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EXAMINING THE GLOBAL TERRORISM LANDSCAPE

HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON
THE MIDDLE EAST, NORTH AFRICA, AND
INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM

OF THE

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EXAMINING THE GLOBAL TERRORISM LANDSCAPE

Tuesday, April 30, 2019
House of Representatives
Subcommittee on the Middle East,
North Africa, and International Terrorism
Committee on Foreign Affairs

Washington, DC

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 2:18 p.m., in Room 2172 Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. David Trone (vice-chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Mr. TRONE [presiding]. Welcome, everyone. The subcommittee is meeting today to hear testimony examining the global terrorism landscape. I thank our witnesses for appearing today.

I now recognize myself for the purpose of making an opening statement. This is our first opportunity for this Congress to take a broader view of the terrorism landscape confronting the United States and the rest of the world.

It has been 18 years after the attacks on 9/11, and we have seen some success with our counterterrorism policy. But we have also watched the universe enlarge with an unsettling number of terrorist groups and affiliates and offshoots.

In an aggressive policy start under President Obama, and continuing under President Trump, we have successfully confronted the Islamic State in Iraq, Syria, to liberate the territory once occupied. However, we must remain vigilant. Simply because a group no longer controls territory does not mean ISIS has been defeated.

ISIS fighters have scattered, but they are morphing into an insurgency in Iraq and Syria, where the group clearly feels emboldened enough that its leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, just appeared on video for the first time in 5 years to reassert his authority in the wake of the lost territory.

ISIS is also sowing the seeds of terror elsewhere by inspiring, guiding, and directing its affiliates and individual extremists throughout the world. Consider the Easter bombings in Sri Lanka that killed over 250 people. ISIS has claimed credit for those attacks. Investigators believe that at least one of the suicide bombers that traveled to and trained in Raqqah and others may have traveled to Turkey, Syria, or Iraq.

ISIS clearly has an ability to export terrorism to parts of the world beyond the Middle East. We cannot let our success in liberating territory from this group blind us to the significant challenges that remain. Of course, ISIS is not the only terrorist group out there. Al-Qaeda remains a potent, if decentralized, force for spreading fear and violence.

It is incredibly disturbing that ISIS and al-Qaeda often compete against one another and against Iranian-backed terror organizations in many of the most fragile contexts worldwide. This interplay only fuels sectarian violence, radicalizes populations, and exacerbates intractable conflicts throughout the Middle East.

No one excels at exploiting regional chaos quite like Iran. Iran has been on our list of State sponsors for terrorism for 35 years. And, unfortunately, it has only expanded its support for terrorist organizations over that time.

The congressional Research Service lists the Syrian regime of Bashar al-Assad, Houthi rebels in Yemen, Shia militias in Iraq, underground groups in Bahrain, and of course Hezbollah and Hamas, among the beneficiaries of Iran's terror patronage.

Just earlier this month President Trump designated Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps as a foreign terrorist organization. I do not dispute the threats the IRGC poses, but I would note the designation may carry consequences in terms of retaliatory measures against the United States and U.S. personnel overseas.

We must be clear-eyed about the threats to the United States and our interests. This includes recognizing a rise in white nationalist terrorism that threatens democracy and human rights at home and abroad.

I grieve with the congregants of the Chabad Synagogue in California, who suffered a tragic attack this weekend. We will continue to seek justice for the victims of the shooting at the Tree of Life Synagogue where my daughter was named. We cannot tolerate such acts of hate inside the United States or against our close allies like New Zealand where a gunman's killing spree targeted the faithful visiting two mosques during Friday prayers just 6 weeks ago.

Far right plots against French President Emmanuel Macron and Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez highlight that terrorism is indeed diverse. We cannot be lulled into a false sense of security. We have to be prepared, strong, and agile—counterterrorism strategy.

The military has a role to play, but almost 2 decades after 9/11 it is clear the problem does not have a military-only solution. We need to address the underlying risks of terrorism, and we must ensure that our counterterrorism efforts account for the complicated politics in regions like the Middle East, Africa, South and Southeast Asia.

This requires investing in foreign aid and diplomacy, not cutting the budget for them. I know there is a strong bipartisan support on this committee for smart policies that build on both military and non-military assets and holistic approach.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses with their views on the threats posed by terrorism today and what the U.S. can do better to defend our citizens and our interests worldwide.

I now recognize the ranking member for the purpose of making an opening statement.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you, Congressman Trone, for chairing this important hearing. Since September 11, 2001, our country has been engaged in a long and persistent War on Terrorism. It is a generational battle against those that wish to threaten our way of

life, our church liberties, and our freedoms. They target innocence simply because of who they are, what they believe, and the way they live their lives. The tragic attacks this past Easter Sunday in Sri Lanka that killed at least 253, including 4 Americans, was a stark reminder of terrorism's global reach and deadly consequences.

Eighteen years ago on that solemn Tuesday morning when the beating heart of our Nation was attacked by a group of al-Qaeda terrorists, we could not have possibly imagined the terrorist landscape today. Today al-Qaeda affiliates stretch from the western edges of North Africa all the way to Southeast Asia.

Sadly, none of us could even fathom the possibility that al-Qaeda's Iraqi branch could spin off and form a full-blown terrorist State the size of Great Britain across Syria and Iraq.

The inhuman brutality afflicted by ISIS on the people of Syria and Iraq, including Muslims, Christians, Yasidis, and others, was a reminder for all of us. We fight this enduring battle against terrorism and the perverted ideology that inspires it to protect our families from this kind of evil.

Fortunately, ISIS no longer holds any territory, and its so-called Caliphate has been delegated to the dustbin of history. The battle has been won, but the war continues. The ISIS threat remains.

According to the National Counterterrorism Center, 14,000 ISIS fighters are still in Iraq and Syria. They remain armed and have continued to carry out attacks. ISIS's dangerous ideology remains a persistent and pernicious threat to the world peace, and hundreds of battle-tested foreign fighters heading home pose new challenges to authorities throughout the world.

Notably, the conditions that led to the rise of ISIS in Iraq has not been completely changed, and the resurgence of ISIS 2.0 is a tragic likelihood. To complicate the landscape even further, Iran has earned the title of number 1 State sponsor of terrorism in the world by fostering a network of Shiite armed groups engaged in terrorism to achieve Tehran's designs.

Their reach extends throughout the Middle East to countries like Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and Bahrain, but Iran's proxies are not limited to the Middle East. Its primary terrorist proxy, Hezbollah, is deeply entrenched in our own backyard in Latin America.

If there is one thing the past 18 years have taught us it is that terrorism is a global threat. It is not just limited to one country or region. It is an international challenge that requires international responses. Terrorists thrive while we turn a blind eye, and they spawn and metastasize in ungoverned spaces until they are ready enough to reach our shores.

Before 9/11, it was Afghanistan. Today Syria safe havens abound in areas of Libya, Yemen, Somalia, Pakistan, the southern Philippines, and even Colombia. There is no doubt that the threat has multiplied. Wherever safe havens exist, American families are at risk. That is why American leadership is necessary now, more than ever.

We must work together with all of our friends and partners throughout the world to protect our values from those that seek to destroy them. We must not delude ourselves with dreams of quick

strikes and missions accomplished. We must realize that to gain any measure of success we will have to be in this for the long haul. We must not make the mistakes of the past and think that we can run away from problems abroad.

In conclusion, God bless our troops, and we will never forget September 11 and the Global War on Terrorism.

With that, Congressman Trone, I yield back and look forward to hearing from our witnesses today.

Mr. TRONE. I will now recognize members of the subcommittee for 1-minute opening statements should they wish to make one.

Mr. SHERMAN. Mr. Chairman?

Mr. TRONE. Mr. Sherman, you are recognized.

Mr. SHERMAN. A decade ago, I was in this room chairing the subcommittee that dealt with international terrorism. I suspect decades from now they will be in this room talking about international terrorism. That does not mean we have lost, just because we cannot expunge international terrorism. As long as we are battling it and keeping it under control, our battles will not always be like World War II where there is an actual surrender of our enemies.

The administration has properly designated the Iran Revolutionary Guard Corps as a terrorist organization. Press reports indicate they will soon designate the Muslim Brotherhood. That will raise some questions because there are so many organizations in the Muslim world influenced or inspired by the Muslim Brotherhood, including the governments of Turkey and Qatar.

Venezuela's legal government is being thwarted by Maduro. Maduro is being aided by Iran.

And, finally, as to crypto currencies, these are the plastic guns of currency. That is to say, the crypto currency can be used for some legitimate purpose, but its unique advantage is to help criminals, drug dealers, and terrorists. And Hamas has on their website how to make donations to Hamas using Bitcoin. It does America no good to see the dollar lose power and crypto currencies take their place and facilitate illegal transactions.

I yield back.

Mr. TRONE. Thank you. I now recognize Mr. Chabot for 1 minute.

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And as Mr. Sherman mentioned, been a long time—had the honor to be a long-time serving member of this committee, and in fact chaired this committee when the Embassy attack in Benghazi took place.

About a month prior to that, I had been with our Ambassador, Ambassador Stevens, for the better part of a day and a half in Tripoli. And we have made some progress in fighting terrorism over the years, but as Mr. Sherman said, we are not there yet, and it is going to take a long, long battle.

And despite ISIS's territorial defeat, and our 18-year battle against al-Qaeda, both groups are still very dangerous. They have affiliates throughout the Middle East and Africa and Asia that threaten our allies and the security and stability of the respective regions.

Iran also uses terrorism and terrorist proxies as weapons in its campaign to gain hegemony in the region, destabilize our allies, and ultimately, in their view, to try to destroy Israel, which is why

the President was right in declaring the IRGC a terrorist organization.

And, finally, Sri Lanka, on Easter Sunday, the holiest day of the year for Christians, radical Islamists attacked three Catholic churches and other targets, the death toll staggering, hundreds murdered. Sunday masses were canceled this weekend, and barbaric attacks like this must never happen, and we mourn with all the families of those innocent souls who died celebrating Jesus' resurrection.

And I yield back.

Mr. TRONE. Without objection, all members may have 5 days to submit statements, questions, extraneous material for the record, subject to the length limitation in the rules.

I will now introduce our witnesses. Mr. Ali Soufan is the chief executive officer of The Soufan Group, as well as a member of the Homeland Security Advisory Council. He is a former FBI supervisory special agent who investigated and supervised several international terrorism cases, including the U.S. Embassy bombing in East Africa, the attack on the USS Cole, and events surrounding 9/11.

At the FBI, Mr. Soufan served on the Joint Terrorism Task Force, FBI New York office, and received numerous awards and commendations for his counterterrorism work. Welcome.

Ms. Vidhya Ramalingam is the founder of Moonshot CVE, a company using technology to disrupt encountered violent extremism globally. She directs digital projects in over 25 countries and oversees partnerships with tech companies to respond to violent extremism on their platforms, online intervention programs, to pull individuals out of violent movements and automated messaging to disrupt closed extremist forums.

She has a decade of experience engaging directly with extremists and previously served as a senior fellow at the Institute of Strategic Dialogue and a senior research fellow at the U.S. Institute for Public Policy. Welcome.

Mr. Bill Roggio is a senior fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies and editor of the Foundation's Long War Journal, which provides original reporting and analysis of terrorism across the Middle East, North Africa, and beyond.

Previously, Mr. Roggio was embedded, the U.S. Marine Corps, U.S. Army, and Iraqi forces in Iran, and with the Canadian Army in Afghanistan, and also served as a signalman and infantryman in the U.S. Army in the New Jersey National Guard.

Thank you all for being here today. Let us remind the witnesses, limit your testimony to 5 minutes. Without objection, your prepared written statements will be made part of the hearing record.

Thank you so much for being here today. Mr. Soufan, please begin.

STATEMENT OF ALI SOUFAN, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, THE SOUFAN GROUP, MEMBER, HOMELAND SECURITY COUNCIL

Mr. SOUFAN. Thank you, Vice Chairman Trone, Ranking Member Wilson, distinguished members. As you will hear from my statement, I believe that the current geopolitical dynamics in the Middle

East are fueling global terrorism and contributing to instability throughout the region and beyond.

My statement will address four fundamental issues. First, we must recognize the resilience of the ideology fueling transnational terrorist groups and helping them recruit across the globe.

Second, sectarianism has become the geopolitical currency of the Middle East, and terrorist organizations have become experts at exploiting this reality for their own gain.

Third, the Arab Spring has shifted the calculus of terrorist groups, especially al-Qaeda, which is playing the long game by focusing on coopting local conflicts to help achieve its goals and objectives.

Fourth, the war in Syria has exposed the true nature of the struggle underlying the current rise of militant groups and non-State actors. After the devastating attacks of 9/11, we responded swiftly. We have enjoyed numerous tactical victories since then, yet for all of these successes we have experienced the strategic failure of truly understanding why the ideology that organizations like al-Qaeda spread across the world is so resilient.

Even today the Caliphate may have been defeated in the physical sense. But the dynamics that allowed the so-called Islamic State to exist in the first place continue to endure.

Sectarianism has long figured in the modern Middle East power struggles, but its importance has grown with Iraq's transition to a Shia-led government and other regional conflicts, especially in Syria and Yemen.

Unfortunately, sectarianism has become primary tool for competing States to solidify power and support. Principally, I am speaking about the struggle for regional hegemony between Saudi Arabia and Iran, which has prolonged already-bloody conflicts and lent them a vicious sectarian edge.

Although both Saudi Arabia and Iran heavily employ the tactic of sectarianism, their strategies are widely different in both execution and success. My written statement goes into great detail of these dynamics.

The Arab Spring represented a key moment to the rise of militant groups and non-State actors. Even bin Laden, just before his demise, nearly 8 years to the day today, instructed his organization to move away from strictly targeting the West and to begin exploiting local power vacuums that followed the collapse of the various Arab regimes.

With that, bin Laden was able to rewrite the global jihadi narrative from a regional perspective, a narrative that has local roots but global aspirations. This local strategy is now as much a part of the agenda of terrorist groups as are the acts of terrorism aimed to dismantle the world order led by the United States.

Of all the Arab Spring revolutions, perhaps the most complicated is Syria. The war in Syria has exposed the true nature of the struggle underlying the current instability in the region. One glance at the Middle East suggests that the region has reverted to an intercivilizational conflict. Sunnis fight Shia, Persians battle Arabs, Turks struggle with Kurds.

The war in Syria also caused a refugee crisis without precedence, which, coupled with the rise of identity politics in Europe, gave ox-

ygen to another transnational violence movement that is unfolding in front of our very eyes, radical right wing terrorism. These two dangerous networks feed off each other. When a jihadi commits a terrorist attack, it benefits the right wing terrorist. And when the right wing terrorist commits an attack, it benefits the jihadi.

It is my hope that I have managed to demonstrate that terrorism does not succeed or fail in a vacuum, and that the terrorist landscape of today operates at a larger strategic context. The resilience of the ideology, coupled with sectarianism and prolonged conflict across the Middle East due to geopolitical power rivalry, is what has given rise to what we are witnessing today.

My written statement includes numerous examples of the talking points I have highlighted here this afternoon, and I look forward for answering questions from the subcommittee. Thank you for the privilege and for the opportunity to be here with you today.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Soufan follows:]

Written Statement for House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on the Middle East, North Africa, and International Terrorism

Examining the Global Terrorism Landscape

By Mr. Ali H. Soufan
Founder of The Soufan Center
30 April 2019

Testimony to be presented before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs on Tuesday, April 30, 2019.

About The Soufan Center

The Soufan Center (TSC) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to serving as a resource and forum for research, analysis, and strategic dialogue related to global security issues and emergent threats. TSC fills a niche-role by producing independent, quality research and hosting proactive conversations in order to effectively equip thought leaders, policy makers, governments, bi- and multilateral institutions, media, and those in the non-profit and academic communities to engage in strategic security-related practices. Our work focuses on a broad range of complex security issues—from international and domestic terrorism, to humanitarian crisis analysis, to refugee and immigrant issues, and more.

The Soufan Center is a 501c3 non-profit organization.

About Ali Soufan

Ali Soufan is the Founder of The Soufan Center. Mr. Soufan is a former FBI Supervisory Special Agent who investigated and supervised highly sensitive and complex international terrorism cases, including the East Africa Embassy Bombings, the attack on the USS Cole, and the events surrounding 9/11. He is the Chief Executive Officer of The Soufan Group and Founder of The Soufan Center.

The Threat Landscape: Understanding the Salafi-jihadist and Shia-extremist Threat

Testimony of Mr. Ali Soufan,

Founder of The Soufan Center

Before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs

Subcommittee on the Middle East, North Africa, and International Terrorism

United States House of Representatives

Tuesday, April 30, 2019

INTRODUCTION

Chairman Deutch, Ranking Member Wilson, distinguished members: Thank you for hearing my testimony today.

