking about some of the teaching materials you are finding at cultural centers, some of the things you are seeing happening in our own Nation, that we do not even sometimes realize is occurring, to promote extremism here.

Dr. VIDINO. Sure. Thank you for the opportunity.

What we do at the center is we basically monitor the ISIS-related scene in the United States, the domestic scene, which, as Professor Byman was saying, is smaller than in most European countries.

The bottom line, by the numbers, we basically have around 120 people who have been arrested for ISIS-related activities since May 2014, when the first person was arrested. According to the FBI, we have around 200, 250 people who traveled or attempted to travel to Syria and Iraq.

What we do is we basically try to understand who these people are, what motivates them, what the demographics are. And it is an extremely, first of all, very small, number of people, extremely heterogeneous group of people. Very odd thing, for example, is around 40 percent of them are converts. They tend to be young. They tend to be mostly men, but with a rising number of females.

What we see as a big difference between the United States and Europe is that most of these people tend to be unaffiliated. They do not belong to somewhat sophisticated recruiting pipelines, like most of the Europeans. They are scattered individuals here and there who tend to use the Internet quite a bit to connect with groups in the Middle East, with groups of ISIS.

The big difference is here. If you are an aspiring jihadist in Europe, it is fairly easy for you to find somebody in the physical space that will recruit you, that will open the gates of Syria, that will open the gates of ISIS to you. If you live in the United States, it is not impossible, but it is much more difficult.

So these people tend to then go to the Internet and try to make connections with like-minded individuals and with recruiters, facilitators, online, which obviously makes it much, much easier for the FBI to intervene because it is online. But most of the cases start because the FBI observes the interactions, and you have some people who are quite unsophisticated in how they reach out to what they think are ISIS facilitators. That is how a lot of the sting operations, a lot of the arrests, that is how they take place.

Obviously, what we have seen, though, it is sort of the flipside of this unsophisticated dynamic of these individuals. Because they find it difficult to find gatekeepers to go to Syria, they try to carry out attacks domestically.

I think Professor Byman was perfectly right in saying we have not seen the large attacks we have seen in most European countries. But by the number, we have actually seen quite a few attacks. Actually, in the last 3 years, we have seen 15 attacks in the United States. Now, granted, some of them are small and carried out by individuals who have also mental issues where they do reference ISIS.

They clearly are consumers of ISIS propaganda. But they also have some personal psychological issues. But other times, they are unquestionably 100 percent driven by jihadist ideology.

I think in some cases, their attacks, even though they are carried out independently without any form of outside support, they are quite lethal. Let's think of the Orlando shooting or the San Bernardino shooting. So the Internet plays a much bigger role here than physical networks play overseas.

We do have also returnees, individuals who are coming back. Again, the numbers are much smaller than most European countries. I think the laws here are better than in most European countries. The system is better prepared to deal with those individuals.

What we do not have here, though, is a system of prevention, of deradicalization, what is known as CVE, different incarnations of it. That is where the U.S. has been somewhat lacking.

So on the repressive side, I think the system is quite equipped to deal with the threat. There is not a lot going on when it comes to the prevention part yet.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much.

Senator Merkley?

Senator MERKLEY. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you both for your testimony.

Dr. Vidino, you mentioned the ideological appeal of ISIS. And things that are sometimes mentioned is their interest in establishing a state, as perhaps compared to Al Qaeda; if you fight and die, you go directly to heaven.

What specifically were you talking about when you talked about the ideological appeal that causes thousands of people to say they want to be in this battle, they want to be part of ISIS? What are the elements that are really driving this?

Dr. VIDINO. Unfortunately, I do not have an easy answer for you. Going back to what I was saying earlier about the heterogeneous profiles of the individuals who are attracted to this ideology, there is a variety of profiles, and different motivations guide each individual. We cannot think that what drives the Ph.D. student in Chi-

cago and a 14-year-old kid in rural Somalia to be attracted to the same ideology is the same thing. Obviously, it is very geographical, very geographic-specific, and it is very specific to individuals.

Obviously, what ISIS has done, creating a territorial entity with some self-imposed religious value to it, has been historical. That is one of the main reasons that has triggered an unprecedented wave of recruits, of sympathizers to the cause.

Al Qaeda tried before. Al Qaeda tried to create a territorial entity in a variety of places before. But ISIS was successful and was very good at also using the Internet to create valuable propaganda for its cause.

There are some very deep geopolitical factors that need to be taken into consideration as to why people radicalize, so big issues from some of the actions in some countries, occupations of some countries, bad governance and so on, to very personal issues. I think when we look at why people radicalize, we have to look at politics, geopolitics. We also have to look at psychology, as to why individual people—

Senator MERKLEY. I am going to cut you off there, just because of the limited time I have.

Dr. VIDINO. Sure.

Senator MERKLEY. I realize you could give me an hour or two on that topic. I think it is important for us to wrestle with understanding those fundamental motivations, as we are engaged in this.

Back to the Saudi funding, it seems like there has been a bit of a social contract, and maybe I will just ask both of you to comment, in which Saudi Arabia, which was itself a Wahhabist state, established, and now ISIS is almost a replica of it, driven by very similar motivations and this vision of the caliphate, and a vision that perhaps Saudi Arabia did not stay as pure to the cause as those individuals would have liked. But it seems like Saudi Arabia has funded operations all over the world, madrasas, that cultivate both hatred of the West and nurture violence.

