

**EXAMINING THE THREAT FROM ISIS
AND AL-QAEDA**

HEARING

BEFORE THE

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON
INTELLIGENCE AND
COUNTERTERRORISM**

OF THE

**COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

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CONTENTS

	Page
STATEMENTS	
The Honorable Max Rose, a Representative in Congress From the State of New York, and Chairman, Subcommittee on Intelligence and Counterterrorism:	
Oral Statement	1
Prepared Statement	3
The Honorable Mark Walker, a Representative in Congress From the State of North Carolina, and Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Intelligence and Counterterrorism:	
Oral Statement	4
Prepared Statement	5
The Honorable Bennie G. Thompson, a Representative in Congress From the State of Mississippi, and Chairman, Committee on Homeland Security:	
Prepared Statement	8
WITNESSES	
Mr. Michael Morell, Former Acting and Deputy Director, Central Intelligence Agency (CIA):	
Oral Statement	8
Prepared Statement	11
Ambassador Tina Kaidanow, Former Acting Assistant Secretary of State for Political-Military Affairs, Former Coordinator for Counterterrorism, U.S. Department of State:	
Oral Statement	12
Prepared Statement	15
Mr. Thomas Joscelyn, Senior Fellow, Foundation for Defense of Democracies:	
Oral Statement	16
Prepared Statement	20

EXAMINING THE THREAT FROM ISIS AND AL-QAEDA

Wednesday, June 24, 2020

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTELLIGENCE
AND COUNTERTERRORISM,
Washington, DC.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 11:02 a.m., via Webex, Hon. Max Rose (Chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Present: Representatives Rose, Jackson Lee, Langevin, Slotkin, Thompson (ex officio), Walker, and Green.

Mr. ROSE. OK, folks. Want to thank you all so much for coming together for this subcommittee hearing examining the threat from ISIS and al-Qaeda.

I am going to start off with an opening statement, and then Ranking Member Walker will do so as well, and then we will go into a brief order of process. Then we can really get to what we want to do here, which is listen, to hear from our esteemed panel, which we are just overjoyed and so honored to have here with us here today.

OK. I guess we are waiting for Ranking Member Walker. We will do that for a minute or two. He is apparently trying to log on.

OK. Ranking Member Walker is on. Thank you, sir, for joining us. It is good to see you.

Mr. WALKER. Glad to be here, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. ROSE. All right. We will get going.

OK. This hearing is held, as you all know, it is an on-going global pandemic. The shifting of U.S. National security priorities to resurgence of ISIS and the al-Qaeda demonstrated endurance. Recent reporting has shown that actions by international terrorist groups like ISIS and al-Qaeda remain a persistent and pervasive threat to U.S. interests abroad and the homeland.

This hearing will provide us with an opportunity to discuss the current threat picture from these groups, how they fit into our evolving National security challenges and policy challenges that the Federal Government faces and how we can effectively counter them. It is no secret that we are divided amongst many competing priorities right now. But as I am sure, judging by their testimonies that our witnesses will attest to, no matter how many competing priorities we are faced with, the threat of terrorism and the threat from ISIS and al-Qaeda does not recede; it only complicates our efforts to address them.

ISIS and al-Qaeda continue to take advantage of vulnerable populations, distracted governments, spreading their propaganda, recruiting new members, taking advantage of safe havens. They surely—and this is one thing that I know many of us are going to hear about today is, how have they capitalized on the instability of COVID-19? It is also clear that this resurgence has not happened in a vacuum, and the geopolitical priorities of the American people are shifting.

One thing that we would like to hear from today is, yes, what are the fights that we must continue, what are the areas in which we must show resilience, but what are the areas where we cannot and should not be chasing ghosts? What are the areas in which we maybe don't seek perfect stability? But on the same end, we do not see a threat to the homeland.