During this session on the global terrorism landscape, my aim is to shed light not only on the existing "hot spots" or relative strength of terrorist organizations, but how these movements have evolved over time. It remains insufficient simply to know the number of foreign fighters that traveled abroad, or the geographical areas of particular concern today. While that information is important, to truly eradicate this threat we must understand the geopolitical context, the ways in which networks are formed, and why the terrorist ideology is able to achieve enduring resonance with individuals and groups. Terrorism never operates in a vacuum, and with that today I hope to clarify how the threat functions in a larger strategic context.

Nearly eight years to the day after Osama bin Laden was brought to justice, and despite ongoing military and intelligence efforts as part of the Global War on Terror, we have defeated neither the organization bin Laden founded, nor the wider Salafi-jihadist movement . On the contrary, al-Qaeda's fighting strength today is an order of magnitude larger than it was on the day bin Laden died—and that does not count the tens of thousands more who have pledged allegiance to al-Qaeda's breakaway rival, the so-called Islamic State (IS). In addition to the threat stemming from Salafi-jihadist terrorism, the sectarian violence that has become synonymous with conflicts in the Middle East has given rise to and empowered pro-Iranian militant groups across the region, many of which have already been designated terrorist organizations both by the U.S. and other states in the international community.

In my years of tracking, analyzing, and ultimately trying to disrupt these terrorist organizations, I draw four main conclusions of the threat stemming from terrorism, which is indeed more significant today than it was on September 11, 2001.

THE RESILIENCE OF IDEOLOGY:

First, we must recognize the resilience of the ideology. In 1989, bin Laden left Afghanistan in disgrace when his rash miscalculations at the Battle of Jalalabad led to the deaths of hundreds of Arab fighters. Welcomed in Sudan, bin Laden set up a network that brought together other foreign fighters who had traveled to Afghanistan to fight the Soviets but were no longer welcomed in their home countries. When he was ejected from Sudan under international pressure, bin Laden returned to Afghanistan, where al-Qaeda evolved into a hierarchical organization. The establishment of operational bases, training camps and a clear command and control structure enabled it to direct and execute spectacular attacks. First the 1998 East Africa Embassy Bombings, then the 2000 USS Cole Bombings, and ultimately the September 11 attacks on the U.S. homeland. After 9/11, we responded swiftly, and bin Laden was on the run. Instead of al-Qaeda imploding, however, it mutated to fit the new reality, morphing into a series of franchises and affiliate groups spanning the globe from North Africa to South East Asia. More importantly, the organization bin Laden created became a message. A message that outlasted bin Laden himself.

We have enjoyed numerous tactical victories. Most of the individuals that comprised al-Qaeda's operational leadership on the eve of 9/11 are either dead or in jail. Almost all of the territory captured by IS has been reclaimed. Tactically, there is nothing we cannot do. Yet, for all of our tactical successes, they amount to a strategic failure. A strategic failure of truly understanding why the ideology that organizations like al-Qaeda have spread across the Islamic world is so resilient. The 'caliphate' may have been defeated in the physical sense, but the dynamics that allowed the so-called Islamic State to exist in the first place and al-Qaeda to expand, continue to spread in so many places around the world. Only by defeating the conditions that allowed the appeal of that narrative in the hearts and minds of so many around the world, can we finally win.

SECTARIANISM:

Second, sectarianism has become the geopolitical currency of the Middle East and terrorist organizations have become experts at exploiting this reality for their own gain. Between 2003 and 2006, the terrorist Abu Musab al-Zarqawi turned al-Qaeda in Iraq into a machine for murdering Shia Muslims as well as fighting the United States, and thereby bequeathed Iraq a sectarian bloodbath that continues to this day. Zarqawi did not invent the concept of sectarianism, which has figured in the modern Middle East power struggles since the ayatollahs took power in Iran in 1979; but its importance has grown with Iraq's transition to a Shia-led government and the Iranian-Saudi proxy wars in Syria and Yemen, and, of course, the rebirth of Zarqawi's movement as today's Islamic State. Sectarian hatred was never an explicit part of bin Laden's agenda—his mother, after all, is an Alawite, a member of the same Shia sect as Bashar al-Assad—but violence against Shia Muslims and their cultural symbols have proven a potent recruiting tool for the global Salafi-jihadist movement, as well as its Iranian-backed opponents.

Unfortunately, we should not expect governments in the region to abandon sectarianism as a rallying cry anytime soon, as it has become the primary tool for competing states to solidify power and support. Principally, I am speaking about the struggle for regional hegemony between Saudi Arabia and Iran, which has prolonged already bloody conflicts and lent them a vicious sectarian edge. Although

both Saudi Arabia and Iran heavily employ the tactic of sectarianism, their strategies are widely different in both execution and success.

Saudi Arabia and its allies have resorted to funding Sunni groups on the ground in local conflicts, often with little regard for these groups' direct or indirect links to transnational terrorist networks, such as al-Qaeda. Today, in the complex civil war in Yemen, Saudi Arabia and its allies find themselves in a direct military war with an Iranian proxy, and in effect, on the same side as al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). AQAP has strengthened its ties to Yemen's Sunni tribes and militias, to the point where it would be difficult, if not impossible, to support those groups without indirectly supporting al-Qaeda.[1,2] In addition, and in order to counter Iranian influence across the Muslim world, Saudi Arabia exports radical religious education which preaches dangerous sectarian narratives that promote and result in sectarian, religious, and ethnic violence. What we witnessed recently in South Asia is an example. The combination of a rise in identity politics and the funding of extremist madrassas that promote a violently radical version of Islam, previously foreign to the area, has contributed to a rising tide of radicalization and extremism within the region. Radical religious influence has resulted in an increase in 'jihadi' violence in Pakistan, Indian Kashmir, and Bangladesh.[3] As a January 2019 report by The Soufan Center highlighted, Salafi-jihadist groups, including both IS and al-Qaeda, have long viewed South Asia as fertile ground to gain new territory and recruits, and militant propaganda has highlighted injustices against Muslims in Bangladesh, Myanmar, India, and Sri Lanka. Importantly, the amplification of an inter-communal divide in the region has the potential of serving the jihadists' cause and accelerating sectarian violence.[4]

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[1] Michael, Maggie, Trish Wilson, and Lee Keath. "AP Investigation: US Allies, Al-Qaida Battle Rebels in Yemen." *AP NEWS*, August 7, 2018. https://apnews.com/f38788a561d74ca78c77cb43612d50da.

[2] Zimmerman, Katherine, "AQAP Post-Arab Spring and the Islamic State," American Enterprise Institute, 30 June 2017. Accessed 25 Jan 2018. www.aei.org/publication/aqap-post-arab-spring-and-the-islamic-state/

[3] Pillalamarri, Akhilesh. "The Radicalization of South Asian Islam: Saudi Money and the Spread of Wahhabism." Georgetown Security Studies Review, December 20, 2014. http://georgetownsecuritystudiesreview.org/2014/12/20/the-radicalization-of-south-asian-islam-saudi-money-and-the-spread-of-wahhabism/.

[4] "Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS): The Nucleus of Jihad in South Asia." The Soufan Center. https://thesoufancenter.org/research/al-qaeda-in-the-indian-subcontinent-aqis-the-nucleus-of-jihad-in-south-asia/.

Iran, on the other hand, has pioneered a sophisticated and intricate strategy that combines insurgent and state power in a potent combination—a strategy evident today in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps – Qods Force (IRGC-QF) is tasked with building pro-Iranian armed factions within the region into political movements with progressively increasing influence and capabilities. One man is recognized as the principal architect of each of these policies: Major General Qassem Soleimani, the long-time chief of the Quds Force. More than anyone else, Soleimani has been responsible for the creation of an arc of influence—which Iran terms its "Axis of Resistance"—extending from the Gulf of Oman through Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon to the eastern shores of the Mediterranean Sea. Today, with Assad's impending victory in Syria's civil war, this Iranian alliance has become stable enough that Qassem Soleimani, should he be so inclined, could drive his car from Tehran to Lebanon's border with Israel without being stopped. And, as the Mossad chief Yossi Cohen has pointed out, the same land bridge would be open to truckloads of rockets bound for Iran's main regional proxy, the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah (Party of God).[5] Iran's "Axis of Resistance" has been built on the efforts of proxies controlled by Soleimani in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen—and on the marriage between state and militant power that Iran has been able to cultivate and nurture in each of those countries. So far, Iran's playbook enables it to accomplish its objectives without invasions or conventional military conflict.

In addition, Iran displayed significant logistical expertise in recruiting and deploying Shia fighters primarily from Lebanon, Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan to the Syrian battlefield. Between 2013-2017, the IRGC-QF reportedly recruited and deployed as many as 50,000 or more Shia fighters in Syria, although estimates vary widely.[6]

Those who suffer from sectarian violence are the people and those who benefit are the terrorists. To provide but one example, in Yemen, which the UN has described as the worst humanitarian crisis in the world today, al-Qaeda in the Arabian

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[5] Ronen Bergman and Raz Zimmt, "Israel's most dangerous enemy: Who are you, Hajj Qasem Soleimani?" YNet News, July 4, 2018.

[6] Jamal, Ahmad Shuja. "The Fatemiyoun Army: Reintegration into Afghan Society." Special Report. United States Institute for Peace, March 2019. https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/2019-03/sr_443-the_fatemiyoun_army_reintegration_into_afghan_society-pdf_0.pdf.

Peninsula has exploited the conflict to expand from 1,000 fighters at the beginning of the war to between 6,000 to 7,000 today—fifteen to seventeen times the size of al-Qaeda as a whole on 9/11.[7,8]

THE ARAB SPRING:

Third, the Arab Spring has shifted the Salafi-jihadi strategy. In the months before bin Laden's death, the uprisings across the Arab world dissolved his keen focus on targeting the United States. To bin Laden, the wave of state failure sweeping the region in the first half of 2011 provided him with a major opportunity. The Arab Spring represented a pivotal moment to implement the chaos strategy of al-Qaeda's handbook, *The Management of Savagery*. Bin Laden instructed his organization to move away from strictly targeting the United States and her allies, to instead exploiting local vacuums that followed the collapse of the various Arab regimes, fomenting instability, building alliances with local groups, and pressuring local populations in areas where Al-Qaeda operates to depend on the terror group for security and much needed social services.[9] This local strategy is now as much a part of the agenda of al-Qaeda franchises as are the acts of terrorism aimed to dismantle the world order led by the United States.

On both aspects of this agenda, AQAP is in the lead, but we see this gradualist and grassroots approach practiced by al-Qaeda affiliates across the world. In Somalia, despite years of heavy fighting with peacekeeping forces from neighboring countries, as well as a steady U.S.-backed counter-terrorism campaign, al-Shabaab remains the dominant entity, especially in rural areas in the south, where it retains the ability to govern the territory it holds.[10] The group's January 2019 attack on a hotel in Nairobi,

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[7] "Chapter 6. Foreign Terrorist Organizations." Bureau of Counterterrorism: U.S. Department of State, 2013. http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2013/224829.htm.

[8] Umarov, Kairat. "Letter Dated 16 July 2018 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee Pursuant to Resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) Concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and Associated Individuals, Groups, Undertakings and Entities Addressed to the President of the Security Council," July 16, 2018. http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2018/705&referer=/english/&Lang=E.

[9] "Letter to Shaykh Mahmud," Office of the Director of National Intelligence [document captured during the Navy SEAL raid on bin Laden's Abbottabad residence]. https://www.dni.gov/index.php/resources/bin-laden-bookshelf

[10] "IntelBrief: Hotel Attack in Nairobi Demonstrates Regional Threat Posed by Al-Shabab." The Soufan Center, January 17, 2019. http://thesoufancenter.org/intelbrief-hotel-attack-in-nairobi-demonstrates-regional-threat-posed-by-al-shabab/.

Kenya was a shocking reminder of its continuing capacity to wreak havoc and destruction. In the Sahel region of Africa, AQIM has merged with three other groups to form Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM), an al-Qaeda- affiliated organization boasting as many as 2,000 fighters as of September 2018.[11] JNIM has continued to carry out attacks on French, UN, and local government interests throughout the region, including the coordinated assaults in Burkina Faso in March 2018.[12]

The picture in Syria is even more complicated. As of January 2019, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS),—the largest insurgent faction in Syria, with as many as 20,000 fighters—stood at the head of a coalition of rebel groups that have undisputed control over Idlib governorate and parts of the neighboring governorates of Aleppo and Hama, making HTS and its partners the de facto government over some three million people.[13,14] HTS, is, in fact, an umbrella organization that consists of many different jihadist groups. Some of these groups, like Tanzim Hurras al-Din, are totally loyal to al-Qaeda but the level of loyalty varies according to each group. With respect to HTS, there is a divergence of interests at times with al-Qaeda Central, but they have more similarities than differences and share common connections and linkages in the broader jihadist universe.

In our comprehensive 2015 report on IS, we predicted that it would go from a proto-state to an underground terrorist organization, which is what we are seeing today. Even though IS' territory has been retaken, which is indeed significant, the group's ability to inspire and take advantage of existing conditions in different places is very much intact. Most IS provinces across the world build on pre-existing conflicts with sectarian, ethnic, and religious divisions. This is true from Boko Haram in Nigeria to Ansar Bayt al Maqdis in the Sinai to Abu Sayyaf in the Philippines. The current strategy employed by IS appears to be taken directly from

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[11] Center for Strategic & International Studies, "Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM)," September 25, 2018. https://www.csis.org/programs/transnational-threats-project/terrorism-backgrounders/jamaat-nasr-al-islam-wal-muslimin#_edn2

[12] Ndiaga, Thiam. "Al Qaeda Affiliate Claims Responsibility for Burkina Faso Attacks." Reuters, March 3, 2018. https://www.reuters.com/article/us-burkina-security-idUSKCN1GF0GS.

[13] "Syria: Who's in Control of Idlib?" BBC, September 7, 2018, sec. World. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-45401474.

[14] "IntelBrief: From Bad to Worse in Syria's Idlib Province." The Soufan Center, January 14, 2019. http://thesoufancenter.org/intelbrief-from-bad-to-worse-in-syrias-idlib-province/.

al-Qaeda's playbook: rewriting the global jihadist narrative from a regional perspective—a narrative that has local roots but global aspirations. IS' global reach has to do with two factors: first, the international network of foreign terrorist fighters and, second, capitalizing on its brand to establish links with groups that already exist. We have to remember that around 45,000 individuals from over 110 countries joined IS.[15] IS thus has an international cadre and is trying to recover from its defeat in Iraq and Syria by leveraging this global network. The recent attack in Sri Lanka is a horrific example in which a local group buys into the terror brand and operates to further its deadly agenda.

THE SYRIAN CIVIL WAR:

Fourth, the war in Syria has exposed the true nature of the struggle underlying the current rise of al-Qaeda and the Islamic State. One glance at the complicated lattice of strife enmeshing the contemporary Middle East is enough to suggest that the region has reverted to *intra*-civilizational conflict. Sunnis fight Shia, Persians battle Arabs, Turks struggle with Kurds, which manifests at a tribal, communal, and even neighborhood level.

The war in Syria morphed into more than just a civil war against a ruthless regime. It became a regional and, ultimately, international war. The war in Syria brought back history. It has provided the opportunity for many countries to try to reestablish their traditional spheres of influence. States like Iran, Russia, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and China all want to assert and expand their regional influences and as a consequence, the fault lines that existed in the 17th and 18th centuries are present today, from Crimea to Mosul.

The war in Syria also caused an unprecedented refugee crisis, which, coupled with the rise in identity politics in Europe, gave oxygen to another transnational violent movement that is unfolding in front of our very eyes: radical right-wing terrorism. These two dangerous networks feed off each other. When a Salafi-jihadist commits

[15] "Beyond the Caliphate: Foreign Fighters and the Threat of Returnees." The Soufan Center. Accessed April 29, 2019. https://thesoufancenter.org/research/beyond-caliphate/.

a terrorist attack, it benefits the right-wing terrorist. And when a right-wing terrorist commits an attack, the Salafi-jihadist terrorist benefits from it.

CONCLUSION:

I would like to leave you with some thoughts about the future of the jihadi threat. There is a growing crisis of leadership in the global jihadist movement. Ayman al-Zawahiri increasingly seems like a liability, as his lack of charisma has hampered al-Qaeda's ability to appeal to the younger generation. For IS, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi is isolated and on the run, and there are questions surrounding his succession and the future leadership of the Islamic State.

Hamza bin Laden's eventual rise to the top leadership position of al-Qaeda could be a lifeline, not only for the future of the organization itself, but for the global Salafi-Jihadi movement as a whole. The young Bin Laden might be uniquely positioned to once again unite the global jihadi terrorism under one banner.