Is that the case? I will just ask both of you. Is that the case? There has been reference to getting Saudi Arabia to do a little less of this. But do we fully appreciate the impact that that funding has caused, in terms of the challenges we face with terrorism in the world?

Dr. VIDINO. I do not think we can overemphasize the role that Saudi Arabia has had over the last 40 years in spreading a certain extremely intolerant interpretation of Islam worldwide, even to places like the Balkans or Southeast Asia, where a traditionally very tolerant brand of Islam dominated. I think it is absolutely a big part of the problem.

Senator MERKLEY. By Southeast Asia—Indonesia, the Philippines?

Dr. VIDINO. Yes, absolutely. It has changed the way parts of Islam locally is lived.

Trying to see the flipside, I would say that over the last few years—again, we cannot overemphasize that aspect.

What I will say is that part of the Saudi leadership over the last 2 or 3 years had somewhat understood part of the problem and to some degree are moving to end that. But there is a very strong pushback from parts of society.

So 10 years ago, I would have told you, yes, the Saudi State funds a lot of activities, extremists and, in some cases, even terrorists. I think today it is a bit of a different answer, a bit more nuanced. I would say there are parts that still do that, and parts that push back.

Senator MERKLEY. My last 20 seconds, Dr. Byman, would you like to add anything to that?

Dr. BYMAN: Only that, for Saudi Arabia, there is some ideology behind it, but also, they see it as a weapon against Iran and other rivals, where if they can get their ideas in front of people, then Iran's other interpretation of Islam will be diminished. So that struggle back and forth with Iran has a lot of negative consequences for everyone else as well.

Senator MERKLEY. Is it also part that, by funding things outside of Saudi Arabia, they are saying to folks leave us alone inside Saudi Arabia?

Dr. BYMAN: Yes, sir. It is a way of legitimizing the government and saying, "You see, we are doing good deeds. Look at what we are doing abroad."

Senator MERKLEY. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Senator Paul?

Senator PAUL. Dr. Byman, do you think that any of Iran's desire to modernize their ballistic missile system is in relation to or competition with Saudi Arabia or the Gulf States, or in reaction to the armaments that they possess?

Dr. BYMAN: To some degree, sir, yes. I think they have a number of motivations for modernizing their ballistic missile program, including their sense of threat from the United States, but also from the Gulf States.

Senator PAUL. Do you think there is an arms race, to a certain extent, between the Gulf States and Iran, that one side gets something, the other side thinks they have to go a little farther, and it goes back and forth?

Dr. BYMAN: A little bit, sir. But the budgets are not even. The Iranians are, frankly, rather broke, despite the somewhat limited sanctions relief, and the Gulf States have a lot of money. So it is not a fair competition, from their point of view.

Senator PAUL. I think that is the good point to make, because I think the perceived danger of Iran is such around here that we think, oh my goodness, Iran is way ahead in the arms battle, and, in fact, they think they may need to catch up.

So if we are interested in the perceptions of the two rivals in the Middle East, the perception of Iran and the actuality is they have a lot less money and they feel the need to catch up.

So I guess then that leads to the question of, we have a pending sale of a large amount of weapons to Saudi Arabia. Do you think that encourages or discourages Iran from thinking they need to advance their ballistic missiles?

Dr. BYMAN: I do think it encourages it, but, frankly, sir, they have a lot of other reasons they want to do it, so I do not think the impact is that significant.

Senator PAUL. All right. With regard to the war in Yemen, we not too long ago had an armed raid in there, and our soldiers went

into a small village, killed some Al Qaeda operatives, and, unfortunately, killed their wives and children as well.

Do not get me wrong, I do not blame our soldiers. They have a job to do, and they do what they are told to do. I do, frankly, though, blame the policymakers often. And I think they deserve some rebuke or some discussion of what the policy is.

I guess my question is, do we create more terrorists than we kill when we go in and kill a handful of people in a remote village in Yemen? To my understanding, I think the oral tradition of those deaths of the people in that village will spread throughout the community and throughout the land, and they will remember it 100 years from now. Long after we are gone, there will still be people remembering that. And they will still hate the Saudis for it. They will hate us for it. They will hate us for supplying the Saudis with the bombs that have been dropped on funeral processions.

I just think that when we are thinking about—we are talking about who we are fighting—it is like we are fighting an ideology, and, I mean, people just pop up. It is not like ISIS is calling you on the phone and saying attack. But people are attracted by this ideology, but they are attracted by it because they feel helpless, under assault, and they feel like we have all the weapons to destroy them anywhere, any time.

So I guess the question is, do we want more manned raids in Yemen? Do we want to send troops into Yemen? Do we want to take the port back?

There are people talking about a surge in Yemen. There are people talking about another surge in Afghanistan. Is this the way we are going to end the war on us, the terrorist war of attacking us? Are we going to end it by ratcheting up more wars in Yemen or Afghanistan?

I will leave that question for both of you.

Dr. BYMAN: Senator, I will take a first attempt.

I would say that we are under assault both by groups and by an ideology, and the groups have to be attacked. So that may be a drone campaign. That may be allies who arrest them. That may be a counterinsurgency. But there does need to be some action against some of these groups on the kinetic side, on the balance side. That does not solve the problem, but that is necessary.