It is clear as day that many of the American people are united by the fact that they want to see us invest at home. But as a New Yorker, I can tell you this, that the memory of 9/11 lives on. Not just a memory of 9/11, but the memory of a myriad of other terrorist attacks that have occurred since then. How do we respect the will of the American people all the while keeping them safe?

To move on, I also, and I know many of us share this, would love to hear about the importance of coalition building in this effort. How do we, not just proactively and robustly, but how do we efficiently and effectively fight the terroristic threat? Particularly, the jihadist terrorist threat. How do we fight it involving intelligence share, and how do we fight it involving partner forces? Then, how do we fight the terrorist threat of today, not just yesterday? We are certainly seeing a resurgence.

In March, ISIS prisoners in Syria rioted; some appear to have escaped. In April, members of an ISIS cell in Germany were arrested after a plan to attack a U.S. Air Force base in the country. In May, a Florida man was arrested who planned and attempted to carry out a mass shooting in the name of the Islamic State. Days later, the suspect's sister was shot dead after attempting to stab a local law enforcement officer. Just last month, the Department of Justice released information that determined the terrorist attack on the Pensacola military base in December was connected with an al-Qaeda affiliate group in Yemen.

In addition, we would also love to hear today how can we hold technology companies, particularly social media companies, accountable? How do we innovate in and around this space, understanding that the most likely threat we face comes from that of someone who has been radicalized on-line, often without traveling? What have we learned from the recent case in Pensacola about how jihadists and terrorists are communicating with al-Qaeda affiliates overseas?

Nearly two decades after the September 11 attacks at home, we are at a crossroads in this rapidly-changing security environment. We have to seriously reevaluate and update America's approach to combatting terrorism. As a New Yorker and as a patriot and as someone who is honored to stand today, saying in a bipartisan manner, that we need to continue to fight terrorism at home and abroad.

We thank the witness and the Members for being here today. I look forward to making progress on this important issue.
[The statement of Chairman Rose follows:]

STATEMENT OF SUBCOMMITTEE CHAIRMAN MAX ROSE

JUNE 24, 2020

This hearing is being held amidst an on-going global pandemic, the shifting of U.S. National security priorities, the resurgence of ISIS, and al-Qaeda's demonstrated endurance. Recent reporting has shown that the actions by international terrorist groups like ISIS and al-Qaeda remain a persistent and pervasive threat to U.S. interests abroad and the homeland.

This hearing will provide us with an opportunity to discuss the current threat picture from these groups, how they fit into our evolving National security challenges, and policy changes the Federal Government can take to effectively counter them as the Government's attention is divided among competing priorities. Abroad and at home, ISIS and al-Qaeda continue to take advantage of vulnerable populations and distracted governments to spread their propaganda, recruit new members, and establish regional safe havens. It is also no surprise that these groups have capitalized on the instability caused by COVID-19. But this resurgence has not happened in a vacuum.

These groups continue to exploit the administration's short-sightedness and lack of strategic thinking to regroup and reinvigorate their operations. In Iraq alone, attacks from ISIS have rebounded—even increased steadily since mid-2019. According to a recent report by the U.N. Security Council, the Taliban continues to back al-Qaeda in Afghanistan despite reaching an agreement with the administration to draw down American troops.

Beyond the Middle East, ISIS and al-Qaeda affiliates have also been exerting influence and even competing for dominance in West Africa. Their territorial claims threaten the stability of important regional partners and the gains American diplomats, trainers, and advisors have made over the last decade to strengthen the rule of law and bolster economic development across the continent.

Diminishing the emphasis on dismantling terrorist networks in Africa will allow for safe havens to exist just as when Osama bin Laden operated al-Qaeda from Sudan in the 1990's. Additionally, I am deeply concerned that the administration effectively abandoned the Kurds, our allies in the Middle East, last year, and temporarily paused U.S. counterterrorism operations in the region earlier this year.

Coalition building, effective diplomacy, and keeping our word—these are all pivotal to the disruption of world-wide terrorist threats. I fear these actions have hurt our Nation's standing around the world, sending a signal to our current and future allies that the United States will break its commitments when convenient. We must do better. That starts with reassessing threats to the homeland as they evolve around the world.