Hamza Bin Laden exemplifies al-Qaeda's potential shift back to focus on the global jihad against the United States and our allies. In his public messages, Hamza calls on followers not to travel to theaters of jihad in the Muslim world, but instead to "[t]ake the battlefield from Kabul, Baghdad, and Gaza to Washington, London, Paris, and Tel Aviv."[16] Indeed, Hamza often repeats, almost word-for-word, myriad anti-American phrases used by his father as early as the 1990s.[17]

Conflicts across the Middle East draw no nearer to a realistic solution and sectarianism is now an integral part of the strategy in the power competition between regional states. As a result, the security vacuum and humanitarian crises created by these conflicts are currently being exploited by both Salafi-jihadist and pro-Iranian militias to strengthen such organizations and expand their influence and support. In Iraq, for example, estimates suggest there are up to 100,000 Iraqi Shia militiamen, collectively known as Popular Mobilization Units (PMUs), with the majority

[16] Joscelyn, Thomas "Analysis: Osama bin Laden's Son Praises al Qaeda's Branches in New Message," Long War Journal, August 17, 2015. https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2015/08/osama-bin-ladens-son-praises-alqaeda-branches-in-new-message.php

[17] Soufan, Ali. "Hamza Bin Ladin: From Steadfast Son to Al-Qa'ida's Leader in Waiting." Combating Terrorism Center at West Point 10, no. 8 (September 7, 2017): 1–8. https://ctc.usma.edu/hamza-bin-ladin-from-steadfast-son-to-al-qaidas-leader-in-waiting/

belonging to Iranian-backed groups. Iran is said to provide well over $100 million per year worth of equipment to the Iraqi militias, and, despite IS being declared "defeated" in Iraq at the end of 2017, these militias still retain their independent capabilities and command structure. [18,19]

It is my hope that I have managed to demonstrate that terrorism does not succeed or fail in a vacuum, but that the terrorist landscape of today operates in a larger strategic context. The resilience of the ideology coupled with sectarianism and prolonged conflicts across the Middle East due to geopolitical power-rivalry is what has given rise to what we are witnessing today.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony.

[18] Iran Dramatically Shifts Iraq Policy to Confront Islamic State. Reuters, September 2, 2014.
[19] Ned Parker. "Power Failure in Iraq as Militias Outgun State." Reuters, October 21, 2015.

Mr. TRONE. Thank you very much.
Ms. RAMALINGAM.

STATEMENT OF VIDHYA RAMALINGAM, FOUNDER, MOONSHOT CVE, BOARD MEMBER, LIFE AFTER HATE

Ms. RAMALINGAM. Chairman Trone, Ranking Member Wilson, members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today.

My name is Vidhya Ramalingam, and throughout my career I have worked to understand and deter individuals from white nationalist extremism and terrorism. Ten years ago, I moved to Europe to undertake a mission to meet with white nationalism extremists in Scandinavia. When a white nationalist terrorist murdered 77 people in Norway, I led the European Union's first intergovernmental initiative on this form of violence.

Today, I appear before this subcommittee as founder of Moonshot CVE. Our mission is to end violent extremism globally. We work regularly with the U.S. State Department to disrupt encountered terrorist networks online, and my team and I have supported the Global Coalition Against Daesh, deployed programs to undermine Boko Haram recruitment in Nigeria, and have worked to prevent al-Qaeda affiliates from recruiting in Southeast Asia.

We deliver programs to counter radicalization to white nationalist terrorism globally. White nationalist terrorism poses both a domestic and a global terror threat to the United States and its allies. It is dedicated to the overthrow of democratic governance and destruction of values intrinsic to the American way of life.

It is an ideology based on the notion that the white race is threatened with extinction, the dehumanization of other races, and conspiracy theories that position particular ethnic and religious groups as enemies.

Instances of this form of terrorism are increasing across the globe. Norway saw the deadliest of these attacks in recent history when a terrorist murdered 77 people in twin attacks on government buildings and on the island of Utoya in 2011. And in March this year we saw attacks by a terrorist on two mosques left 50 people dead in Christchurch, New Zealand.

These movements have encouraged a dangerous strategy of leaderless resistance where individuals operate independently from one another and carry out violence to serve white national extremist interests. This is not dissimilar from the tactics adopted by ISIS and affiliated groups, which have encouraged so-called lone wolves to independently carry out low-tech acts of terror across the globe.

Mirroring ISIS, white nationalist terrorists have adopted the term "white jihad" and have increasingly chosen low-tech methods of violence, including vehicular attacks.

White nationalist fighters and ideologues increasingly move across borders. The perpetrator of the New Zealand attack was an Australian citizen who traveled across borders to carry out his attack. The ongoing conflict in Ukraine has drawn white national foreign fighters from dozens of countries at an unprecedented scale.

In the past several years, we have seen these terrorists themselves become dangerous international ideologues and hate preachers. Norwegian terrorist Anders Behring Breivik and New Zealand

terrorist Brenton Tarrant published their own manifestos, which served to inspire others to act.

On Saturday, a synagogue in Poway, California, was attacked by a gunman. A manifesto suspected to have been posted by the gunman claims that he drew direct inspiration from the New Zealand attack. This, once again, highlights that the global white nationalist terrorist threat is directly inspiring violence here in the United States.

Tarrant also pioneered a new communications tactic—live streaming a video of his massacre to the world using Facebook Live. This turned the attack into a powerful piece of digital propaganda itself, with millions of internet users watching globally.

The internet did not create this global movement, but it has supercharged its evolution. Adopting increasing decentralized structures, these movements may not be as deadly as ISIS, but they share with it many of its characteristics.

My written testimony includes a range of strategic priorities to aid the fight against white nationalist terrorism, and I will mention just a few here. The fight against terrorism will be significantly enhanced by the designation of key individuals and groups whom we know to be behind acts of white nationalist terror as specially designated global terrorists.

We encourage greater collaboration between governments and the private sector to move beyond simply content removal and deliver proactive strategic communications campaigns to counter the terrorist threat.

We have partnered with Google to repurpose advertising technology to reach terrorists with content which discredits these ideologies and offers alternatives. This method has now been delivered globally, together with governments and the private sector, including actors, such as the Gen Next Foundation here in the United States, in the fight against ISIS.

Today we are working to use this technology to change behavior of white nationalist terrorists online. We encourage this subcommittee to see white nationalist terrorism as part of the full spectrum of terror threats facing the United States and its allies.

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss this with you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Ramalingam follows:]

Testimony of Vidhya Ramalingam
Founder & Director, Moonshot CVE
Before the
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
Hearing on "Examining the Global Terrorism Landscape"
April 30, 2019

I. Introduction

Chairman Deutch, Ranking Member Wilson, and members of the Subcommittee: Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I appreciate your leadership to ensure better understanding of the threat posed by international terrorist groups, and welcome the opportunity to discuss the threat posed by white nationalist terrorists globally.

My name is Vidhya Ramalingam, and throughout my career, I have worked to understand and deter individuals from white nationalist extremism. Ten years ago I moved to Europe to undertake a mission to meet with white nationalist extremists in Scandinavia, to understand how they operate and what motivates individuals to join these groups. I spent time with individuals who espouse white nationalist ideologies, including those with violent pasts and those who went on to perpetrate violence.

Shortly after, when a white nationalist terrorist murdered 77 people in Norway, I led the European Union's first inter-governmental initiative on this form of terrorism and extremism, initiated by the governments of Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Finland, and the Netherlands, and launched by the EU Commissioner for Home Affairs. In this role, I worked across ten European countries to design policy, initiate projects, and build capacity to respond to white nationalist terrorism and extremism.

Today, I appear before the committee as Founder of Moonshot CVE, a company with a bold mission to disrupt and ultimately end violent extremism globally.[1] We design new technology and methods to directly engage violent extremists, and those at-risk of perpetrating violence. We work regularly with the U.S. Department of State to deliver strategic communications programs to respond to a broad range of violent extremist and terrorist threats online.

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[1] This written testimony has been prepared with support from Ross Frenett, Ludovica Di Giorgi, Danielle Soskin, and Liam Monsell of Moonshot CVE.

Since our inception in 2015, Moonshot CVE has worked with governments across the globe to deliver programs to disrupt terrorists of all kinds. My team and I have supported the Global Coalition Against Daesh, deployed programs to undermine Boko Haram recruitment in Nigeria, trained counter-extremism activists in Libya, and have worked to prevent al-Qa'ida affiliates from recruiting in South East Asia. Our work to counter radicalization to white nationalist extremism and terrorism has included partnerships with the Governments of the United Kingdom, Australia, and a recent initiative launched with the Government of Canada which will engage with white nationalist extremists across Canada.[2]

II. A persistent threat

White nationalist extremism is dedicated to the overthrow of democratic governance and destruction of values intrinsic to the American way of life. It poses both a domestic and a global terror threat to the United States and its allies, in which global attacks have immediate ramifications here in the United States. It is an ideology based on the notion that the "white race" is threatened with extinction, promoting efforts to defend and protect the white race from alleged dispossession. It is an ideology that relies on the dehumanization of other races, and conspiracy theories that position particular ethnic and religious groups as "enemies." Conspiracy theories underpinning this ideology include the belief that the white race is under attack from Jewish interests across industries and the government, which is referred to as the Zionist Occupied Government (ZOG). The virulent anti-Semitism that sits at the heart of this ideology is one of the many things it shares with jihadist organizations such as ISIS.

Crucial to the coherence of this ideology are several influential texts, including the 1978 racist dystopian novel *The Turner Diaries*, which inspired the Oklahoma City bombing and other attacks; and the "White Genocide Manifesto", published in 1988 by a white nationalist extremist in prison, which is regularly referenced by white nationalist terrorists across the globe.[3] Ideologues use the concept of white genocide, the idea that miscegenation and migration are fostering the end of white society, to stoke fear and incite violence. Many ideologues also purport that a race war, referred to as Racial Holy War (RaHoWa) is inevitable and should be fought by white nationalist extremists.

My testimony today covers groups, individuals, and violence inspired by a range of ideological strands which fall under the umbrella of white nationalist extremism. For consistency, I will use the term "white nationalist extremism and terrorism" to discuss these groups and international responses. However, the Subcommittee should be aware that international governments, intelligence agencies, and police use varying terminology for these ideologies and acts of terrorism, including the terms "right-wing extremism and terrorism" and "far-right extremism and terrorism."

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[2] Public Safety Canada, "Federal support for innovative online initiative to prevent radicalization to violence", *Public Safety Canada,* November 6th, 2018, accessed April 28th, 2019, available at: https://www.canada.ca/en/public-safety-canada/news/2018/11/federal-support-for-innovative-online-initiative-to-prevent-radicalization-to-violence.html

[3] J.M. Berger, "The Turner Legacy: The Storied Origins and Enduring Impact of White Nationalism's Deadly Bible", *International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, The Hague* 7, no. 8 (2016), accessed April 28th, 2019, available at: https://icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/ICCT-Berger-The-Turner-Legacy-September2016-2.pdf

Throughout history, there have always been groups and organizations dedicated to advancing the interests of white nationalist extremism. These have included groups such as the Ku Klux Klan, plus hundreds of others from North America, Europe, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand. Law enforcement responses, weak leadership, and in-fighting facilitated the penetration and fragmentation of many of these groups over the course of several decades. The move toward a decentralized approach to coordination of violence was deliberate and necessary for these movements, as organizational loyalty declined and white nationalist extremists were forced into loosely affiliated networks and coalitions.

As early as the 1980s, these movements were moving toward a new strategy that would encourage what was termed "leaderless resistance," where individuals were to operate independently from one another and carry out violence to serve white nationalist extremist interests.[4] This approach is not dissimilar from tactics adopted by ISIS and affiliated groups, which have encouraged and embraced so-called "lone wolves" to independently carry out low-tech acts of violence across the globe. The shift to loosely affiliated global networks poses challenges to law enforcement efforts to track, monitor, and disrupt planned violence.

Though white nationalists were early adopters of the internet, the mainstreaming of new social media platforms over the past 15 years has further expanded possibilities for white nationalist extremist cooperation online. New social media platforms facilitate the dissemination of ideas, the recruitment of new members, and the socialization of individuals into violence. White nationalist extremist groups understand how to manipulate the public and private spheres of the internet to their advantage. They are increasingly brazen in their efforts to disseminate information on their beliefs and activities publicly, using platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Reddit, Gab, Discord, 8chan, 4chan, and many others. This new global community does not confine itself simply to the digital realm, but deliberately creates an environment that fosters and encourages offline action, including lone actor terrorist attacks.[5]

III. White nationalist terrorist attacks

On March 15, 2019, attacks by a white nationalist terrorist on two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, left 50 people dead. The violence in Christchurch joins a growing list of similar attacks across the globe, and is the latest manifestation of a long-standing, but evolving, global threat.

White nationalist and neo-Nazi terrorism has a long and bloody history post-World War Two. In France, the *Organisation Armée Secrète* killed hundreds in a campaign of bombing and assassinations during the late 1950s and early 1960s. In Italy, members of *Nuclei Armati*

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[4] Edwin Bakker and Beatrice de Graaf, "Lone Wolves: How to prevent this phenomenon?", *International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, The Hague* 1, no. 2 (2010), accessed April 28th, 2019, available at: https://www.icct.nl/download/file/ICCT-Bakker-deGraaf-EM-Paper-Lone-Wolves.pdf

[5] Europol, "European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2017", *Europol*, 2017, accessed April 28th, 2019, available at: https://www.europol.europa.eu/tesat/2017/5.RIGHT-WING_TERRORISM.html

Rivoluzionari bombed Bologna Centrale railway station in 1980, killing 85 people and wounding over 200. That same year, the Oktoberfest bombing in Munich left 13 dead and 213 wounded. Here in the United States, the horrific Oklahoma City bombing in 1995 led to the deaths of 168 people.

Over the past decade, the international community has been confronted repeatedly with the grim reality of white nationalist terrorism. In 2009, the Aryan Strike Force became the first terrorist organization in the UK to successfully manufacture ricin. Norway was hit by violence in 2011, when terrorist Anders Behring Breivik carried out the deadliest attack propagated by a white nationalist terrorist in recent history, murdering 77 people, mostly children, in twin terrorist attacks on government buildings and the island of Utøya. In 2011, German police uncovered the National Socialist Underground (NSU), a terrorist group which carried out a series of murders, bombings and bank robberies. In 2013, Ukrainian-born terrorist Pavlo Lapshyn's wave of terror in the United Kingdom began with a single racially motivated murder, and ended with a series of attempted bombings against mosques. In 2016, Thomas Mair shot and killed Member of Parliament Jo Cox. Mair had links to international white nationalist extremist networks and targeted the politician for her stance on immigration and multiculturalism. Canada experienced violence in 2017, when Alexandre Bissonette shot and killed six individuals and injured 19 more, at the Islamic Cultural Centre of Quebec City in Sainte-Foy, Quebec. Last year the Prime Minister of Spain and the President of France were both the targets of white nationalist assassination plots.[6]

Here in the United States, the three deadliest white nationalist attacks in the last decade have all been on places of worship. In 2012 in Oak Creek, Wisconsin, six people were murdered at the Sikh Temple of Wisconsin. In 2015 in Charleston, South Carolina, nine people were murdered at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church. In 2018 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 11 people were murdered at the Tree of Life synagogue. Just this Saturday, one person was murdered in an attack on a synagogue in Poway, California. At the time of writing this testimony, a manifesto suspected to have been posted by the attacker claims that he drew direct inspiration from the perpetrator of the New Zealand attack.

The scale of violence from white nationalist terrorism across the globe remains difficult to quantify. Legislative frameworks vary and are often ill-designed to cope with white nationalist violence as terrorism, particularly as group membership wanes and perpetrators are increasingly part of loosely affiliated networks. White nationalist violence is therefore often charged as hate crime or other types of crime.

Overall instances of white nationalist terrorism are increasing. The Global Terrorism Index (GTI) records a rise in white nationalist terror incidents over the past decade.[7] The number of white

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[6] Daniel Koehler, "Violence and Terrorism from the Far Right: Policy Options to Counter an Elusive Threat", *International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, The Hague*, February 27th, 2019, accessed April 28th, 2019, available at: https://icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Koehler-Violence-and-Terrorism-from-the-Far-Right-February-2019.pdf

[7] Institute for Economics & Peace, "Global Terrorism Index 2018: Measuring the impact of terrorism", November 2018, accessed April 28th, 2019, available at: http://visionofhumanity.org/app/uploads/2018/12/Global-Terrorism-Index-2018-1.pdf

nationalist extremist individuals receiving support in the UK's Channel program, a government-run early intervention program, has increased by 300% since 2012, as compared to an 80% increase in referrals related to Jihadism.