However, that does not mean we have to go against every group in every country everywhere in the world. And I think one difficulty this country has had has actually been drawing limits. We can say the Islamic State is in many, many countries but it is only active in an anti-American sense in a few of those. We need to recognize which are priorities.

And a big thing, Senator, I would say is that we need to improve our ability to help our allies, our programs to train them, to arm them, and to improve their capabilities, because that is the lasting solution.

Senator PAUL. Yes, but I guess with the Al Qaeda rebels in Yemen, they are actually fighting against the Houthis. They are sort of, ostensibly, on our side.

Are we really making things better? Maybe they would be killed in battle with Houthis? Maybe they would decide, in aligning with

the Saudi side, that they are more interested in taking back land from the Houthis.

I just think that, ultimately, if we do that, I think we end up getting more blowback from it than killing a handful of people in a remote village in Yemen.

We do have to protect ourselves. We do not want them coming here. We have to stop them, if they are plotting to attack us in an organized, sufficient way.

But every rebel around the world, every time we kill one, we create 10 more. So I would have to disagree with you that going into a remote village in Yemen and saying that that—I mean, that is the policy you have to decide. Is that a good idea? I guarantee there are another couple hundred people just like that in Yemen.

Do you want 10 more raids like that? Do you want to send our Navy SEALs into Yemen? Do you think that is a good idea? I think that that is a terrible idea.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Booker?

Senator BOOKER. Thank you very much.

Dr. Vidino, we are clearly making a lot of progress in the field in Syria. We are closing in on Raqqa. There is a lot of kinetic activity going on. There is significant progress, about 60 percent of ISIS territory, and we are going to continue to make that progress with a lot of brave soldiers fighting in a very important war.

But my biggest concern in this fight to keep Americans safe, my big concern, and I want to broaden this question a little bit, because obviously we are talking about ISIS but when I look at Boko Haram, when I look at Al Qaeda and their ability to inspire, their ability to recruit, the tools that we have at our behest clearly are military tools. But that is not my bigger concern right now, because what I worry about with this administration is the savage cuts that they are doing to State Department activities, to USAID, and the things that prevent communities from having soil fertile for extremism.

It is outrageous to me that you have an administration out of one side of their mouths want to talk about being tough against ISIS and against terrorism. But probably what I would say, if you are looking at a toolbox, one of the most critical assets we have is the activities being done through diplomacy, through USAID, and through other CVE efforts that are not about military, but CVE efforts that really focus on countering violent extremism through Internet activities and through creating relationships in communities and stopping them from becoming fertile grounds.

Can you comment on that for me for a moment?

Dr. VIDINO. Yes, Senator. I agree with you.

I think, particularly in some parts of the world, it is crucially important to maintain a very strong diplomatic presence and to fund some activities on the ground, in terms of prevention of radicalization. I talked a lot about returning foreign fighters in my testimony. I think that is going to be one of the big issues.

I am thinking, for example, in North African countries, we are going to see tens of thousands of people coming back. If there is no reintegration effort for these individuals—so some of them definitely need to be arrested, and we need to provide support with intelligence and with resources in that effort. Then some of them

need to be reintegrated. Again, these are countries, I am talking about Mali, Niger, that have very, very limited resources that do need our help.

I know about the situation in Mali where they are trying to reintegrate large numbers of people who are part of some of the rebel groups linked to Al Qaeda, some of them in the conflict there, and they do not have the financial support to do that. These are individuals that are likely to go one way or another in terms of joining, potentially, ISIS and Al Qaeda-affiliated groups.

I think if the U.S., and not just the U.S., I think it is also a burden for European countries and for some gulf countries to provide financial support and do CVE there.

Senator BOOKER. So I would like, and I am going to submit this question for the record, what are the specific programs that are being targeted for cuts that you think we should prioritize in the Senate to try to preserve?

I listened to a national security expert speak in an interview recently, and they talked about everything, their worries about threats to American lives. They talk about everything from pandemics to terrorism. And they were focusing, though, not on what our military could accomplish but critical investment of resources.

In the short time that I have left to both of the gentleman before me, I think what the President is doing in terms of his rhetoric is making Americans less safe. The way he talks about Islam through his campaign, and even right now the rhetoric he is using is making Americans less safe by not talking about this problem that creates more unity of action.

I want to be even more specific. The Muslim ban that he has been trying to push, I believe, has sent wrong signals and is making Americans less safe. Even his immigration policy here at home, and I see this myself in New Jersey, which is undermining communication flows between—now communities are living in fear and now being pushed further in the shadows, because they are afraid of deportation. It is undermining the communications between communities that we need to have strong relationships with.

So could you please, in the 15 seconds I have left, comment on that? And am I off base, for that opinion?

Dr. VIDINO. The rhetoric is not helpful. That is in my 6 seconds that I have left.

Dr. BYMAN: I will agree and simply add I worry tremendously about the aftermath of a terrorist attack in the United States, which will happen in the next 3.5 years. That is just the laws of probability. And I worry that, rather than bringing Americans together, we will be divided further.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Senator BOOKER. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Isakson?

Senator ISAKSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Really, for both of you, I think it was 2003, President Bush made a major speech to the country following the 9/11 disaster that we had in our country. He talked about the axis of evil being Iraq, Iran, and North Korea.