In March, ISIS prisoners in Syria rioted, and some appear to have even escaped, threatening our security and regional stability. In April, members of an ISIS cell in Germany were arrested after they planned to attack a U.S. Air Force base in the country.

In May, a Florida man was arrested who planned and attempted to carry out a mass shooting in the name of the Islamic State. Days later, the suspect's sister was shot dead after attempting to stab a local law enforcement officer. Just last month, the Department of Justice released information that determined the terror attack on the Pensacola military base in December was connected with an al-Qaeda affiliate group in Yemen.

Although Department officials stopped short of saying the al-Qaeda affiliate directed the attack, they admitted that the gunman coordinated with al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula by sharing "plans and tactics." We have since learned that gaps in our information sharing and vetting systems, as well a failure of current policies, resulted in the attack that took the lives of 3 U.S. sailors and injured 8 other Americans.

Just a few days ago, the threat of jihadist terrorism and the threat of white supremacist terrorism intersected when we learned that a white supremacist U.S. Army Private shared Classified information about overseas troop movements with al-Qaeda, admitting that his goal was to kill as many U.S. service members as possible.

Nearly 2 decades after the September 11 attacks at home, we're at a crossroads in this rapidly-changing security environment and need to seriously re-evaluate and

update the American approach to combatting extremism. I look forward to a conversation discussing how the Government can effectively prioritize this threat amid competing priorities.

Mr. ROSE. I would like to now recognize the Ranking Member of this subcommittee, the gentleman from North Carolina, someone I sincerely respect and admire, consider a dear friend, Mr. Walker, for his opening statement.

Mr. WALKER. Thank you, Chairman Rose. I appreciate your passion about this. You have been relentless on this since Day 1. This isn't just a political talking point on you; this is something from your heart, I admire that, and I want to applaud you and continue to support you to do this. I apologize also for being a couple of minutes late there.

This hearing is important. While I wish we were meeting in person, I appreciate the opportunity to discuss the continued threat linked to Islamist terrorism.

Al-Qaeda declared war on the United States in 1996, and followed up their words with the 1998 United States Embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania, the 2000 attack on the *USS Cole* and the direct attack on the homeland on September 11, 2001. From that, ISIS spawned from a split with al-Qaeda around 2013. The new organization implemented an even more brutal and violent ideology, killing and enslaving minority groups and beheading their hostages. Their message appealed to 30,000-plus foreigners—30,000—who traveled to join them, including over 200 Americans.

After years of persistent counterterrorism pressure, both terror groups have suffered major territorial and leadership losses. However, the terror threat did not remain overseas. The FBI has testified on multiple occasions that they have over 2,000 open investigations between al-Qaeda and ISIS supporters across the United States.

Over the past few years, we have seen a rise in competing threats that have resulted in a diversion of resources that risk creating an opening for terror organizations to regroup. There is no doubt that the threat posed by nation-states is increasing, particularly in cyber space. We have seen a rise in global White supremacy extremism and domestic terrorism.

I applaud the Trump administration for recognizing the challenge of emerging and competing threats in the 2018 National Strategy for Counterterrorism and for focusing on the need to use counterterrorism to address these threats without losing focus on those posed by al-Qaeda and ISIS.

As a Nation, we are also challenged with terrorism fatigue. After nearly 2 decades of military action in Afghanistan, the American public is ready for military forces to come home. While I share this goal, it is essential that we maintain the ability to deploy counterterrorism capabilities and gather necessary intelligence to prevent power vacuums while terrorists can regroup and plot.

I am also very concerned about reports that al-Qaeda and ISIS-linked groups are expanding in Africa and Southeast Asia. We have seen this movie before. After 9/11, al-Qaeda was able to spread affiliate groups in Yemen, Somalia, and elsewhere, where they continued plotting, radicalizing, and carrying out attacks. Maintaining counterterrorism pressure and coordinating with the international

community, we need to ensure that these new hotspots do not turn into operational safe havens.