III. Key trends

Attack tactics
White nationalist perpetrators rely on an evolving playbook of tactics to carry out attacks. Europol confirms that many members of the white nationalist terrorist scene have been found in possession of a significant amount of firearms, ammunition or explosives. There is evidence from Europe and South Africa of white nationalist extremist groups organizing training camps to improve combat techniques.

While the use of homemade explosive devices continues to be common, many perpetrators have chosen low-sophistication methods, such as armed assault, or the replication of tactics encouraged by ISIS, such as vehicular attacks. Vehicular attacks by white nationalist extremists include the ramming of a car into crowds in Charlottesville killing one person in 2017; the use of a van to attack worshippers at a London mosque killing one person in 2017; and the use of a van by a white nationalist extremist in Toronto to kill 10 people in 2018.

White nationalist extremists have developed more sophisticated communications strategies surrounding attacks. This has included the self-publication of written manifestos, published and distributed shortly before attacks are committed, including a 1,515 page manifesto by Norwegian terrorist Anders Behring Breivik; a four page manifesto by American terrorist Dylann Roof; a 74 page manifesto by Australian terrorist Brenton Tarrant; and most recently a manifesto suspected to have been published this weekend by the perpetrator of the attack on a synagogue in Poway, California.

The perpetrator of the New Zealand attack pioneered a new communications tactic. Taking advantage of the availability of live video streaming technology, he used a camera strapped to his forehead to stream a live video of his attack using Facebook Live. This act turned the attack into a powerful piece of digital propaganda itself, with millions of internet users watching and sharing the video globally. Facebook has reported that it deleted 1.5 million uploads of the video within the first 24 hours of the attack. Given the history of replication of tactics among white nationalist terrorists, governments and technology companies alike need to be prepared for the possibility that this style of attack could be attempted by white nationalist terrorists in the future.

A globally connected movement
White nationalist terrorism has always been international, with fighters and ideologues moving across borders. The New Zealand perpetrator, an Australian citizen, was not the first white nationalist terrorist to travel across borders to carry out an attack. In 2013, Ukrainian-born terrorist Pavlo Lapshyn arrived in the UK and within five days had murdered an 82-year old Muslim grandfather. He later planted three bombs near mosques in the West Midlands. The ongoing conflict in Ukraine drew in white nationalist foreign fighters on an unprecedented scale,

with neo-Nazis and white supremacists from Brazil, the UK, Ireland, Italy, France, Sweden and dozens of other countries flocking to join the fight.[8]

The internet did not create this global movement, but it supercharged its evolution. The current wave of white nationalist terrorism is intrinsically connected with the emergence of internet cultures. White nationalist extremists use technology to organize and recruit, and like jihadists, the rise of social media has provided a rich opportunity for these groups to support one another across borders. They are active on major platforms such as Twitter, YouTube and Facebook, and on more niche forums such as 8chan and 4chan. Social media platforms have been used to communicate violent intent prior to and during attacks. The New Zealand shooter left posts on Twitter indicative of his intent prior to his attack, and provided users on 8chan with links to a live feed of his attack, which he then streamed on Facebook Live.[9]

In addition to exploiting public social media platforms, white nationalist extremists have readily adopted closed messaging platforms such as WhatsApp and Telegram, and gone so far as to create their own platforms where it suits them.[10] If one is not already embedded within the extremist community, the closed and encrypted nature of these platforms makes white nationalist extremist groups harder to find and access. Encryption technologies provide the protection needed for white nationalist extremist groups to coordinate physical attacks or demonstrations, as has been similarly demonstrated with jihadist groups organizing themselves, disseminating propaganda, and glorifying terrorist attacks. Following the banning of the National Action terrorist group in the UK, a leader of the group created the WhatsApp group "Triple KKK Mafia" to accompany another WhatsApp group "Inner".[11] In these encrypted channels they discussed "race war" and murdering their opponents.

These online connections have real world impacts. Before his 2011 attack, Norwegian terrorist Anders Behring Breivik's manifesto set out a world-view borrowed from authors around the globe, in which he argued for the violent annihilation of 'Eurabia' and multiculturalism. Explicitly praising and drawing on the works of his "hero" Breivik, the New Zealand perpetrator published his own manifesto before his attack. In this, he praised Luca Traini from Italy, Anders Breivik from Norway, Dylann Roof from the USA, Anton Lundin Pettersson from Sweden and Darren Osborne from the UK. This international cast of characters that inspired the New Zealand perpetrator is a potent reminder that this threat is anything but domestic; it is truly global.

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[8]Tom Parfitt, "Ukraine crisis: the neo-Nazi brigade fighting pro-Russian separatists", *The Telegraph*, August 11th, 2014, accessed April 28th, 2019, available at: https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/Europe/ukraine/11025137/Ukraine-crisis-the-neo-Nazi-brigade-fighting-pro-Russian-separatists.html

[9] Kevin Roose, "A Mass Murder of, and For, the Internet", *The New York Times*, March 15th, 2019, accessed April 28th, 2019, available at: https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/15/technology/facebook-youtube-christchurch-shooting.html

[10] Alexander Meleagrou-Hitchens, Audrey Alexander, and Nick Kaderbhai, "Literature Review: The impact of digital communications technology on radicalization and recruitment", *International Affairs*, 93(5), 2017: 1233-1249.

[11]Graham Macklin, "'Only Bullets will Stop Us!' – The Banning of National Action in Britain", *Perspectives on Terrorism*, 12(6), 2018: 104-122.

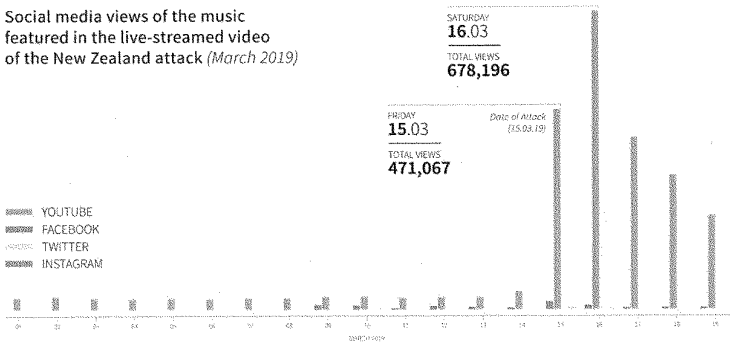
A unique online subculture
Much like jihadists, white nationalist extremists are adept at repurposing and hijacking otherwise neutral forms of new media and have constructed an immersive global ecosystem of mutually reinforcing memes, music and games. They have adopted a tactic in online messaging forums known as "shitposting," which is a rhetorical tactic used to provoke emotional reactions and derail productive discussions online. This style of communication, along with a catalogue of custom memes and iconography, is transnational in nature and helps to connect white nationalist extremists across the world.

Music in particular plays a crucial role in drawing individuals towards white nationalist extremism. The genres consumed vary from traditional white power rock music to remixes of popular music with white power lyrics, with underlying messages of white supremacy, vilification of perceived traitors, and incitement to violence. Music and violence go hand in hand; notably, the New Zealand perpetrator chose a white nationalist extremist soundtrack to accompany the livestreaming of his attacks. This served to reinforce the sense of community he felt with other white nationalist extremists, and helped to popularize the tracks he selected within this community.

In addition to music, online gaming is increasingly utilized by white nationalist extremists to socialize individuals to violence. In addition to creating communities within mainstream video games or on gaming applications such as Discord, they have also created their own custom games. In the days after the New Zealand attack, several video games were developed depicting the massacre. In one white nationalist extremist game, the user plays as the New Zealand perpetrator as he walks through various levels of the mosque shooting Muslims and other religious and ethnic groups.

Accessibility of white nationalist extremist content
White nationalist extremist content remains highly accessible not only on social media platforms, such as Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter, but on search engines, such as Google, Yahoo and Bing. Since 2016, Moonshot CVE has monitored the ways in which search engines are used to access violent extremist and terrorist content across the globe. We consistently find that the scale of audiences searching for white nationalist extremist content exceeds the scale of individuals using search engines to access jihadist content in the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, and in the United States.

In the aftermath of the New Zealand attack, Moonshot CVE collected data on the spread of white nationalist extremist content consumed and referenced by the attacker. The perpetrator chose five pieces of music to accompany his livestreamed footage of the attack, including songs popularly referenced among white nationalist extremist subcultures on the platform 8chan. Following the attack, Moonshot CVE recorded a dramatic spike in views for these five music tracks, peaking at 678,196 views globally. Viewers during the period immediately following the attack were disproportionately male (90%), aged 18-24 (40.3%), and were spread across the globe, with 20% based in the US.



Individuals also turned to Google to access white nationalist extremist content linked to the New Zealand attack. In the month following the attack, Moonshot CVE recorded high rates of white nationalist extremist searches across New Zealand, with the highest rates in Canterbury (50 searches per 100,000 people), Wellington (42 searches per 100,000 people) and Nelson (32 searches per 100,000 people). These rates exceeded the white nationalist extremist search traffic on Google in Australia during the same period, which capped at 14 searches per 100,000 people in New South Wales. These included searches for a Serbian nationalist, anti-Muslim and pro-genocide music video - one of the choices for the perpetrator's soundtrack - as well as attempts to access the perpetrator's manifesto.

Consistently, in the immediate aftermath of white nationalist attacks, we recorded spikes in attempts to access white nationalist extremist content across the globe. In the aftermath of the 2018 attack by a white nationalist extremist on the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, we recorded a 92% increase in searches for white nationalist extremist content across the United States, and a 182% increase in searches relating to killing Jews and ethnic minorities. This observation is consistent with the increase Moonshot CVE has recorded in jihadist search traffic following jihadist attacks. Following the 2017 terrorist attack by an individual who drove a pickup truck into a crowd in New York City, Moonshot CVE recorded a 104% increase in overall jihadist searches across the United States, with a 142% increase in attempts to download ISIS media products.

A shift is taking place in the threat environment as white nationalist extremists are increasingly active on social media and digital platforms, facilitating networking and global information sharing at an unprecedented scale. As Facebook has sought to ban white nationalist extremism from its platform, Moonshot CVE identified 21,579 users based in New Zealand that are connected to prominent white nationalist extremist pages on Facebook. Of these users, 1,509 were connected to multiple pages, indicating heightened interest and involvement in white nationalist extremism. Online platforms have helped to catapult individuals, who might otherwise operate alone, into global networks. Even in countries where intelligence agencies report minimal numbers, most security agencies report a high level of chatter and information sharing in the online space.

IV. The international response

In the past several years, governments have taken action to increase monitoring efforts and implement new policies to respond to white nationalist terrorism and extremism. These actions have often been implemented in the aftermath of white nationalist terrorist attacks. The Government of New Zealand has taken rapid action following the New Zealand attack. Last week, Prime Minister Jacinda Arden announced an international initiative with the Government of France to work with social media and technology companies to curb the spread of extremist beliefs online.[12] The UK government proscribed the neo-Nazi terrorist group National Action, convicting members and supporters of National Action, and of affiliated movements the System Resistance Network and the Sonnenkreig division, on terror charges. Here in the United States, Congress has banned U.S. aid to Ukraine from being used to provide arms, training or other assistance to the Azov Battalion, an ultranationalist militia that includes neo-Nazi membership.[13]

Globally, monitoring of white nationalist extremist groups has been increasingly brought under the remit of intelligence agencies. In 2018, the General Intelligence and Security Service of the Netherlands (AIVD) released a report focusing exclusively on the threat from white nationalist

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[12] BBC Staff, "Jacinda Ardern leads effort to curb online extremism", *BBC*, April 24th, 2019, accessed April 28th, 2019, available at: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-48033313

[13] Rebecca Kheel, "Congress bans arms to Ukraine militia linked to neo-Nazis", *The Hill*, March 27th, 2019, accessed April 28th, 2019, available at: https://thehill.com/policy/defense/380483-congress-bans-arms-to-controversial-ukrainian-militia-linked-to-neo-nazis

extremism, citing a "revival" of this form of extremism since 2014. In 2018, Germany's federal domestic intelligence agency announced a 50% increase in personnel focused on white nationalist extremism in 2019.[14] In the UK, the British domestic intelligence agency MI5 has brought white nationalist extremism under its remit.[15] Following the New Zealand attack, the UK's Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre, which currently issues the UK threat warnings for jihadism and Northern Ireland-related terror, will now also issue threat warnings concerning white nationalist extremism.[16]

Governments have also called upon technology companies to take swift action, particularly following the New Zealand attack, to remove extremist content faster and more efficiently. Since 2017, technology companies have taken action to remove accounts by white nationalist extremist users and websites, including action by domain and hosting services such as GoDaddy, Google, CloudFlare, and WordPress; music streaming services such as Spotify; and e-commerce platforms such as PayPal. Just this month, Facebook implemented new policies prohibiting support for white nationalist extremism on its platforms, including Instagram.

Removal of content, and enhanced measures to ensure live streaming of violence never occurs again, are important efforts to create safer online spaces that are less likely to be abused by white nationalist terrorists. However, removal of content alone will not diminish the global threat posed by white nationalist terrorism. Those uploading this content often repeatedly repost removed content and move onto new platforms to share propaganda. Despite increasing crackdowns, attempts to access violent extremist content persist, as demonstrated by the dramatic increases in searches on Google, Yahoo and Bing, for both white nationalist extremist and jihadist content following violent attacks.

Action to counter the white nationalist terrorist threat will necessarily look different from the military measures used to disrupt other forms of terrorism and terrorist groups, including ISIS and al-Qa'ida. However, many of the broad priorities set out in the National Strategy for Counterterrorism are applicable to the white nationalist extremist threat.[17] We recommend that efforts to counter the white nationalist terrorist threat focus on the following strategic priorities:

Evolve legal instruments to accommodate the changing nature of the terrorist threat: The fight against white nationalist terrorism globally will be significantly enhanced by the designation of key individuals and groups, whom we know to be behind acts of white nationalist

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[14] Thomas Haldenwang, "Neuer Verfassungsschutz-Chef verspricht stärkeren Kampf gegen rechts", *Sueddeutsche Zeitung*, December 21st, 2018, accessed April 28th, 2019, available at: https://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/thomas-haldenwang-neuer-verfassungsschutz-chef-verspricht-staerkeren-kampf-gegen-rechts-1.4262135

[15] Vikram Dodd, "MI5 to take over in fight against rise of UK rightwing extremism", *The Guardian*, October 28th, 2018, accessed April 28th, 2019, available at: https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/oct/28/mi5-lead-battle-against-uk-rightwing-extremists-police-action

[16] Vikram Dodd, "UK to start issuing far-right terrorism alerts", *The Guardian*, March 19th, 2019, accessed April 28th, 2019, available at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/mar/19/uk-to-start-issuing-far-right-terrorism-alerts

[17] The White House, "National Strategy for Counter Terrorism of the United States of America", *The White House*, October 2018, accessed April 28th, 2019, available at: https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/NSCT.pdf

terror, as Specially Designated Global Terrorists. As we've seen from the act of violence this weekend in Poway, California, where the perpetrator left behind evidence of his admiration for the New Zealand shooter, white nationalist terrorists inspire other perpetrators across the globe, including here in the United States.

Advance technology to analyze data pertaining to white nationalist terrorists online: Development of new technology is required to help process and analyze data to better understand and keep pace with the evolving tactics of white nationalist extremist individuals and groups online, and to facilitate the identification of individuals whose online behaviors indicate risk of imminent threat.

Improve routine intelligence cooperation on global white nationalist terrorism: Given the global nature of today's white nationalist terror threat, routine intelligence cooperation and information sharing will be required to ensure the national security communities of the United States and its allies are prepared to respond to planned violence and terror. As the terrorist threat is increasingly dominated by networks of individuals and small terrorist cells which appear and disband rapidly, enhanced intelligence cooperation and sharing of best practices will be critical.

Initiate strategic communications efforts through private sector partnerships: Given the ease of availability of white nationalist terrorist content online, undermining the recruitment of white nationalist terrorists will require efforts to deconstruct white nationalist extremist ideologies and offer safe alternatives to violent content. In 2015, we partnered with Google to launch the Redirect Method, which uses publicly available online advertising tools to match those searching for violent extremist and terrorist content with safer alternatives. The Redirect Method was initially deployed to engage with ISIS supporters online. We're now working with Google to draw on best practices from our fight against ISIS, to design deployments of the Redirect Method to engage with white nationalist extremists online.

Efforts to repurpose advertising technology can radically improve the availability of content which discredits extremist narratives, or simply offers alternatives, to those seeking dangerous content. We have worked with governments, including a recent partnership with the Government of Canada, to deploy this strategic communications tactic to reach white nationalist extremists globally.[18] Here in the United States, we built a partnership with the Gen Next Foundation, a community of private sector leaders which leverages a venture philanthropy model, to carry out strategic communications to undermine white nationalist extremists and jihadists online. This domestic program was entirely driven, tested and funded by the private sector.