Here we are, 17 years later or 15 years later. We know the story of Iraq, but we also know Iran is a provider of resources and encouragement for ISIS.

What reach does North Korea have, if any? Or what evidence do we know of that North Korea may, in some way, be involved with ISIS or be aiding and abetting ISIS or providing ISIS with materiel that they otherwise would not get?

Dr. VIDINO. As far as I know, there is no connection. I might be missing something, but no connection.

Dr. BYMAN: That is my knowledge as well, that there is no connection.

Senator ISAKSON. In expanding ISIS's reach beyond where it is today in the Levant and Maghreb, it would take something like an enabler like North Korea or somebody else to really get them beyond the Middle East. Is that not correct?

Dr. BYMAN: Sir, I would say that, as my colleague has pointed out, their ideology still has appeal to some people, and that enables them to make geographic leaps where it would be hard for them to do just with their people. So they have been able to reach out to Southeast Asia or parts of Africa even though they do not have strong kind of physical and geographic connections. So I would look for areas that are relatively weakly governed, where there might be sympathy for their ideology.

Dr. VIDINO. Yes, and I would say this does not necessarily require any formal state support. I think it is the ability to penetrate certain areas where governance is weak, where there is a lot of resentment. And also, I think in some countries that are more stable, I think I hear a lot about countries in the gulf, countries in Central Asia with relatively stable governments, but nonetheless strong support for the ideology and their ability to create sort of clandestine networks there.

Senator ISAKSON. I was somewhat surprised—in fact, “somewhat” is not the right word. I was very surprised with the recent attack in Iraq by ISIS. Is that any evidence of an expansion or a change in their mode of operation?

Dr. VIDINO. Do you mean the one in Iran?

Senator ISAKSON. Iran.

Dr. BYMAN: Iran has almost been enemy No. 1 for this group, frankly, ahead of the United States. It is a relatively hard target. They do not have sympathizers in Iran in a significant way, and the Iranian security services are brutal, but they are pretty competent.

So they have been trying to do attacks on Iranian targets elsewhere. So this is, I think, actually their biggest success in the last year, frankly.

Dr. VIDINO. If I might add, I think from a propagandist point of view, this helps them a lot. The fact that they had not been able to attack Iran, which as Professor Byman was saying, arguably, ideologically, is enemy No. 1, was a big stain on their resume, if you will.

And I think they will be promoting the fact that they were able to attack Iran in the very heart of the Iranian regime. I think that is something that they are going to be using a lot in propaganda.

Senator ISAKSON. It appears that most of the attacks that we are seeing now are individually carried out by one or two lone-wolf type terrorists in isolated events using a motor vehicle or some type of terror like that. You referred to the next 3.5 years, it is an inevitable that we will probably have an attack of some type in the United States.

Do you think the possibility of a bigger attack than an individual use of a lone wolf in a vehicle is something bigger than what we might anticipate? Or do you think we might see what is happening in Europe now come to the United States?

Dr. BYMAN: I am hopeful that we will not see the scale and scope of attacks that we have seen in Europe in the United States. But because of our relatively open gun laws, you can kill more people with a gun than a knife, and it is relatively easy for someone to do so.

So if you look at what happened in London, I just think, what if those people had had semiautomatic weapons, and how much more the carnage would have been. So I worry about that. I also worry about right-wing terrorism in the United States that has been accelerating and enabled.

So I do think these are all possibilities. There is a degree of randomness with terrorism, where sometimes an attack will kill two, but the same type of attack in another country will kill 50. So I think we have to recognize that, even though it makes it hard to predict.

Dr. VIDINO. I think most of the attacks, as you correctly pointed out, have been carried out by one individual or a couple individuals with no operational connections. Even some of those can be very lethal, whether they use automatic weapons, as in the case of Orlando, or driving a truck, in the case of Nice in France, more than 80 people killed just by one guy with no affiliation driving a truck.

I think the big question is whether we are going to see more of the structured, sophisticated attacks, which tend to be more and more lethal. Once ISIS loses its territory, will it be able to do so? I spoke about virtual planners, and I think that is something that enables them with very little investment to carry out a big return, in terms of sophistication of attacks.

Senator ISAKSON. Thank you both very much.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, sir.

Senator KAINE?

Senator KAINE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thanks to the witnesses for this great testimony. I want to ask you some questions about who we should work with to defeat ISIS's global reach.

The head of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Dunford, recently reappointed by President Trump, says that Russia is our chief nation-state adversary. President Trump says, though, if there are ways we can work together with Russia to defeat ISIS, we should. And I agree with President Trump on that.

So, for example, if the United States had intel about some ISIS attack on Russia, I would hope that we would share that intel with Russia, so that it could avoid it. Talk to us about potential for cooperating with Russia, lessons, pieces of advice, to defeat ISIS.

Dr. BYMAN: Senator, I strongly agree that we want to find allies where we can, even if, as in the case of Russia, we are opposed to them on a host of other issues.

The tension comes from things like intelligence-sharing where, obviously, in my view, if there were an attack, we, of course, would want to pass on any warning we had to save innocent lives. But with Russia, we should expect that they will try to take any information we give them and extract the intelligence sources and methods behind it. That is true in various ways for a host of other countries around the world. They are just not quite as good as the Russians are in doing that.