I look forward to hearing from the witnesses today about the current state of al-Qaeda and ISIS and their recommendations on how to implement a new strategy to counter the terror threat.

Before closing, again, I want to congratulate Chairman Rose on the birth of his first child a few months ago in this new season. My best wishes to you and your family, Max. I appreciate you very much.

Thank you, and I yield back time.

[The statement of Ranking Member Walker follows:]

STATEMENT OF RANKING MEMBER MARK WALKER

JUNE 24, 2020

Thank you, Mr. Chairman for holding this hearing. While I wish we were meeting in person, I appreciate the opportunity to discuss the continued threat linked to Islamist terrorism. Al-Qaeda declared war on the United States in 1996 and followed up their words with the 1998 United States embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania, the 2000 attack on the *U.S.S. Cole*, and the direct attack on the homeland on September 11, 2001. ISIS spawned from a split with al-Qaeda around 2013. This new terror organization implemented an even more brutal and violent ideology, killing and enslaving minority groups and beheading hostages. Their message appealed to 30,000-plus foreigners who traveled to join them, including over 200 Americans.

After years of persistent counterterrorism pressure, both terror groups have suffered major territorial and leadership losses. However, the terror threat has not remained overseas. The FBI has testified on multiple occasions that they have over 2,000 open investigations between al-Qaeda and ISIS supporters across the United States.

Over the past few years, we have seen a rise in competing threats that have resulted in a diversion of resources that risk creating an opening for terror organizations to regroup. There is no doubt that the threat posed by nation-states is increasing, particularly in cyber space, and we have seen a rise in global white supremacy extremism and domestic terrorism.

I applaud the Trump administration for recognizing the challenge of emerging and competing threats in the 2018 National Strategy for Counterterrorism, and for focusing on the need to use our counterterrorism tool kit to address these threats without losing focus on those posed by al-Qaeda and ISIS.

As a Nation, we are also challenged with “terrorism fatigue.” After nearly 2 decades of military action in Afghanistan, the American public is ready for military forces to come home. While I share this goal, it is essential that we maintain the ability to deploy counterterrorism capabilities and gather necessary intelligence to prevent power vacuums where terrorists can regroup and plot.

I am also very concerned about reports that al-Qaeda and ISIS-linked groups are expanding in Africa and Southeast Asia. We have seen this movie before. After 9/11, al-Qaeda was able to spread to affiliate groups in Yemen, Somalia, and elsewhere where they continued plotting, radicalizing, and carrying out attacks. Maintaining counterterrorism pressure and coordinating with the international community, we need to ensure that these new hot spots do not turn into operational safe havens.

I look forward to hearing from the witnesses today about the current state of al-Qaeda and ISIS and their recommendations on how to implement a new strategy to counter the terror threat.

Before closing, I also want to congratulate Chairman Rose on the birth of his first child a few months ago. My best wishes to you and your family.

Mr. ROSE. Thank you. Thank you, my friend. You know, it is the Uncle Ranking Member for my kid.

Mr. WALKER. All right. We will take it.

Mr. ROSE. All right. So now we are just going to—myself and the Ranking Member will just go back and forth very briefly. I apologize. This will take us a few minutes.

So I thank the Ranking Member. With that, I will yield to the Ranking Member for purposes of a colloquy.

Mr. WALKER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Could you please explain our agreement on committee procedures during these remote proceedings?

Mr. ROSE. I thank the Ranking Member. Let me begin by saying that standing House and committee rules and practice will continue to apply during remote proceedings. Members will be expected to continue to adhere to the rules of the committee and the House.

During the covered period as designated by the Speaker, the committee will operate in accordance with House Resolution 965 and the subsequent guidance from the Rules Committee in a manner that respects the rights of all Members to participate.

Technology we are utilizing today requires us to make some small modifications to ensure that the Members can fully participate in these proceedings.