We encourage greater collaboration between governments and the private sector to move beyond simply content removal, and deliver proactive strategic communications campaigns to

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[18] Public Safety Canada, "Federal support for innovative online initiative to prevent radicalization to violence", *Public Safety Canada*, November 6th, 2018, accessed April 28th, 2019, available at: https://www.canada.ca/en/public-safety-canada/news/2018/11/federal-support-for-innovative-online-initiative-to-prevent-radicalization-to-violence.html

divert those at-risk of white nationalist extremism and facilitate behavior change. Engagement by the private sector will be greatly assisted by the designation and proscription of white nationalist terrorists by governments, as this will help apply pressure to social media companies to take action.

Support real-world and online intervention efforts:
There is significant potential in taking traditional methods of social work and applying them in the online space to intervene in the radicalization process, as has been demonstrated in recent pilot tests run in the UK. These pilot programs involved trained intervention providers directly messaging people expressing extremist views online and engaging them in sustained conversations, and saw 64% of conversations with white nationalist extremist individuals lead to sustained engagement.[19] We have worked to connect those supporting white nationalist extremism online with real-world support programs, aiming to offer assistance in disengaging individuals from movements and reintegrating them into their communities. There are long-standing disengagement programs which have pulled hundreds of white nationalist extremists out of violent movements, and record low recidivism rates, across Europe. There are nascent programs, such as Life After Hate, here in the United States. These types of preventative tactics can be deployed in the pre-criminal space, and complement hard security measures.

V. Conclusion

White nationalist terrorism is a growing transnational threat. Dedicated to the violent overthrow of our way of life, inspired by a deeply anti-Semitic ideology, and empowered by the internet, this movement may not be as deadly as ISIS, but it shares many of its characteristics.

To respond effectively, we need to recognize that this threat is global in nature. We need to adjust our laws accordingly and to see the internet not as a barrier to the prevention of terrorism, but as an opportunity to enhance existing counter-terrorism efforts by facilitating identification of terrorist networks, engaging with those vulnerable to terrorism, and changing their behavior.

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss with you today this growing concern for governments, technology companies, and communities across the globe.

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[19] Jacob Davey, Jonathan Birdwell and Rebecca Skellett, "Counter Conversations: A model for direct engagement with individuals showing signs of radicalisation online", *Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD)*, 2018, accessed April 28th, 2019, available at: http://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Counter-Conversations_FINAL.pdf

Mr. TRONE. Thank you very much.
Mr. ROGGIO.

STATEMENT OF BILL ROGGIO, SENIOR FELLOW, FOUNDATION FOR DEFENSE OF DEMOCRACIES

Mr. ROGGIO. Chairman Trone, Ranking Member Wilson, and members of the subcommittee, I thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today.

The Easter day suicide attacks in Sri Lanka were a stark reminder that this war is far from over. We face a brutal and uncaring enemy that is committed to its cause and believes it is justified in killing civilians in churches and hotels. The Sri Lankan attacks were claimed by a local group that swore allegiance to the Islamic State, and it coordinated the release of its propaganda with the Islamic State. Authorities are now beginning to unearth international ties between the two.

In this war, we have been too quick to declare our enemies defeated. In late March, the Trump administration touted the Islamic State's loss of its last vestige of territory in Syria. The Islamic State may have gone to ground now, but it has by no means been defeated.

The Islamic State has been down this path before. After the U.S. surge in Iraq, its predecessor, the Islamic State in Iraq, which was an al-Qaeda affiliate, regrouped and warred back to retake large areas of Iraq and Syria just 3 years later.

This problem is by no means limited to the Trump administration. The Obama Administration as quick to declare the defeat of al-Qaeda after killing Osama bin Laden in Pakistan, yet his deputy, Ayman al-Zawahiri, who was second in command on the day of 9/11, remains alive and directs multiple branches that operate across—operate active insurgencies across three continents.

The jihadist threat has expanded since 9/11. Prior to 9/11, al-Qaeda operated openly in Afghanistan, alongside the Taliban, and had cells and small units scattered across several countries. Today it manages full-fledged insurgencies in Yemen, Syria, Northeast and West Africa, and South Asia, including in Afghanistan where it continues to fight alongside the Taliban.

Some analysts seek to disconnect local jihadist insurgencies from international terrorist attacks, but this is a mistake. The local insurgencies in international terrorist attacks feed off of each other. The insurgencies give foreign fighters combat experience, training, network, and ideological reinforcement.

International attacks provide propaganda and entice Westerners to conduct attacks at home or emigrate to wage jihad. At least one of the Sri Lankan suicide bombers is known to have traveled to Syria and likely provided key knowledge to execute those deadly attacks.

Al-Qaeda used to have a monopoly on the jihad, but no more. The Islamic State, which rose out of a dispute between al-Qaeda's cadres in Iraq and Syria, is now in direct competition with al-Qaeda. These two groups share the same goal: they wish to reestablish a global Caliphate and impose its harsh version of Sharia or Islamic law.

Where they differ is how to achieve these goals. The Islamic State wants its Caliphate now and ruthlessly attacks any who refuse to swear allegiance to its emir. Al-Qaeda's approach is far more patient and subtle. It is willing to work with local Islamist groups and believes the Caliphate should only be declared when it can be properly defended.

Iran, which alongside Pakistan are the biggest State sponsors of terrorism, also seeks to establish an Islamic State. It backs loyal militias in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen. These militias are organized and trained along the same lines as Hezbollah. The long-term impact of these militias is still not fully understood, and they have a far greater recruiting base than Hezbollah had to recruit from inside Lebanon.

While Iran primarily backs Shia groups, it has openly battled the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. It is not opposed to forming alliances with Sunni jihadists. Al-Qaeda maintains a network in Iran, and key leaders shelter there. This secret deal was documented by the U.S. Treasury Department in 2011 and several times since.

Pakistan also continues to harbor numerous terrorist groups and uses them as a tool of its foreign policy. Its support for the Taliban has been unwavering and is leading us to defeat in Afghanistan. I would argue that we have already lost Afghanistan. We are merely attempting to negotiate the terms of our exit.

Pakistan continues to sponsor terrorist groups that launch deadly attacks in India. It has paid no price for its perfidy.

As our enemies have expanded their base of operations and remain committed to the fight, our will has faltered. We seek to disengage from the battle fronts, giving our enemies easy victories. This is a long war and commitment is key. If we hope to end this threat, we must renew our commitment and present a united front. We must rethink our goals and strategy and recognize our enemy's goals and strategy.

We have to figure out a way to effectively fight our enemies, both in the military sphere and the sphere of ideas. We must continue to combat State sponsors of terror and make hard decisions about countries such as Pakistan.

We have to work with our allies to figure out what to do with the numerous detainees captured in Iraq and Syria. There are thousands of foreign fighters there, and their families, who are citizens of Western countries. Some remain unrepentant yet want to return home.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify, and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Roggio follows:]

CONGRESSIONAL TESTIMONY: FOUNDATION FOR DEFENSE OF DEMOCRACIES

House Foreign Affairs Committee, Subcommittee on the Middle East, North Africa, and International Terrorism

Examining the Global Terrorism Landscape

BILL ROGGIO

Senior Fellow
Foundation for Defense of Democracies

Editor
FDD's Long War Journal

Washington, DC
April 30, 2019

Chairman Deutch, Ranking Member Wilson, and other distinguished committee members, thank you for inviting me to testify today to examine the global terror landscape.

The Easter day bombings in Sri Lanka serve as a stark reminder that our enemies are committed to their cause and are willing to go to any lengths to destroy our way of life. Nine suicide bombers, many of them well educated, including two sons of a wealthy spice tycoon, and a pregnant woman, killed more than 250 people during attacks on churches and hotels.[1] The suicide bombers swore allegiance to Islamic State emir Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi before carrying out their heinous attacks.[2]

The Sri Lanka bombings took place just one month after the U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) declared a victory over the Islamic State.[3] While the Islamic State may have lost its physical caliphate in Iraq and Syria, it is by no means defeated.

For today's hearing, you ask us to examine the landscape of global terrorism. My testimony will focus on the threat from both Sunni jihadists and Shiite militias backed by Iran, as well as other state sponsors of terrorism.

In short, the jihadist threat has become more diverse since the horrific attack on September 11, 2001. Prior to 9/11, al-Qaeda maintained a base in Afghanistan and fought alongside the Taliban, operating primarily at the cellular level in several other countries throughout Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia. Al-Qaeda's base in Afghanistan was key to allowing it to recruit and train its cadre of global operatives for attacks against the U.S. and its allies. Iran's primary proxy was Hezbollah in Lebanon, and it also supported Palestinian terrorist groups against Israel.

Since 9/11, al-Qaeda's footprint has greatly expanded. It has established branches in Yemen and Saudi Arabia (al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula); North and West Africa (al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin, or JNIM); Somalia and East Africa (Shabaab); Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, and Myanmar (al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent); and in Syria. In many of these countries, al-Qaeda maintains an active insurgency, and in some, al-Qaeda's branches or allies control a significant amount of land.

However, al-Qaeda is no longer the only global jihadist actor. The Islamic State, which arose from a dispute between al-Qaeda branches in in Iraq and Syria, now rivals its parent group in many ways. The Islamic State has what it calls "provinces" in countries spanning from West Africa through East Africa and into the Middle East, all the way to Southeast Asia. Since it declared its so-called caliphate in 2014, the Islamic State has taken credit for most of the Sunni jihadist attacks in the West, including operations that were inspired or directed by the group.

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[1] Kai Schultz, "Sri Lanka Calls Bombers 'Well Educated' and Warns of Ongoing Threat," *The New York Times*, April 24, 2019. (https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/24/world/asia/sri-lanka-bombings.html)

[2] Thomas Joscelyn, "Terrorists in Sri Lanka swore allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi," *FDD's Long War Journal*, April 23, 2019. (https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2019/04/terrorists-in-sri-lanka-swore-allegiance-to-baghdadi.php)

[3] Thomas Joscelyn, "US-backed forces declare end to Islamic State's physical caliphate," *FDD's Long War Journal*, March 23, 2019. (https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2019/03/us-backed-forces-declare-end-to-islamic-states-caliphate.php)

Shared Goals, Differing Strategies

Our enemies share the same goal: the establishment of a global caliphate and imposition of their harsh brand of *sharia*, or Islamic law. However, they disagree on how to achieve this objective. After decades of fighting, al-Qaeda has concluded that its best chance of success will come by working alongside local jihadist and Islamist insurgencies, as well as tribes and clans, in order to overthrow the existing governments and regimes. Al-Qaeda has had some success with co-opting these local insurgencies. Al-Qaeda believes that declaring a caliphate before it could be properly defended will only lead to failure.

The Islamic State, on the other hand, has taken a more radical approach to its jihad. The Islamic State declared its caliphate in June 2014, after overrunning much of Iraq and Syria. The Islamic State demands allegiance to its caliph, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, and ruthlessly targets those who refuse to submit.

Iran, which also seeks to extend the influence of its Islamic state in the region, has excelled at establishing local Shiite militias to take up its cause. It has effectively done so in Iraq and Syria. During the U.S. surge in Iraq, Iranian-backed militias were responsible for killing more than 600 U.S. service members.[4] After the Islamic State onslaught in Iraq in 2014, the Iraqi government called on the militias to bolster flagging Iraqi security forces.

These militias (two of which the U.S. has designated as terrorist organizations), have organized under the banner of the Popular Mobilizations Forces (PMF), which is now an official security force answerable only to Iraq's prime minister.[5] The PMF is an organization akin to Iraq's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), and some PMF commanders have sworn fealty to Iran's supreme leader and said they would overthrow the Iraqi government if ordered to do so.[6][7] This development should concern patriotic Iraqis. The implications of the creation of the PMF have yet to be fully understood. If the history of Hezbollah is any guide, it will not bode well for Iraq or the region.

There is one aspect of Iran's tremendous influence in Iraq that has gone virtually unreported: its access to a vast recruiting base among Iraq's Shiite population. In Lebanon, Iran stood up Hezbollah, which has waged proxy war against Israel for over three decades, by recruiting from the country's 1.65 million Shiites. Today, Hezbollah is the most influential player in Lebanon; its

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[4] Jeff Schogol, "The Pentagon says Iran killed 603 US troops during the Iraq War," *Task & Purpose*, April 3, 2019. (https://taskandpurpose.com/iran-killed-us-troops)

[5] Bill Roggio and Amir Toumaj, "Iraq's prime minister establishes Popular Mobilization Forces as a permanent 'independent military formation,'" *FDD's Long War Journal*, July 28, 2016. (https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2016/07/iraqs-prime-minister-establishes-popular-mobilization-front-as-a-permanent-independent-military-formation.php)

[6] Bill Roggio and Caleb Weiss, "Iraqi Shiite militia leader says he would overthrow government if ordered by Iran's supreme leader," *FDD's Long War Journal*, November 12, 2015. (https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2015/11/us-designated-terrorist-of-iraqi-militia-reportedly-in-aleppo.php)

[7] Bill Roggio, "Iraqi militia leader wants to model PMF after Iran's Revolutionary Guard," *FDD's Long War Journal*, March 22, 2016. (https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2016/03/why-cant-the-hashd-be-like-the-revolutionary-guard-in-iran-iraqi-militia-commander-says.php)

military eclipses the Lebanese army, and its arsenal of Iranian-supplied weapons poses a direct threat to Israel's security. In Iraq, where the polarization between Sunni and Shiite populations remains high due to nearly two decades of jihadist insurgency, Iran has a pool of more than 24 million Shiites from which to recruit.

Contrary to popular opinion and despite its open war with the Islamic State, the Iranian regime is not averse to forming pacts with Sunni jihadists to achieve its goals. Under the Obama administration, the U.S. Treasury Department outlined "Iran's secret deal with al Qaeda allowing it to funnel funds and operatives through its territory."[8] Iran has also supported the Taliban since 2001.[9]

The Loss of the Islamic State's Physical Caliphate

In March of this year, the U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces took control of the Islamic State's last stronghold in Syria, rendering it landless. While this is a welcome development, it is far too soon to declare victory.

It took a vast coalition of forces, with the U.S. and its allies on one side and the Syrian government backed by Iran and Russia on the other, more than five years to drive the Islamic State underground (the Islamic State first took control of Fallujah and much of Western Iraq in January 2014). Recent history tells us that the Islamic State may indeed return in force.

The Islamic State's predecessor, the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), was a front for al-Qaeda in Iraq and controlled large areas of Iraq before it was defeated during the U.S. surge from 2006 to 2010. The ISI responded by going underground, biding its time until conditions were ripe for its reemergence. The Syrian civil war and political unrest in Iraq gave the ISI new life. By 2013, it was on the offensive.

Today, in Iraq and Syria, the conditions are ripe for the resurgence of the Islamic State. Baghdadi and many key leaders remain alive. Thousands, if not tens of thousands of Islamic State soldiers, are at the ready. The Syrian regime remains weak, and the Iraqi government's ties to Iran and its reliance on Shiite militias provides recruiting fodder for the Islamic State.

In fact, this same cycle has been seen in other theaters against jihadist enemies. Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula overran several provinces in Yemen and held them for extended periods of time twice since 2011. Shabaab held Mogadishu and large areas of southern Somalia for two years between 2009 and 2011 before being driven out by African Union forces; it reorganized and today it controls 25 percent of the country.[10] In Afghanistan, U.S. forces ousted the Taliban after 9/11;

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[8] Thomas Joscelyn, "Treasury targets Iran's 'secret deal' with al Qaeda," *FDD's Long War Journal*, July 28, 2011. (https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2011/07/treasury_targets_ira_1.php)

[9] Thomas Joscelyn, "Analysis: Iran has supported the Taliban's insurgency since late 2001," *FDD's Long War Journal*, May 29, 2016. (https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2016/05/analysis-iran-has-supported-the-talibans-insurgency-since-late-2001.php)

[10] Bill Roggio, "US airstrike targets Shabaab in terror haven," *FDD's Long War Journal*, April 11, 2019. (https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2019/04/us-airstrike-targets-shabaab-in-terror-haven.php)

today, the Taliban controls at least 10 percent of the country and hotly contests another 50 percent.[11] Boko Haram, a jihadist group previously loyal to al-Qaeda and now part of the Islamic State, has controlled large areas of northern Nigeria several times since 2009.

There is one other major problem that exists in both Iraq and Syria: the handling of captive Islamic State fighters, particularly the ones from outside these countries, and their families. The SDF is currently holding more than 3,200 Islamic State fighters, and several thousand family members are detained in camps.[12] More than 17 years after 9/11, there is no consensus in the international community on how to deal with detainees and their families. Should citizens of Western countries be repatriated, or tried in local courts in Iraq or Syria? Some wives of Islamic State fighters remain unrepentant; their repatriation to their home countries poses serious security risks.[13] The SDF has threatened to release these prisoners if action is not taken.