We also need to recognize that one common form of assistance is U.S. training or technical support, especially signals intelligence. And when we give that, countries around the world will also use it against their domestic opposition. And we are often on the side of the domestic opposition against the government, even as we are on the side of the government against terrorists.

So I do not have, again, this kind of magical answer of how to work with these rather disturbing allies, other than we will have to do things case by case and recognize the limits.

Senator KAINE. Dr. Vidino?

Dr. VIDINO. I completely agree. I think it is case by case. But I think the Russians are in a position where they do hold a lot of important intelligence for our security, because of their presence on the ground in Syria, because a lot of the very experienced foreign fighters come from Russia, from the Caucasus, from the republics in Central Asia. The Russians know those dynamics very, very well.

And I think we have to find a way, with all the caveats that Professor Byman expressed, in exchanging that information.

Senator KAINE. So even though Russia is an adversary in many ways, the defeat of ISIS is an important goal. And with caveats and being cautious, we should appropriately do what we can together to defeat ISIS.

Let me ask about Iran. The bombing in Tehran, the bombing of the Shia mosque in Kuwait in 2015, should we treat Iran differently? They are a nation-state adversary. But if ISIS is targeting them, and if there are ways that we can help them defeat ISIS, shouldn't we, with similar caveats, try to help them avoid the loss of innocent lives, as was experienced earlier this week?

Dr. BYMAN: I hope the U.S. position is that we are strongly against many governments in the world but not against their people. And attacks on innocent people, they are innocent regardless of nationality.

So I do believe the United States has, at times openly, at times tacitly, cooperated with Iran. Right after 9/11, the Bush administration cooperated with Iran against Al Qaeda. And under Obama and now President Trump, Iran is playing a major role in fighting the Islamic State, especially in Iraq. And, tacitly, there is information passed back and forth, often by the Iraqi Government.

And this is always tough for Americans, but to recognize that we can be strongly against a country for 10 reasons and working with it on one, we should still try to do both when possible. It is not

ideal. Iran is a nasty country. But at times, we have common interests.

Senator KAINE. Dr. Vidino?

Dr. VIDINO. Again, I agree. I think we have a precedent on that when it comes to another group, the Mujahadeen-e-Khalq. They are an anti-Iranian regime. To some degree, some would argue that they serve our interests. I think the way the United States has treated the group, by designating them, is the right one, because they are a terrorist group, at the end the day.

I think when it comes to those case-by-case tactical situations, I think there needs to be cooperation.

At the same time, I am extremely concerned about the influence that Iran has in post-ISIS Iraq. And I think the Iraqi Government and special forces have done a terrific job in Mosul, but the disrupting impact the Iranian-sponsored militia have in that part of the country is of high, high concern and needs to be tackled. So it is obviously a very, very difficult dynamic there.

Senator KAINE. And would you say it is somewhat analogous? I mean, Russia and Iran are very different countries, but they are both adversaries. We are both opposed to them in many ways. But they are both worried, in their own way, about ISIS. And if our goal is to defeat ISIS globally, we are going to have to work with other nations to do it. We cannot just do that on our own, correct?

Dr. VIDINO. I completely agree, but I think we have done that in the past. There is a tradition of doing that.

We were talking about the axis of evil. We used to share information and work on some counterterrorism operations with Syria 10 years ago.

So I think that is the nature of counterterrorism. You strike deals, maybe not publicly sometimes, with nasty regimes.

Senator KAINE. Thank you.

Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you. I know there was some discussion yesterday about having the bill we have on the floor. We, I think, cleared last night a condolence resolution, relative to many of the things you talked about, which we said we would do.

Senator KAINE. I appreciate that. That is very important.

The CHAIRMAN. I am just checking to make sure that it cleared last night, but I think that it did.

Senator Murphy?

Senator MURPHY. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

I wanted to ask you both a question about the importance of conflict zones to the spread of extremist groups.

We always have competing priorities in the Middle East, multiple competing priorities in Syria. We have very little interest in a political settlement that allows for Bashar al-Assad to stay in power, so that has caused us to continue to fuel the fire of that fight, waiting until the perfect set of circumstances align, in which he can be removed from power.

In Yemen, we ultimately want a transitional government there that has the least amount of Iranian influence as possible. So we feed the conflict there, hoping that there is a moment at which the Iranians walk away from the table.

I would be interested to hear your thoughts on the importance of these continued local conflicts to the growth of groups like ISIS and how that should educate the decisions that we make. Should we be willing to set aside some of those competing priorities to create stable places and to end these conflicts? Or is it important to get the sort of transition government and the politics of a place right, and we should just let these things play out until the circumstances align with our interests in the region?

Dr. BYMAN: Senator, I would say that is a vital question to me because the Islamic State and many of these groups, they feed on war. So if you look at Syria, if you look at Yemen, if you look at Iraq, if you look at other countries, they did not begin the conflicts there, but they became much stronger because of these conflicts.

It is hard to imagine many of the problems we have globally with the Islamic State if they did not have the base in Iraq and Syria, if they were not able to use that cause to recruit, to fundraise, and so on.

So we need stable regimes as a way of simply policing countries and arresting or killing terrorists. But we also need stability in order to decrease the ideological foment that enables these groups to recruit.