Mr. WALKER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. What could a Member expect should they encounter technical issues during a remote event?

Mr. ROSE. Well, first, to simplify the order of questioning, I will recognize Members for their 5-minute question based strictly on seniority, as determined by our subcommittee roster, a departure from our previous procedure. Members must be visible to the Chair in order to be considered present for purposes of establishing a quorum or for voting. Members should make every effort to remain visible on screen throughout the proceeding. If a Member is experiencing issues with their video stream, they may proceed with solely audio to ensure a connection, provided they have been identified previously.

Again, in this hearing, Members are on mute. Members may unmute themselves in order to be recognized for purposes of their 5-minute questioning of the witnesses. At the conclusion of speaking, Members will be expected to then mute themselves to prevent excess background noise. In the event that a Member does not mute themselves after speaking, the Clerk has been directed to mute Members to avoid inadvertent background noise.

Should a Member wish to be recognized to make a motion, they must unmute themselves and seek recognition at the appropriate time.

Mr. WALKER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am making sure I am staying in order here with you there. I am looking here at my notes here. What should Members expect regarding decorum during a remote event?

Mr. ROSE. In the event the Member encounters technical issues that prevents them from being recognized for the questioning, I will move to the next available Member in the same party. I will recognize that Member at the next appropriate time slot, provided they have returned to the proceeding. Should a Member's time be interrupted by technical issues, I will recognize that Member at the next appropriate spot for the remainder of their time once their issues have been resolved.

Mr. WALKER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Finally, what should Members expect if a vote is called during a remote event?

Mr. ROSE. Members are reminded that they are only allowed to attend one virtual event at a time. Should they need to attend another committee's proceedings, please fully exit the hearing before entering another proceeding. No zoom cheating.

Finally, all Members are reminded they are expected to observe standing rules of committee decorum for appropriate attire, you have a professional and apolitical background when they are participating in any remote event.

Mr. WALKER. All right. May it be on the record that it is the first time that I have ever heard the term "zoom cheating."

With that, I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. ROSE. Also, just a few other things. In the event the witness loses connectivity—

Mr. WALKER. Yes.

Mr. ROSE [continuing]. We will reserve their time. That is—that is, I believe, all.

So with that, I ask unanimous consent to waive committee rule 882 for the subcommittee during remote proceedings under the covered period designated by the Speaker under House Resolution 965.

Without objection, so ordered.

All right. The Chair now recognizes the Chairman of the full committee, the gentleman from Mississippi, Mr. Thompson, for an opening statement.

Is he still with us? Chairman?

OK. Is the Ranking Member, Mr. Rogers, from the great State of Alabama, is he on?

OK. So now, I am really honored to welcome our panel of witnesses. Our first witness is Mr. Michael Morell, former acting and deputy director of the Central Intelligence Agency. Mr. Morell spent more than 3 decades at the CIA, at the center of the Nation's fight against terrorism, our work to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, our efforts to respond to trends that are altering international landscape. There is sincerely no major or minor terrorist incident in the last 20 to 25 years that he has not been front and center of combating. As someone who was in New York City on 9/11, I was a teenager at the time, I thank you, sir, for keeping us safe.

Our second witness is Ambassador Tina Kaidanow, who recently left the Department of Defense where she was senior advisor for international cooperation to the under secretary for acquisition and sustainment. Ambassador Kaidanow is the former acting assistant secretary of state for political-military affairs at the Department of Defense, former coordinator for counterterrorism at the Department of State. Ambassador Kaidanow also previously served as a deputy chief official at the U.S. Embassy in Kabul.

Ambassador, thank you for your extraordinary service.

Our third and final witness is Mr. Thomas Joscelyn, a senior fellow at the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies where he conducts research on how ISIS and al-Qaeda operate around the world. He has been described as having an encyclopedic knowledge of terrorist biography. Mr. Joscelyn has served as a trainer for the FBI's Counterterrorism Division, was the senior counterterrorism advisor to Rudy Giuliani in the 2008 Presidential campaign.