Western Will has Waned

As this long war is close to entering its third decade, one thing is clear: The West's will to continue the fight has waned. We are facing an enemy that cannot match our resources and technology, but it does possess the will to fight. We have failed to take a long approach to this war. We have viewed clashes in Iraq and Afghanistan and other countries as individual wars instead of theaters in the overall war. Make no mistake, this is how the enemy views the fight.

Our political and military leadership have failed us. Three successive administrations have failed to explain to the American public the nature of the threat and the importance in remaining engaged. Our military leaders have routinely provided rosy assessments of fights that are going badly.

Today, U.S. policymakers are largely seeking ways to disengage from the fights. Victories have been few and far between, primarily due to our inability to define the enemy and create a strategy to deal with it. We refuse to recognize there is a religious ideological component to this war, and have done little to effectively counter the jihadists' narratives.

In a rush to the exit, the U.S. is willing cut a deal with an enemy in Afghanistan that cannot be trusted and continues to shelter al-Qaeda to this day. In Syria, U.S. withdrawal will provide space for the Islamic State to regenerate its forces. We continue to coddle Pakistan, despite its perfidy in Afghanistan and its culpability in the deaths of thousands of U.S. soldiers. Our actions and inactions have consequences, and our enemies have been able to capitalize on them. As Sri Lanka reminds us: The enemy has a vote, and will not go away without a fight.

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[11] Bill Roggio and Alexandra Gutowski, "Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan," *FDD's Long War Journal*, current as of April 26, 2019. (https://www.longwarjournal.org/mapping-taliban-control-in-afghanistan)

[12] Hwaida Saad and Rod Nordland, "Kurdish Fighters Discuss Releasing Almost 3,200 ISIS Prisoners," *The New York Times*, December 20, 2018. (https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/20/world/middleeast/isis-syria-prisoner-release-trump.html)

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Recommendations

1. If the U.S. government is serious about continuing the fight against our jihadist enemies, it must regroup, reevaluate the nature of the threat, and develop a whole-of-government approach to tackle critical issues. Such issues include properly defining the nature of our enemy and recognizing its goals and strategies, combating the ideology, and developing our own strategy to fight the war over the long term. Additionally, the president must explain to the American public on a regular basis the existential threat and the need to fight a long war.

2. The U.S. must work with its allies to develop a comprehensive strategy for dealing with the issue of detainees captured on the battlefield, particularly those who are Western citizens.

3. State sponsors of terrorism, such as Pakistan, must stop being treated as key allies. Pakistan has fueled the Taliban's insurgency, sabotaged U.S. efforts to secure Afghanistan, and has the blood of American and Western soldiers and citizens on its hands. The U.S. possesses the diplomatic and economic means to punish Pakistan for its perfidy, but has been unwilling to do so.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify. I look forward to answering your questions.

Mr. TRONE. Thank you for your testimony.

We will now move to member questions under the 5-minute rule. I will begin, followed by Ranking Member Wilson, and we will then alternate between the parties. I recognize myself for 5 minutes.

I would like to discuss the interplay between technology and the terrorist threats. Terrorist groups like ISIS have been incredibly effective at exploiting online resources to recruit, radicalize, spread messages and propaganda, plan attacks at various locations across the globe.

Ms. Ramalingam, how has the use of technology for conduct of terrorist operations evolved in the last few years? And then, also, what technology can we use, should we be using, to beat them at their own game?

Ms. RAMALINGAM. Thank you, Chairman Trone. That is an incredibly important question. White nationalist extremists were early adopters of the internet. They were using online bulletins going back to the late 1980's and the early 1990's. But what we have seen is that changes in advancements to social media availability and technology has allowed them to recruit and radicalize at unprecedented rates.

What we are seeing is that they are increasingly active not only on very mainstream, widely used platforms, like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, but also on more niche platforms, like 8chan, 4chan, and even using encrypted platforms, like WhatsApp and Telegram to coordinate amongst them.

We have even seen the use of technology before and during attacks used to incite others to carry out acts of violence, and their content remains increasingly accessible. You know, my company has been tracking the use of Google and Yahoo and Bing to access terrorist content over the last 7 years, and what we find is that individuals are consuming white nationalist extremist content in the West at rates that far exceed those that are consuming jihadist content on those platforms.

Now, the use of technology can also be used against these groups. We need to see technology not just as a barrier to counterterrorism efforts, but we need to work through ways that we can develop new technology to automate the identification process of these individuals online, to directly interact with them online, to offer them alternatives, and that is where using even publicly available technologies like advertising can be important, but also to directly intervene online, to try and disrupt/start conversations with individuals, and get them out of movements.

Mr. TRONE. Mr. Soufan, it is clear that terrorist networks from across the ideological spectrum are adept at exploding technology. But many of them use relatively low tech methods to carry out their lethal attacks. Are we approaching this duality properly from a counterterrorism standpoint? And then how should the U.S. Government balance its efforts, prevent these very different types of events, given our constrained resources?

Mr. SOUFAN. Thank you, sir. The jihadists use the same methods that we heard about that are used also by the white supremacists. However, I think one of the things that the jihadis are doing with communicating with each other is basically the networks that we heard about. Those guys know each other. Sometimes, as we have

seen in Sri Lanka, somebody went there, probably trained, built a network over there, they come back and they conduct an attack.

I think overall our law enforcement intelligence agencies are really doing a phenomenal job in countering this, because even when the threat went from radicalization and sometimes individuals self-radicalized themselves online, to mobilization in a short period of time, we have so many operations where the FBI and other local and, you know, State authorities have been successful, especially through the joint terrorism task forces, in disrupting that.

So I think the intelligence community and the counterterrorism agencies we have are doing a really good job in matching the threat, both from a low-tech and a high-tech level.

Mr. TRONE. Ms. Ramalingam, I am also on the Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Europe, and we have been troubled by the riots of far right nationalism movements in many European countries. They have had some electoral success lately and succeeded winning seats in more than a few Parliaments, including just last week Spain.

What is the likelihood of a government emerging in Europe that is heavily influenced by the far right political movement with ties to white nationalist terrorists, and what dangers could this pose to the U.S. and our allies?

Ms. RAMALINGAM. So important to mention here that my organization, Moonshot CVE, works specifically on violent movements. So we do not actually work on movements that are operating in the political space. That said, these movements do not exist in a vacuum.

They feed off of what they hear in mainstream media. They feed off of the current political situation. And there are worrying trends in Europe where we are seeing white nationalist extremist movements and terrorist organizations starting to form political movements. So we do need to be concerned about the way that that develops.

Mr. TRONE. Thank you. And I recognize Ranking Member Wilson for his witness questions.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you, Congressman Trone, and thank each of you for being here today and raising such important issues.

Mr. Roggio, you have been following terrorist groups for some time now with the Long War Journal. In your opinion, are the Iranian-backed groups operating in Iraq, such as AAH and the Badr organization terrorist groups, should the U.S. designate these groups as—for their terrorist activity?

Mr. ROGGIO. Yes, absolutely. These—I would argue most of these groups should be—some actually are. I believe Hezbollah brigades, and I believe AAH was just added to the list. No? Oh, OK. There have been two of them. Hezbollah brigades is one of them.

A lot of these groups have sworn allegiance to Iran's supreme leader. They have said they would overthrow the Iraqi government if ordered to do so. They said they wish that its overall governing organization, the popular mobilization front, they want it to operate like the IRGC does inside of Iraq.

And so these are a very direct threat to U.S. national security. They have also—members of these groups or leaders of these

groups have said that they would attack U.S. interests in the Middle East if ordered to do so, including U.S. troops inside of Iraq. So they are a direct threat.

I view these groups as just mini-Hezbollahs that are ready to metastasize into a far greater problem than Hezbollah is today. And we all know what a great threat Hezbollah is in the Middle East right now.

Mr. WILSON. And, Ms. Ramalingam, with your social media background, with the social media platforms, a number of them have been successful in removing the ability of terrorist organizations to communicate with each other. What more can be done?

Ms. RAMALINGAM. We would urge technology companies and the government to work together with private sector to move beyond simply takedowns. There is a huge amount we can do with content which, first of all, may not be illegal and may not be liable to be taken down, but also to find individuals. If we remove their content, that person still exists and they may just repost it elsewhere or move on to another platform.

What we suggest is the use of creative partnerships between both the public and the private sector to push strategic communications efforts which make use of available technology on many of these platforms to try and undermine the ideologies of these groups. These are efforts which have really taken place in the counter-ISIS space, and we now need to mirror those efforts in the white nationalism space.

Mr. WILSON. Well, your efforts are just so appreciated. Thank you very much.

Ms. RAMALINGAM. Thank you.

Mr. WILSON. And, Mr. Soufan, with the recent defeat of the physical Caliphate, how should the United States approach the ongoing counterterrorism operations in Iraq and Syria to prevent the success of counterinsurgency and terrorist sleeper cells by ISIS and its sympathizers?

Mr. SOUFAN. First of all, sir, we cannot just say we won and we defeated them. ISIS probably does not exist physically, but ISIS still has the ability to inspire people around the world, as we have seen in the recent attacks in Sri Lanka, as we have seen yesterday in the videotape that was put out by Baghdadi, and that is the very first figure tape I think in probably a decade, so—or at least since ISIS—since his speech in Mosul.

ISIS is going through exactly what al-Qaeda went through after we swiftly kicked them out of Afghanistan in 2001/2002. We thought al-Qaeda is done, the Taliban regime collapsed, and suddenly they shift—they changed from being an organization to being a message. And that is what ISIS is trying to do today.

They are trying to compete with al-Qaeda in this local conflict that al-Qaeda has been, you know, operating in, all the way as you mentioned from the western shores of Africa to Southeast Asia.

Mr. WILSON. And, Mr. Roggio, earlier this month the Trump administration designated Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, IRGC, in its entirety as a foreign terrorist organization. How would you assess the significance of this designation, and what impact do you think it will have on the IRGC's ability to fund proxy groups?

Mr. ROGGIO. Well, first, it should help limit the IRGC from operating internationally. Now that the individuals of the overall group are designated, they should have a much more difficult time traveling to places like Europe and South America where they can do fund-raising and conduct other activities.

I think it was necessary. It has been a long time coming. The IRG's—one of its suborganizations, Quds Force, has been designated for some time. The IRGC acts as a terrorist organization. It sponsors the murder of American soldiers in the Middle East, and I think the impact of it, as far as safety—Iran is already our enemy. Iran has killed 603—at least 603 American soldiers inside of Iraq during U.S. time there.

So I am not sure how this designation makes Iran even a greater threat to U.S. soldiers stationed in the Middle East.

Mr. WILSON. And thank you all for being here today very much. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. TRONE. I now recognize Congressman Allred of Texas.

Mr. ALLRED. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to our witnesses for being here today. This is an important topic, and I am glad that we are talking about it, and I am hopeful that we can handle it in a bipartisan, you know, non-partisan manner.

Mr. Soufan, I wanted to begin with you because in your written testimony you note that to truly eradicate the terrorist threat we need to understand the geopolitical context. And you talk a lot about sectarian conflict, and particularly the Saudi/Iranian divide, and cold war to a certain extent.

Obviously, we have a limited influence on Iran. What can we do, though, the United States, with our leverage we have over Saudi Arabia to influence that conflict or to mitigate it or to try and do what we can to steer away from the sectarian violence we are seeing?

Mr. SOUFAN. Thank you. That is a very good question, and I think if you look what is happening in Yemen, what is happening in Syria, what we mentioned earlier, ISIS was defeated, or the original ISIS, the Islamic State in Iraq, was defeated until the war in Syria and until sectarianism became a rallying call, and then ISIS found a livelihood again.

One of the things that we can do is basically work with our allies in Saudi Arabia to stop the hate rhetoric that is being sponsored through radical Wahhabi madrassas across the Muslim world. I mean, the Saudis and some elements in Saudi Arabia use this Wahhabi radicalism across the Muslim world in order to limit Iranian influence in Muslim communities.

But, unfortunately, it is—you know, it is firing back on everyone, to include the Saudis themselves. So I think it starts with the theology, if you want to call it, or with that interpretation of the theology that is very foreign to so many places around the Muslim world.

It was very foreign to Sri Lanka until in the last decade or so when we started seeing all of these madrassas popping up, and people coming from the Gulf with coffers of money, building mosques and building madrassas, and educating people on a version of Islam that did not exist there before. We have seen it in Southeast Asia in the 1990's. It resulted in the Bali bombing

and other bombings in Jakarta and with what is happening in the Philippines with Abu Sayyaf and other groups.

So it started with a theology and with ideology. And then—and when you are funding other groups to counter Iranian's groups, like Hezbollah, like Asa'ib Ahl Al Haq, like Harakat al-Nujaba, like Zaynabiyoun, like Fatimiyoun, like al-Houthis, all of these groups around the Middle East that Iran has been recruiting, funding, and training.

When it comes to that, just let's be sure, our allies, that the money does not go to groups that are connected to al-Qaeda. Yemen is a perfect example. They were giving a lot of aid to Abu al-Abbas brigade, which is a Salafi group, and then the Humvees ended up with al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, as we have all seen.

We have seen that in Syria also, and we have seen that in Iraq, and we have seen that in so many different places. So I appreciate that, you know, they are trying to counter Iranian influence, but you cannot be a bull in a china shop while doing that.

Mr. ALLRED. Yes. Thank you. I agree with what you are saying. I see the Arab Spring, as you said, creating new challenges, but also perhaps new opportunities.

And I am interested, if you could, discuss a little bit what you have in your testimony about the Arab Spring and some of the new challenges that it has created for us and where you think the United States can assist or be useful, because to me, obviously, the expansion of democracy is our goal, and we want to see that, but then we have seen in Egypt and in other countries the way that went.

And so what role can we play, and do you think that we should be looking to play to influence that?

Mr. SOUFAN. I think the Arab Spring created huge opportunities, first for Osama bin Laden and for al-Qaeda, because they looked at what was happening in the Middle East at the time. And Osama bin Laden wrote his—as we know from the documents we recovered from his house, he wrote to his commanders and he said, "Everything I told you about just targeting the United States, forget about it, because we already defeated the United States. That is why people like Mubarak and Qaddafi and other dictators are falling in the Middle East. What we need to do is to actually move from phase 1 to phase 2."

He means Management of Savagery, which is al-Qaeda's plan, which we know about. Phase 1, you do terrorism in order to weaken the order, the States, the international order. Phase 2, you create a vacuum, and you will not allow anyone else to fill that vacuum. And because whoever—as bin Laden told them before the Navy Seals' bullets took him down, whoever is going to fill that vacuum is going to be the new agent for the Americans in the region.

Phase 3, you establish the Caliphate. So now what they did is you have Syria, with their affiliates in Syria. Then you have all the way what they are doing in Yemen. They have the Horn of Africa. They have a Sahara region, and imagine when their plan is to reconnect all of the things together in a Caliphate.

That is what al-Qaeda is doing, and they have been doing it under the radar because everybody has been focusing on ISIS. ISIS, exactly as my colleague said, they decided just because they hated the leadership of al-Qaeda, personal conflicts that goes—history, when they were operating in Iraq—they decided to start the Caliphate immediately, not going through the phases.

So that is a huge opportunity for Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda, and we are seeing it giving fruits in places like Yemen and places like Libya and places like Mali and places like Somalia, and so forth.

Now, from our perspective, unfortunately—and that is something that, you know, I really wish we did not do—is we have this policy of leading from behind. And I think that policy made many different countries in the region feel that they can run the show. And we start seeing this competition between them and everyone started to figure out their own sphere of influence in that area, trying to protect this sphere of influence in that area.

Unfortunately, we did not allow democracy to take roots. For example, under the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, this is the only time since the time of the pharaohs that they actually had some kind of a democratic forum.

Remember, the John Stewart of Egypt making fun of Morsi all the time. But immediately after, you know, there was two or 3 months, and then there was an election in Egypt. They did not allow this election to happen because then you will have civil society, and definitely the Muslim Brotherhood will lose in the ballot box.

Unfortunately, we did not support democracy. We did not support the movement that is happening across the Middle East, and we paid greatly for it today. That started with our engagement in Libya and Syria, and we continue to have the same strategy, unfortunately, around the Middle East, supporting dictatorships against the people.

Mr. ALLRED. Thank you so much. I yield back.

Mr. TRONE. Thank you. I now recognize Mr. Mast of Florida.

Mr. MAST. Thank you, Chairman. I appreciate it. Thank you all for your testimony today.