Dr. VIDINO. I agree. As difficult as it is, I think stability in some of these conflicts, even if it requires a certain degree of intervention, is crucial. Letting them play out, first of all, has a terrible impact on human life. There is a moral imperative, as controversial as that is, to intervene.

These conflicts have a tendency to be used and abused by ISIS and other groups. They tend to sacralize some conflicts that start as purely ethnic or political. They tend to take on religious undertones, with time. I am thinking of Chechnya, for example.

I think it is a case-by-case basis, obviously. But, generally speaking, it is not in our interest to let them play out.

Senator MURPHY. As you know, it is virtually impossible for any Republican or Democrat to get their heads wrapped around a future Syria with Bashar al-Assad or people close to him, who butchered his own people, continuing to have the reins of power there. But it is a fundamental question that we have to ask, because the consequences of waiting until that perfect moment are perhaps—the result of that is the increased opportunity for both groups to expand.

Back to this Saudi question that a number of people have raised, I think we all agree that this has to be a higher priority in our discussions with the Saudis.

Maybe starting with you, Dr. Byman, tell us about the degree to which the Saudi Government is able to control the money that moves out of that country, A, directly to groups that we do not like, but, B, to the spread of this version of Islam that some of us worry is at the foundation of some of these extremist groups. How much of this is under the Saudi Government's control? How much of it is not under their control?

Dr. BYMAN: The Saudi Government has made truly significant progress in the last 15 years in stopping direct aid from their citizens to radical groups. The 2016 State Department report made

clear they still have a way to go, but really spelled out a lot of the successes.

So that is a little bit of good news. But that is different from the broader support for an array of extremist causes. There, that is something that the regime has been very hesitant to try to stop, in part because it sees it as an instrument of its competition with Iran, in part a form of status, and in part because it is a form of domestic legitimacy.

So this is something that it is almost untested because it has not tried to do a significant crackdown. At times, there will be a quiet conversation, which in Saudi Arabia goes quite far if it is between the regime and certain power centers. But it has not been anything systematic and comprehensive.

Dr. VIDINO. Indeed, the barrier has been changed, I mentioned earlier, in the way the Saudis deal with the issue. Ten years ago, it would have been the Saudi Government completely funding these efforts. Now it is contested. You have particularly the new leadership quite aggressively moving and stopping certain flows of money not just to groups that are violent, but to the ideology in general.

There is an enormous pushback. The nature of the Saudi state is based on a compromise between the Saudi royal family and the Wahhabi clergy. So breaking that deal, the agreement that exists, undermines the whole entire foundation of the country.

It is a battle that the Saudi Government is, to some degree, fighting. But when you have organizations like the Muslim World League, the World Assembly of Muslim Youth, organizations that are partially public, partially nonpublic, that send millions and millions to a variety of extremist causes worldwide, it is that not easy. Particularly in a country where a lot of transactions are done on a cash basis, it is quite difficult to stop that.

Senator MURPHY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you. This has been a great hearing. We thank you both for your contributions. We will keep the record open until the close of business on Monday.

We understand you have other responsibilities, but to the extent you can answer any additional written questions promptly, we would appreciate it. Again, thanks for your service to our country and being here the way you have been today. It has been, again, very, very informative.

With that, the meeting is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:09 a.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

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#### ADDITIONAL MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

##### RESPONSE OF DR. LORENZO VIDINO TO QUESTION SUBMITTED BY SENATOR TODD YOUNG

*Question.* In your prepared statement, you express concern about Daesh members fleeing Syria and Iraq and traveling to Europe and North America. In Dr. Byman's prepared statement, he assessed that the U.S. and our allies are not prepared for the "likely diaspora of returning foreign fighters" from Iraq and Syria. What do you assess the U.S. and our allies must specifically do to better prepare for the return of foreign fighters from Iraq and Syria that many have been predicting for quite some time?

*Answer.* Any U.S. response to the return of foreign fighters from Syria and Iraq must account for the successes and failures of our allies and partners. While the

United States faces a slightly more acute problem regarding returnees than other countries, due to the geographic, political, and societal landscape, our law enforcement and intelligence agencies will no doubt face significant challenges. As I argued in my testimony, the easiest (and currently implemented) solution for returning foreign fighters is to simply arrest them and process them through the legal system. Drawbacks to this method, however, include the possibility that individual fighters may slip through the cracks and evade our justice system. There are often difficulties with accessing and utilizing evidence that is provable in a court of law. While it is clear that the U.S. legal system may be the best destination for some returning foreign fighters, others may not be great candidates for prosecution.

Foreign fighters vary in their level of involvement in ISIS operations and level of commitment to the organization's cause. Thus, determinations of appropriate responses to foreign fighters must occur on a case-by-case basis. Upon arriving in the IS, some foreign fighters quickly become disillusioned with the group's ideology and wish to return home to a normal life. Others embrace their new roles and begin working their way up the ranks. In short, some returning fighters are a good candidate for rehabilitation and others are not. Intelligence sharing between the U.S. and our allies is of the upmost importance when determining which returnees pose a significant threat of committing attacks on American soil. The U.S. must work with regional partners to determine which returnees have information on the capabilities, structure, and strategies of the Islamic State, and which returnees can be re-integrated into their communities with minimal intervention from law enforcement.