Ms. Ramalingam, I want to go back to something that Representative Wilson prompted where you spoke about the need for some of those technology companies to crack down. Just as a quick followup on that, which technology companies are you speaking of specifically?

Ms. RAMALINGAM. Thank you, sir. The technologies that I am speaking about span Facebook, Google, and all of the main social media platforms that are used widely. Those platforms have taken action. It is important that since 2017 those platforms have taken action against white national extremism in different forms.

What I would love to see from those technology companies is more efforts to move beyond simply takedowns and encourage partnerships with other private sector entities, organizations that are actively trying to undermine these groups independently, as well as governments, to form public-private partnerships to make this more sustainable and to make the fight against white nationalist

extremism go beyond simply removing content, because if you remove the content the person who sits behind it does not disappear.

Mr. MAST. Thank you. I was just curious which companies you were talking about specifically.

Mr. Soufan, thank you for being here. As we spoke a little bit before, I have read some of your work, several times, enjoyed it. I want to talk a little bit about what you just spoke about, about al-Qaeda stringing together different events and activities going on throughout the Middle East and kind of juxtapose that to what is going on with Iran and Hezbollah.

You could always almost say, are they in competition for what they want to do throughout the region? In looking back on some of your history, right, the Cole bombing, the Khobar Towers, 9/11, Bali nightclub, things that you have played a role in, you were looking at al-Qaeda before most people had heard the term or the name al-Qaeda before.

So I have a couple of questions in those veins. Number 1, are there entities out there that are on your radar that we are not thinking about right now? That would be a question for you.

And then, as we think about the way things have changed since 9/11 in terms of human intelligence, geospatial intelligence, signal intelligence, cyber intelligence, certainly financial intelligence—I mean, that has been one of the big changes since 9/11—does that change the way that we go out there and address this fight when you look at the long-term approach that Iran and Hezbollah has to colonizing the Middle East versus those individual attacks that often prompt nation-building for decades on end?

Because of this change in intelligence-gathering, should there be a change in the way that we go out there and address our War on Terror?

Mr. SOUFAN. Thank you, sir. As when it comes to Iran, I think Iran's policy in the region is very—their strategy I think in the region is very sophisticated, and I think we will—we will not do ourselves any favors if we underestimate that strategy and contain it only within the framework of terrorism.

I think a lot of the groups that work for Iran today are groups that are not listed as terrorist organizations. They are involved in the political games in places like Iraq, in places like Lebanon. They are part of the government. They are part of——

Mr. MAST. Specifically, while we are talking about it, we would love to hear the names. I am sure everybody would love to hear names.

Mr. SOUFAN. Sure. Like, for example, if you want to look into Iraq, you will have in places like we mentioned the Badr Organization, Asa'ib Ahl Al Haq, Harakat al-Nujaba, all groups that work under Qassem Soleimani, under Al-Quds Force, but some of them have even members of the Iraqi Parliament, and Iraq is considered an ally country for us.

So they are engaging on many different levels. They have a group that we correctly declared as terrorist organizations. So they are engaged in trying to get all of these militants that they have been working with them in Iraq and other places and trying to make them more political, and they are progressively succeeding in doing so.

So this is a very dangerous area. A lot of these other groups that Iran work with and we did not declare, we need to focus on these organizations, because these organizations, in case of any kind of conflict, rest assured they will do whatever Al-Quds Force and Qassem Soleimani want them to do.

So this is something that we have not been focusing on, and I think we need to focus on it, and we need to look at it within the bigger geopolitical context of what is happening.

So Iran's involvement is happening on many different levels. Security and terrorism is only one of it. They have a lot of other things that they are doing in their own form of nation-building. They kind of became experts in creating a formula that actually corrupt the government from inside with building relationships between militants, between the government, and between elements in the army.

And we have seen that in Yemen with what happened with Ali Abdullah Saleh and the Houthis. We have seen that in Lebanon with Hezbollah, and we have seen that also in Iraq with Hashd al-Sha'bi and the Iraqi army and the Iraqi government. So that is something that we definitely need to keep in mind in order to basically have a forecast of our relationship in the region overall.

As for the other terrorist groups that I have been focusing on, I think all of the affiliates of al-Qaeda—al-Qaeda I believe is strategically—is still way more dangerous than ISIS. And what I think that might—we might see, I think we might see members of ISIS rejoining their mother organization if Al-Baghdadi is not in the picture.

We might see new leadership appearing in the Salafi jihadi movement that might have the ability to reunify the Salafi jihadi movement, especially Hamza bin Laden, bin Laden's son, who did not criticize ISIS a lot—at all actually.

Ayman al-Zawahiri criticizes ISIS. Hamza only talks about that ISIS and al-Qaeda are all followers of his dad. I think this is something that we have to worry about, and I believe that State Department have been paying attention to this, because they recently, just like about a month or so ago, declared Hamza bin Laden as, you know, they put an award out for his capture or any information about him.

So I think we might start seeing this kind of unification between entities of ISIS and between the mother organization al-Qaeda. Just 2 or 3 weeks ago, al-Qaeda and Yemen start putting audio—videotapes of members of ISIS who came and joined al-Qaeda again, and they were making fun of ISIS and the Caliphate and the fact that it is—you know, the title is expanding and remaining, which is—obviously, it is not expanding or remaining in their point of view.

So a lot of the things, we need to figure out the threat, not as it is today, but how it might be tomorrow and what are the entities on the Shia side and the Sunni side that might create a problem for us and for our national security interests in the region tomorrow.

Mr. MAST. Thank you, Mr. Soufan.

Mr. SOUFAN. Thank you.

Mr. DEUTCH [presiding]. Thanks. I thank the gentleman from Florida. My apologies for my late arrival, and I recognize Mr. Malinowski for 5 minutes.

Mr. MALINOWSKI. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Soufan, I wanted to ask you to discuss some of the similarities between the jihadi Salafi groups like al-Qaeda and ISIS and the new threat or growing threat of white extremist terrorist groups. I mean, superficially, they are different. One claims to fight for a twisted form of Islam; the other attacks mosques.

But would it be fair to say, would you agree that in fact in their world view, in their prejudices, in their desire to create ethnically pure States, in some of their conspiracy theories they are actually quite similar?

Mr. SOUFAN. Absolutely. There are glaring similarities between them. As you mentioned, sir, the whole issue about declaring or fighting for pure States, or pure societies, also taking advantage of the social and the cultural and the political divisions in the societies in order to make themselves more relevant and more mainstream, and the same time their use of social media, now we start seeing also transnational connections and manifestos that is being written by everyone who commits a terrorist attack on the right wing side or the—you know, the white supremacist side, which is very similar to the martyrdom video or the martyrdom statement from the jihadi side.

We also—I think we start seeing that transnational network, there is a travel pattern that is reminding me very much so with the travel pattern that we have seen early on, at least in the late 1980's and early 1990's with the jihadi movement when they used to go to Afghanistan to fight against the Soviets in Afghanistan or the Communist regime in Afghanistan, and now we see a similar kind of travel pattern in going to Ukraine.

Lots of them are going to East Ukraine, but also some of them are going to West Ukraine, so there is a lot of overlapping similarities.

Mr. MALINOWSKI. So it is transnational, and yet it is correct to say that we are not sharing intelligence with our allies about the white supremacist groups and the way that we are or have consistently shared intelligence on ISIS and al-Qaeda.

Mr. SOUFAN. Yes. I think we are very limited in what we can do because we do not have them declared as terrorist organizations, and this makes it very complicated. I mean, we can—I do not think legally we can have the authority—I do not think the intelligence agency—let's put it this way——

Mr. MALINOWSKI. Well, the FBI.

Mr. SOUFAN [continuing]. The authorities.

Mr. MALINOWSKI. Would the FBI have the authority to share with its counterparts?

Mr. SOUFAN. I think if there is criminal cases that is related and connected to other criminal cases that is happening in allies' countries, maybe there is an opportunity. But I do not think we do it on the—I know we do not do it on the same level that we do it with the Salafi jihadis and with other type of Islamic terrorism.

Mr. MALINOWSKI. Understood. Well, the threat is obviously growing. By any measure, the number of attacks of all kinds by the

white extremist groups has been increasing. Just one statistic. There was a 60 percent—about a 60 percent increase in anti-Semitic attacks in the United States just between 2016 and 2017.

Is this because suddenly in 1 year there were 60 percent more anti-Semites in the United States? Or is there something in the atmosphere which is emboldening these people? And I would maybe pose this question to you, Ms. Ramalingam.

Ms. RAMALINGAM. Thank you. Yes. We have seen evidence that the threat is growing, not just here in the United States but globally, and there are a number of factors which will play into that, one of which is reporting is actually increasing, reporting of these sorts of incidences, which will play into that growth.

But even when it comes to terrorism attacks beyond just simply hate crime perpetrated by individuals connected to these movements, we see on a global scale, the Global Terrorism Index has cited that in the 13 years prior to 2014 there were 20 attacks that took place. In the 3 years prior to 2017, there were 61 attacks that took place. So that is not just about increased reporting. That is about increased capacity of violence from these groups.

Now, the nature of these movements has changed over the past several decades. They have taken an increasingly decentralized approach to organizing. It is no longer simply about fixed terrorist organizations or terrorist cells that are developing.

We are looking at loosely affiliated networks of individuals who choose to carry out acts of violence independently. That poses greater challenges, both for law enforcement and intelligence agencies, to actually identify and disrupt those individuals before they carry out their attack, and that is playing into that trend.

Mr. MALINOWSKI. Is it not also a factor that in the past virtually every authoritative voice in our society would have been telling these people that they are alone in their delusions, but now some of their ideas are being echoed by politicians, by leaders in our society, the idea of a, you know, deep State that is conspiring against the people, the idea of immigrants invading us from every single side? I mean, they are hearing things from high up that reflect some of their own delusions and conspiracy theories. Do you think that that is a factor?

Ms. RAMALINGAM. As I mentioned, these movements do not operate in a vacuum. The words and actions of political leaders do matter. What the U.S. can do right now to indicate that it is taking a stance against white nationalist terrorism is add white nationalist terrorist perpetrators to the list of specially designated global terrorists.

That will indicate not only to potential perpetrators but also to wider communities that this issue is being taken as seriously as it should be.

Mr. MALINOWSKI. Thank you. I yield back.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you, Mr. Malinowski.

Thanks to the witnesses for being here. Again, my apologies. I just want to start by saying I just got back on a trip—from a trip with Chairman Albio Sires to Colombia where we had a meeting with—a good meeting with President Duque, went to Cucuta, saw the humanitarian crisis at the border and the suffering of the Venezuelan people wrought by the Maduro regime.

We talked to families who travel hours—hours with their children to give them one meal, to be able to give them one meal per day. And we saw the humanitarian resources from the United States, from the United Nations, from other nations around the world, that are sitting in warehouses across a bridge that has been blocked by Maduro because he has chosen to prevent the suffering that he has wrought from being alleviated in his country and by not allowing those resources to be delivered.

As we walked across the other bridge in Cucata, Venezuelans were coming and going throughout the day to try to get a meal, and they shouted out to us pleading for the support of the United States.

So I only mention that as we watch closely what happens in Venezuela now as the Venezuelan people try to restore democracy in their country, as we told President Duque, we offer support to the Colombians, the Lima Group, and nations around the world as Interim President Guaido works to restore democracy in the Nation of Venezuela.

I want to turn back to this hearing and the purpose of your being here. It has been 18 years since the terrorist—almost 18 years since the terrorist attacks of 9/11, and the focus of U.S. foreign policy shifting toward greater power competition. But the transition occurs as the U.S. still faces these threats from a disparate array of jihadist, Iranian-sponsored, and white nationalist terror groups.

The recent defeat of ISIS's territorial Caliphate is a noteworthy milestone, but the ideology, as you have spoken about throughout this hearing, remains active around the world. It is demonstrated by two events that occurred yesterday, first, the revelations that at one—that one of the suicide bombers in the horrific Easter attacks in Sri Lanka trained with ISIS in Syria, and that as many as four of the terrorists involved in the attacks may have traveled to Turkey, Syria, and Iraq, where they have—it is believed they have contacted ISIS operatives—had contacted ISIS operatives.

Second, ISIS released a video showing Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. The video is the first appearance in nearly 5 years, as he urged his followers to fight on, despite the recent losses by the group. And both events demonstrate that while ISIS's physical Caliphate is destroyed, they continue to have a network of supporters around the world who are trained by ISIS operatives and loyal to the organization's cause.

Most importantly, these individuals seek to launch attacks against individual—innocent civilians. Furthermore, the challenge of Iranian-backed groups persist, threatening U.S. interest in military personnel as well as our allies and partners in the Middle East and around the world.

The transnational threat posed by white nationals terrorism is clearly growing, as exemplified by the horrific attacks in Christchurch, at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, and just days ago at the Chabad of Poway, just north of San Diego.

Understanding these motivations and threats will inform future subcommittee hearings and help members consider legislation to improve our U.S. counterterrorism policy, and a greater comprehension of these threats will help fulfill our duty to help keep

the American people safe. That is the reason that we held this hearing.

And my greatest regret in being late is that the reports I have gotten from all of my colleagues is that all of our witnesses have been terrific, and we are grateful to you.

I just had two questions. Ms. Ramalingam, in your written testimony, you claim that development of new technology is required to help process and analyze data to better understand and keep pace with the evolving tactics of white nationalist extremist individuals and groups online.

Given Mr. Soufan's acknowledgment in his exchange with Mr. Malinowski about the shortfall in cooperation among nations of the world in addressing the white nationalist threat, what type of technology would support these efforts? Would this technology help assist nations to cooperate with one another to combat it? And what can Congress do to help catalyze those efforts?

Ms. RAMALINGAM. Thank you, Chairman. We absolutely do need new technology to fight this particular threat. As these movements are shifting to decentralized networks of individuals on the dark corners of the internet, we need technology which can automate the identification process, automate geolocation processes, automate risk assessments of those individuals on the basis of the digital footprint that they are leaving us, indicating that they are getting involved.

What my company has done over the past few years is we have invested heavily in the development of this sort of technology. It relies on us building data bases of risk indicators, well into the millions of text, that are being shared by these groups, phraseology that they use, propaganda that they share, memes, photos, everything we can use online to identify them.

What we need to do is facilitate more public-private partnerships to advance this technology, bring in the tech community so that we are taking advantage of advancements in artificial intelligence technology, to bring this into the fight. And what I would also suggest is that we move not only toward removal of that content but how we can take advantage of just how brazen these groups are in the online space to try and find them before they perpetrate attacks.

Mr. DEUTCH. Right. Just give me an example of that.

Ms. RAMALINGAM. An example is Brenton Tarrant. In the moments before he carried out his attack, including 2 days before his attack, had started posting not only on Twitter, including images of his weapons with references to his heroes, of terrorists across the world, who had previously carried out similar attacks. He posted that on Twitter. In the moments before his attack, he was posting on 8chan that he was intending to carry out his attack.

There were a slew of posts which followed from individuals around the world supporting him, encouraging him, and congratulating him on carrying out those acts of violence. And then in the weeks that followed, my organization has tracked individuals across the globe that have sought to consume propaganda that came directly from Brenton Tarrant as well as his affiliates across the globe.

Technology can help us identify those individuals and to interact with them.

Mr. DEUTCH. What happens with that information now? What happens when someone Tweets something like that? What happens when they make those postings on 8chan?

Ms. RAMALINGAM. Well, technology companies are getting better at identifying this content, but they are not there yet. And the greatest example of that was just how efficiently Brenton Tarrant was able to live stream his attack, the entire massacre.

Facebook took down millions of copies of that video in the 24 hours that followed the attack, but we are still not there, obviously, to identify that content quickly. But there are movements to make this happen. We just need more of it.

Mr. DEUTCH. And just one last point on this. So for all of the people who have posted their support of what he had done, you are suggesting that using advanced technology to identify not just someone who praises the horrific terror act that he carried out, but likely there are other indicators, too, that should be—that are out there and that could readily be gathered using technology.

Ms. RAMALINGAM. Yes. Absolutely. A lot of this work needs to take place in the preventative space. This is the pre-criminal space before somebody actually carries out an attack. If they are indicating affiliation or glorification of the violence, we can automate the identification process for that individual and try and interact with them to try and get them out.

Mr. DEUTCH. All right. Thanks. And, Mr. Wilson, if I may ask one more. Thanks.

Mr. WILSON. Hey, we are glad to have you back.

Mr. DEUTCH. OK. Thank you very much.

Mr. Soufan, in 2008, Britain designated Hezbollah's military wing as a terror organization, which diverged from the position—the official position of the EU. It was not until mid-July 2013, so 5 years later, that the EU adopted a similar position, and only following claims of the link between Hezbollah and the Burgas, Bulgaria, bus attack.