For foreign fighters with well-documented crimes, the U.S. should turn to the legal system and not consider reintegration. If the result of intelligence sharing reveals strong evidence that the returnee willingly provided support to ISIS, fully understood the organization's ideology, committed violent acts, or showed no signs of disillusionment, there is reason to believe that this person would be a threat to the American public. If an arrest and a lengthy sentence is necessary to protect the public, then the U.S. should pursue this course of action.

If the result of intelligence sharing shows any evidence that an individual stumbled unwittingly into ISIS, had no clear understanding of their mission, did not partake in violent acts, or regretted making the trip to Syria, the U.S. should explore rehabilitative methods. ISIS officials often employ recruitment methods that take advantage of socially marginalized individuals that seek sense of community and belonging. Rehabilitation can provide an off-ramp to radicalization that works to bring returning fighters into a safe and inclusive environment. Rehabilitation benefits the U.S. in two ways. First, returning fighters could provide valuable intelligence on ISIS strategy, safe house locations, and troop movement. Instead of prosecuting returning fighters, the U.S. and their allies could work with returnees to uncover ISIS activity. Second, a precedent of rehabilitative efforts provides incentive to foreign fighters that are considering a peaceful return to the U.S. A well-articulated off-ramp could help draw down ISIS troop levels, potentially preventing future violence.

Thank you for your question and for the opportunity to speak Thursday.

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RESPONSES OF DR. DANIEL BYMAN TO QUESTIONS  
SUBMITTED BY SENATOR TODD YOUNG

*Question.* In your prepared remarks, you write that many counter violent extremism (CVE) programs "are based on weak data and untested theories and demand scrutiny and oversight." Can you describe your concerns regarding U.S. government CVE programs in more detail and suggest how they should be strengthened? Do you have any specific concerns or recommendations related to the Department of State's Global Engagement Center (GEC)?

*Answer.* CVE has become a catch-all term, and it includes many programs that are more oriented toward development than fighting terrorism. At times there are untested or even false assumptions about the role of poverty or poor education in fomenting terrorism, so programs to fight these ills are justified in the name of national security. Although I often favor these programs for humanitarian reasons, we should not think they are useful for fighting terrorism.

For more specific CVE programs, long-term analysis is necessary. The effects are likely to be diffuse, and given the analytic uncertainty over many key questions (e.g. how do you define radicalization?), this field is in its infancy. The programs are often cheap and the potential benefits are considerable, so I favor continuing most and even expanding them, but we should not think these are ready to substitute for other counterterrorism programs at this time.

The State Department's Global Education Center (GEC) can play a useful but minor role in fighting terrorist ideology and communications. Particularly valuable are efforts to support and amplify voices from allied countries that might have credibility among would-be jihadists. However, government communications tend to be bland and slow, often by design, so it is difficult to respond in real-time to terrorists. More importantly, the actions and words of U.S. leaders do (and should) count or much more than what comes out of the GEC, which plays no role in determining policy but merely tries to adjust its messaging in response to it.

*Question.* Elsewhere in your prepared remarks, you state that, "Washington should coordinate an international policy to identify and arrest these fighters," returning to Europe and elsewhere. I would hope that the Obama administration started doing that and that this administration is building on their efforts. Is that not the case?

*Answer.* I am not privy to classified information on this question, which is where the scope and scale of any U.S. effort would be detailed. To my knowledge, intelligence professionals in the Obama administration and now the Trump administration are trying to track foreign fighters in a systematic way. However, European and Arab responses remain uneven, and coordinating a response to returnees has not been a policy priority for senior U.S. officials. As a result, there is not a full coordinated response.

*Question.* In Dr. Vidino's prepared statement, he expressed concern about Daesh members fleeing Syria and Iraq and traveling to Europe and North America. In your prepared statement, you assess that the U.S. and our allies are not prepared for the "likely diaspora of returning foreign fighters" from Iraq and Syria. What do you assess the U.S. and our allies must specifically do to better prepare for the return of foreign fighters from Iraq and Syria that many have been predicting for quite some time?

*Answer.* In addition to sharing intelligence to identify suspected fighters, the United States must encourage resourcing of security services. As the recent attacks in the United Kingdom made clear, security services may know someone is potentially dangerous, but if they do not have sufficient resources that person may not be monitored or may otherwise be allowed to conduct or support an attack. When appropriate, the United States should offer direct assistance to upgrade allies' intelligence capabilities. In addition, many allies do not have robust laws to monitor and arrest returnees. Finally, many countries, including the United States, need to work on "off ramps" so that those returnees who come away disillusioned or traumatized have a way to leave the jihadist world and reintegrate into mainstream society. Even many contrite returnees should have appropriate punishment and monitoring, but a draconian one-size-fits-all for returnees a mistake.

The State Department emphasizes countering violent extremism (CVE) in its diplomacy, but funding for these programs is limited in practice. Cuts to diplomats and to the overall State and USAID budgets will further imperil these efforts.

The State Department also funds an array of programs designed to build capacity of partner nations to fight the Islamic State and other jihadist groups. These include the Antiterrorism Assistance program (ATA); Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF) to exchange best practices; the Regional Strategic Initiative (RSI) to build partner capacity; and Counterterrorism Partnerships Fund (CTPF) to build criminal justice programs and other civilian capacity. In addition, the State Department sponsors regional programs such as the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP).