British government recently announced the blacklisting of Hezbollah's political wing, thereby designating the entire organization in its entirety as a terrorist organization, thereby essentially treating a terrorist organization as a terrorist organization.

What impact will this have on Hezbollah? And how effective will the designation—their designation be if the EU does not follow suit?

And then, I will also just put out there now for you to add when you are finished, go ahead and comment on the response that people point to the government of Lebanon and say, "We can't do it because of Hezbollah's position in that government."

Mr. SOUFAN. Well, this is what the EU and this is what the British claimed for a long period of time because Hezbollah is member of the Parliament, member of the government, and they are engaging with Lebanon on a government level, and there is U.N. troops on—you know, some of them are Europeans on the border. And if you start dealing with all of the entities of Hezbollah's terrorist organization, then it creates legal complications for them to deal with. This is their excuse.

But, you know, Hezbollah is Hezbollah, and the political leadership of Hezbollah and the military leadership at Hezbollah both fall under the leader of Hezbollah, Nasrallah, who is the leader of Hezbollah.

So I think this is one of the things that we have seen the UK finally recognizing. As you mentioned, a terrorist organization is a terrorist organization, but I think it will be probably more complicated for the EU to do that because of actually what you correctly mentioned—their engagement with the government of Lebanon.

I think eventually it needs to be done, because if you consider that organization as a terrorist organization, you cannot consider the people who are defending and speaking politically for the organization to be individuals who are not connected to a terrorist organization. I think the logic does not flow here with this.

Mr. DEUTCH. Well, and just, finally, the argument that there is a legal complication that may exist when you do that, is there a strict line between the two separate entities legally that prevents anyone who is in the—what the EU would refer to as the humanitarian wing, the political wing of Hezbollah, and the terrorist wing, is there—what is the legal distinction there? As they worry about legal complications, what are the legal distinctions between the two?

Mr. SOUFAN. Absolutely not. You know, we do not know of any distinctions between both. Hezbollah is an organization that is very popular among big segments of the society. That is why they are voted into the Parliament. And I think in order to—for some countries in the West to deal with that situation, they figure out, OK, you know, there is a big division—difference between the political element and the military element.

But I think both of them are under the leadership of the same individual, both of them under the leadership of the same, you know, command, politically and militarily. And when there are elections in Lebanon, the person who put out the agenda of Hezbollah and put out who are the candidates of Hezbollah is actually the head of the military of Hezbollah also, who is Hassan Nasrallah, the head of both the military and—so there is no difference.

This is some, you know, lawyers coming up with a way of how to deal with an organization when it is listed as a terrorist organization. And we came up earlier today, I think with Congressman Mast, we were talking about different groups that us in the United States, we have a problem with that.

We did not declare them as terrorist organizations in Iraq, even though we know that they operate under al-Quds Force, and we know that they are involved in the war in Syria, and we know that they are trained and work closely with Hezbollah. And we did not declare them as terrorist organizations because they have people in the Parliament, in Iraq, because they are part of the political process in Iraq, too.

Mr. DEUTCH. Finally, what will the designation—what will the designation mean? If the EU followed suit and acknowledged that Hezbollah is a terrorist organization, what would that mean for

Hezbollah financing? What would that mean for Hezbollah terror operations?

Mr. SOUFAN. Honestly, I do not know if Hezbollah have money in the EU or have money in Europe. They get all their money from Iran and from different operations and criminal activities in Latin America and other places.

But I think one of the things that it—while it can limit the travel of so many members and leaders of Hezbollah, who are actually traveling sometimes to Europe as part of the Lebanese government or part of being members of the Lebanese Parliament, it will limit the engagement between European political leaders and between Hezbollah.

For example, many of the negotiations for hostages, you know, between Israel and between Hezbollah went through Germany because the Germans were involved in negotiating with the group because they did not consider it as a terrorist organization at the time.

So it will definitely impact them, and it might impact their fundraising capabilities in Europe. But I am not familiar that they are doing it publicly; they are probably doing it covertly.

Mr. DEUTCH. OK. I appreciate it. Again, my apologies for my delay, but I am most grateful for the three of you, and Mr. Wilson, my ranking member.

Thanks to the witnesses, and to all of our members who have been here throughout the day. Thank you for your excellent testimony.

Members of the subcommittee may have some additional questions. So we would just ask that the witnesses respond to their questions in writing, and my request to our colleagues is that any witness questions for the hearing be submitted to the subcommittee clerk within 5 business days.

And with that, and without objection, this subcommittee hearing is adjourned. Thank you.

[Whereupon, at 3:36 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

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

Subcommittee on the Middle East, North Africa, and International Terrorism

Ted Deutch (D-FL), Chairman

April 30, 2019

TO: MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

You are respectfully requested to attend an OPEN hearing of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, to be held by the Subcommittee on the Middle East, North Africa, and International Terrorism in Room 2172 of the Rayburn House Office Building (and available live on the Committee website at https://foreignaffairs.house.gov/):

DATE: Tuesday, April 30, 2019

TIME: 1:30 pm

SUBJECT: Examining the Global Terrorism Landscape

WITNESS:

Mr. Ali Soufan
Chief Executive Officer
The Soufan Group
Member
Homeland Security Advisory Council

Ms. Vidhya Ramalingam
Founder
Moonshot CVE
Board Member
Life After Hate

Mr. Bill Roggio
Senior Fellow
Foundation for Defense of Democracies

By Direction of the Chairman

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

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

MINUTES OF SUBCOMMITTEE ON *Middle East, North Africa, and International Terrorism* HEARING

Day *Tuesday* Date *04/30/19* Room *2172*

Starting Time *2:18 PM* Ending Time *3:36 PM*

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

Presiding Member(s)

Vice Chairman David Trone, Chairman Theodore E. Deutch

Check all of the following that apply:

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

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

TITLE OF HEARING:

Examining the Global Terrorism Landscape

SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

See Attached

NON-SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT: *(Mark with an * if they are not members of full committee.)*

N/A

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

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

QFR - Rep. Brad Sherman

TIME SCHEDULED TO RECONVENE _____
or
TIME ADJOURNED *3:36 PM*

Subcommittee Staff Associate

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING

SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE MIDDLE EAST, NORTH AFRICA, AND INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM

PRESENT	*MEMBER*
X	Theodore E. Deutch, FL
	Gerald E. Connolly, VA
	David Cicilline, RI
X	Ted Lieu, CA
X	Colin Allred, TX
X	Tom Malinowski, NJ
X	David Trone, MA
X	Brad Sherman, CA
	William Keating, MA
	Juan Vargas, CA

PRESENT	*MEMBER*
X	Joe Wilson, SC
X	Steve Chabot, OH
	Adam Kinzinger,IL
X	Lee Zeldin, NY
X	Brian J. Mast, FL
	Brian K. Fitzpatrick, PA
	Guy Reschenthaler, PA
X	Steve Watkins, KS

Questions for the Record from Representative Brad Sherman
Examining the Global Terrorism Landscape
April 30, 2019

Questions:

"Questions for Mr. Ali Soufan: Chief Executive Office, the Soufan Group, Ms. Vidhya Ramalingam: Founder, Moonshot CVE, Mr. Bill Roggio: Senior Fellow, Foundation for Defense of Democracies:

1. What is your assessment of the global terror threat posed by Iran?
2. Within the last year, Iran used its diplomats in Europe as part of an effort to carryout terror attacks. What do you make of this practice? How big is Iran's terror infrastructure in Europe? Elsewhere in the world?
3. What impact do you believe the Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) designation of the IRGC will have? What more should the U.S. be doing to counter Iran and the IRGC's terror efforts?
4. What role does the IRGC play in Syria? In Iraq? In Yemen?
5. What impact are sanctions having on Iran's ability to fund external operations? Have we seen any impact on Iran's support for Hezbollah? Or for their activity in Syria or Yemen?
6. There have been recent reports of Iranian support headed to the Maduro regime in Venezuela. What so you make of these reports? Can you describe the presence of Iran and the IRGC in Central and South America and the threats any presence may pose to U.S. interests?"

Answers:

Mr. Ali Soufan:

Attached

Mr. Bill Roggio:

Iran, along with Pakistan, are the two premier state sponsors of terrorism. Iran's sponsorship of Shia groups arrayed against Israel, such as Hezbollah, Hamas, and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, remains a direct threat to Israel. Hezbollah has directly trained and supported Iranian-backed Shiite militias in Iraq to sabotage US efforts in Iraq and killed more than 600 US soldiers. The Iranian-backed militias in Iraq and Syria are relative newcomers to Iran's constellation of terror groups and are hostile to the US and its allies. Iran's sponsorship of the Houthis in Yemen and other terror groups on the Arabian Peninsula has destabilized the region. Additionally, Iran's penetration into South America is extremely worrying. Left unchecked, Iran's actions

Within the last year, Iran used its diplomats in Europe as part of an effort to carryout terror attacks. What do you make of this practice? How big is Iran's terror infrastructure in Europe? Elsewhere in the world?

This is par for the course with Iran. Keep in mind the Iranians used a similar tactic to attempt to assassinate Saudi ambassador Adel al-Jubeir **in** the United States. Iran uses its embassies as outposts for IRGC-Qods Force to conduct its operations. I cannot provide accurate information on the size of Iran's infrastructure in Europe and globally at this time.

What impact do you believe the Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) designation of the IRGC will have? What more should the U.S. be doing to counter Iran and the IRGC's terror efforts?

The IRGC FTO designations will impact IRGC operations worldwide, particularly as individuals are named. This designation should impact the travel of IRGC officers, particularly in Europe, and also impact IRGC finances. It is important that State and treasury to continue to name and designate individuals and entities associated with the IRGC in order to impact their operations. I have long held that the US should not shy away from confronting IRGC terror activities and its operatives. In Iraq, we have detained numerous IRGC and Hezbollah officers, but released them after short detentions. One, Musa Ali Daqduq, the head of Hezbollah's "special forces" and an IRGC officer involved with assassinating six US military personnel, was captured in Iraq and released after several years in detention. He was designated as a terrorist shortly after his release. He returned to Lebanon and continued his past activities. This is madness. The US must not be afraid to detain dangerous IRGC operatives and try them if it is deemed appropriate. The policy of catch and release is unserious and counterproductive.

What role does the IRGC play in Syria? In Iraq? In Yemen?

The IRGC plays an identical role in supporting militias in Iraq, Syria, and Yemen. It provides training, weapons, funding, and other means of support to build up these militias as capable fighting units. In Iraq and Syria, IRGC officers, including Qods Force commander Qassim Soliemani, have planned, organized, and led operations against the Islamic State (in Iraq and Syria) and Islamist and other rebel groups (in Syria). Additionally, in Iraq, IRGC officers have enormous political influence with senior government officials as well as the political parties associated with the Shia militias.

Ms. Ramalingam did not submit a response.

May 10, 2019

The Honorable Bradley James Sherman
2181 Rayburn House Office Building
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Sherman:

Please find my answers to Questions for the Record Following a Hearing on 'Examining the Global Terrorism Landscape' in the United States House Subcommittee on Middle East, North Africa, and International Terrorism within the House Foreign Affairs Committee on April 30, 2019 disclosed within this communication.

1. **What is your assessment of the global terror threat posed by Iran?**

Answer: We assess that Iran is implementing a sophisticated and intricate strategy intended to achieve absolute security – the ability to thwart the U.S. capacity to overturn Iran's regime or invade Iran militarily. Iran's strategy involves using the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps – Qods Force (IRGC-QF) to build pro-Iranian armed factions into political movements with progressively increasing influence and capabilities. These factions, particularly Lebanese Hezbollah, have and do sometimes carry out acts of terrorism, not only in the Middle East but in Europe and elsewhere. Iran and its allies and proxies have the capability to conduct acts of terrorism around the world, either as retaliation or to demonstrate Iran's global reach.

2. **Within the last year, Iran used its diplomats in Europe as part of an effort to carry out terror attacks. What do you make of this practice? How big is Iran's terror infrastructure in Europe? Elsewhere in the world?**

Answer: Our assessment is that Iran's primary goal in carrying out terrorist attacks in Europe is to assassinate and intimidate organized opposition groups that are based there. A key target of Iran's terrorist apparatus in Europe is activists and leaders of the People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran (PMOI), who often organize large anti-regime rallies, primarily in France. It is not possible to conclude from open sources how large is Iran's terror network in Europe or elsewhere, but it is clear that the network is organized out of Iran's embassies abroad, often working with trusted Iranian agents living abroad or IRGC-QF and Ministry of Intelligence agents posted abroad to organize specific terrorist attacks. Iran also often works with Lebanese Hezbollah members who have long been based in the countries where the attacks are carried out. For example, both Iran and Hezbollah were teamed to carry out the 1992 bombing on the Israeli Embassy and the 1994 bombing of a major Jewish community center in Buenos

Aires.

3. **What impact do you believe the Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) designation of the IRGC will have? What more should the U.S. be doing to counter Iran and the IRGC's terror efforts?**

Answer: The FTO designation of the IRGC is likely to have minimal practical impact on the IRGC, because the IRGC is already sanctioned by the United States under multiple laws and Executive Orders that carry penalties similar to those of the FTO designation. Companies in Europe and Asia have long ago stopped any direct financial dealings with the IRGC, and countries in the region that must deal with the IRGC – particularly Iraq – will continue to do so despite the designation. Iran has enacted legislation declaring U.S. forces in the Middle East as terrorists, and some Iranian commanders have threatened to close the vital Strait of Hormuz. But, there have been no clear public indications to date that the fears of some experts about IRGC retaliatory attacks against U.S. forces in the region are about to be realized Countering Iran and IRGC terror and regional operations requires robust engagement with partners in there region. For example, more extensive engagement with the Lebanese military could strengthen that force against Lebanese Hezbollah. On the other hand, rolling back Iran's influence in Syria or its presence in the Persian Gulf might require greater kinetic action against Iranian or Iran-backed forces there.

4. **What role does the IRGC play in Syria? In Iraq? In Yemen?**

Answer: In all three conflict-ridden countries, the IRGC is following what we assess as its standard "playbook" – funding, arming, advising, and training organized militia forces. In Iraq, Iran seeks to build its militia allies into powerful political players, and has done so successfully, for example by building the Badr Organization into a major political force. In Syria, the IRGC-QF is deploying militias to help the Assad regime combat its armed opposition, many of which have been backed by regional Sunni powers. Iran has also created new militias from scratch to deploy in Syria, for example by recruiting Afghan and Pakistani Shias to fight in Syria. In Yemen, the IRGC-QF is backing the Zaidi Shia Houthi movement to help it retain control of Sanaa and the other areas it has captured, in the face of a Saudi-led Arab coalition that has intervened to try to restore the former Sunni-led government of Yemen.

5. **What impact are sanctions having on Iran's ability to fund external operations? Have we seen any impact on Iran's support for Hezbollah? Or for their activity in Syria or Yemen?**

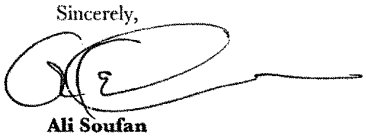
Answer: We see little effect of sanctions on Iran's external operations, and do not anticipate that sanctions pressure will cause Iran to scale back any of its core goals or operations in the region. There are indications that Iran is cutting back its payments to Hezbollah, causing Hezbollah to ask for donations. And, oil shipments to Syria have become complicated by sanctions, causing shortages and long lines for gasoline there. However, the cutbacks are probably due mostly to the fact that there is less combat in Syria and less need for Iran to keep as many fighters in the field there as was required previously. And international organizations now predict that Iran's economy might shrink as much as 6% from March 2019 to March

2020. We note that heavy sanctions pressure during 2011-2016 did not cause Iran to refrain from intervening in either Syria or Yemen during that time, or from intervening heavily in Iraq to combat the Islamic State organization in 2014.

6. **There have been recent reports of Iranian support headed to the Maduro regime in Venezuela. What do you make of these reports? Can you describe the presence of Iran and the IRGC in Central and South America and the threats any presence may pose to U.S. interests?**

Answer: We have no basis to either confirm or refute statements by the U.S. Secretary of State that Iran and Lebanese Hezbollah are involved in Venezuela in support of the Maduro government. We note that in mid-April, Iran re-opened a long dormant direct air link between Caracas and Tehran, using Mahan Air, an Iranian airline that has been sanctioned by the United States as a terrorism-supporting entity. However, it is our assessment that the government of President Hassan Rouhani has been far less interested in building Iranian influence in Central and South America than was his predecessor, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. As in Europe, Iran has the ability to conduct terrorism, espionage, and influence operations in Central and South America using its embassies in the countries of the region. Still, our assessment is that Iran has de-emphasized the Western Hemisphere in recent years and its almost singular focus has been on building ever greater influence in the Near East region.

Sincerely,



Ali Soufan
Founder
The Soufan Center

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