Capacity-building programs are vital for preventing the Islamic State from reestablishing itself should it lose all its territory, as it did in Iraq after the U.S.-led surge brought it low. These programs should be expanded and integrated more with those of other government agencies, particularly the Department of Defense, and those of the U.S. military.

The United States cannot, and should not, fight jihadists wherever they appear. Some parts of the world are marginal to U.S. interests, and even in more vital areas the United States should only bear part of the burden. Efforts to build capacity will have many problems stemming from the political and socioeconomic weaknesses of U.S. partners. Nevertheless, they are relatively cheap compared with deploying U.S. troops and offer a potential long-term solution.

RESPONSE OF DR. LORENZO VIDINO TO QUESTION  
SUBMITTED BY SENATOR CORY BOOKER

*Question.* Question on State Department Budget Cuts: The U.S., our partners in the anti-ISIS coalition, and U.S. backed Syrian fighters are leading an assault on Raqqa, ISIS's capital. We are clearing ISIS-held territory and striking the heart of the caliphate. Yet attacks in Manchester, London, Tehran show that while we are making strides militarily in Iraq and Syria, the battlefield is far broader in terms of geography and more complex in terms of the tools it demands we employ.

Vital to any comprehensive strategy, and showing the truth of their depraved ideology is through the use of programs at the State Department and USAID.

Yet, President Trump wants to hamper our ability to defeat ISIS by significantly cutting State Department and USAID funding.

What programs at the State Department and USAID should we prioritize to help us stop the spread of ISIS's ideology? What type of programming at the State Department and USAID would preclude another insurgent force such as ISIS to develop once ISIS is militarily defeated?

*Answer.* Thank you for your questions. Unfortunately, it is incredibly difficult to single out a specific program or type of programming that could preclude the rise of a post-ISIS insurgent group. Current and previous State Department and USAID programs that focus on halting the dissemination of violent extremist ideologies have varied in their effectiveness. While certain programs from both agencies have been effective in countering the spread of violent extremist ideologies on a limited scale, successes and failures of programs must be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Specific regions' and countries' stability and counterterrorism resources differ from one to the next, and can affect the impact of programming. Thus, a program or method that effectively reduces recruitment to violent extremism may be effective in one area, but fail outright in another.

That being said, both the State Department and USAID have implemented programs that could be used, in some form, as a model for future efforts. One such program is the State Department's Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF) which began in September 2011 and has since then organized over \$200 million to support counterterrorism-related rule of law institutions for countries that are shifting away from emergency law. The program additionally seeks to set in place practices that provide guidance to countries and create a stronger unity within global counterterrorism efforts.

USAID programs have had more varied success, although it too has implemented several successful countering violent extremism (CVE) programs. One program, the Pakistan Transition Initiative, focuses on strengthening social and political development within communities in Pakistan that are vulnerable to conflict. In West Africa, USAID has implemented the Regional Peace for Development II (PDEV II). The PDEV II strives to build social ties within communities in Niger, Chad, and Burkina Faso to create stable environments and prevent recruitment by extremist organizations. By strengthening communities, these programs can assist in precluding radicalization and violent extremism.

In general, a good guideline for countering violent extremism and deradicalization programs implemented by both the State Department and USAID is that the more individualized to a particular area, the more likely it is to produce measurable results and ultimately success. Programs with smaller target populations have experienced a great deal of accomplishments elsewhere around the world, and both the State Department and USAID could make a larger effort to implement programs aimed at individuals rather than whole societies.

Thank you for your question and for the opportunity to testify before the committee on the 8th.

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RESPONSE OF DR. DANIEL BYMAN TO QUESTION  
SUBMITTED BY SENATOR CORY BOOKER

*Question.* Question on State Department Budget Cuts: The U.S., our partners in the anti-ISIS coalition, and U.S. backed Syrian fighters are leading an assault on Raqqa, ISIS's capital. We are clearing ISIS-held territory and striking the heart of the caliphate. Yet attacks in Manchester, London, Tehran show that while we are making strides militarily in Iraq and Syria, the battlefield is far broader in terms of geography and more complex in terms of the tools it demands we employ.

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Answer. The State Department emphasizes countering violent extremism (CVE) in its diplomacy, but funding for these programs is limited in practice. Cuts to diplomats and to the overall state and USAID budgets will further imperil these efforts.

The State Department also funds an array of programs designed to build capacity of partner nations to fight the Islamic State and other jihadist groups. These include the Antiterrorism Assistance program (ATA); Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF) to exchange best practices; the Regional Strategic Initiative (RSI) to build partner capacity; and Counterterrorism Partnerships Fund (CTPF) to build criminal justice programs and other civilian capacity. In addition, the State Department sponsors regional programs such as the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP).

Capacity-building programs are vital for preventing the Islamic State from reestablishing itself should it lose all its territory, as it did in Iraq after the U.S.-led surge brought it low. These programs should be expanded and integrated more with those of other government agencies, particularly the Department of Defense, and those of the U.S. military.

The United States cannot, and should not, fight jihadists wherever they appear. Some parts of the world are marginal to U.S. interests, and even in more vital areas the United States should only bear part of the burden. Efforts to build capacity will have many problems stemming from the political and socioeconomic weaknesses of U.S. partners. Nevertheless, they are relatively cheap compared with deploying U.S. troops and offer a potential long-term solution.