Without objection, the witnesses' full statements will be inserted in the record. I now ask each witness to summarize his or her statements for 5 minutes, beginning with the former acting director of the CIA, Mr. Morell. Additional Member statements will be submitted for the record.

STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN BENNIE G. THOMPSON

JUNE 24, 2020

Today's hearing provides an opportunity to assess the current threat from al-Qaeda and ISIS. As we approach the 19th anniversary of the September 11 attacks, we must remain vigilant. ISIS remains a significant threat even as its ability to control physical territory is severely limited. And although al-Qaeda may be more dispersed, it is far from defeated.

Recently, we have been reminded of the ability of ISIS and al-Qaeda to inspire and even direct attacks against the homeland and U.S. interests abroad. Acts of terrorism within our borders—like in Pensacola, Florida and Corpus Christi, Texas—show that our oversight and focus remain critical. These attacks in particular targeted the men and women of our military.

We must do everything we can to prevent future attacks in the United States—especially on military bases. In cases like the Pensacola attack, which was apparently linked to al-Qaeda, this must include improved information sharing and reforming inadequate vetting procedures among Government agencies. But the threats we face are not just to our men and women in uniform—our communities continue to face the threat of violence fueled by propaganda from ISIS and al-Qaeda.

That is one of the reasons I introduced H.R. 2476, the Securing American Non-profit Organizations Against Terrorism Act of 2019, and was especially proud to see it become law. The program provides grants to nonprofits and faith-based organizations in both urban and rural areas to help secure their facilities against a potential terrorist attack. The new law authorizes the grant program for years to come.

This is also an important time to note that DHS has been without a permanent Secretary for well over a year now. To plan for the future of the Department and stay one step ahead of the terrorism threats of today and tomorrow, the American people need a permanent Secretary. Counterterrorism involves a concerted effort that requires consistency, vision, and leadership from a confirmed Secretary.

Before I conclude, I would be remiss if I did not mention that the committee's oversight efforts on extremism will continue despite the current administration's lack of effective partnership in providing documents and briefings in a timely manner. One of our greatest successes since September 11 has been acknowledging and addressing the need to share information between the various Government departments and agencies. I hope that the administration reevaluates their current strategy and chooses to work with Congress, including ensuring that policy makers are being informed of the most up-to-date threats.

With that being said, I look forward to a frank conversation with the experts here today about the effectiveness of the current strategy and policies aimed to combat ISIS and al-Qaeda. Specifically, I hope we can shed light on emerging trends and identify new tools, policies, and procedures to combat terrorist actors at home and abroad, while upholding our American values.

STATEMENT OF MICHAEL MORELL, FORMER ACTING AND DEPUTY DIRECTOR, CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY (CIA)

Mr. MORELL. Good morning, Chairman Rose, Ranking Member Walker, Members of the subcommittee. It is great to be with you today. I think this hearing is extraordinarily important. I was honored to be invited. As your staff knows, I jumped at the opportunity.

It is great to talk with you about the threats that our Nation still faces from al-Qaeda and ISIS. I really want to emphasize that word "still," because I fear that as a country, that we are losing our focus on terrorism, in large part because most Americans think that al-Qaeda and ISIS have been defeated.

Once we got Osama bin Laden, the idea was that al-Qaeda was defeated. Once we took the caliphate away from ISIS, the idea was that ISIS was defeated. I think there is a sense out there that, on the part of most Americans, that an attack on the homeland is no longer possible. I believe that those perceptions are wrong, and dead wrong. That is why I think this hearing is so vitally important.

As you noted, I spent 33 years at the agency. I spent the first 15 of those focused on East Asia, focused on a different issue. But in those last 18 years in assignments of increasing responsibility, Mr. Chairman, I covered the whole world, right, but my focus was almost entirely on counterterrorism.

There is a little paragraph in my testimony that I won't read through of all of my touch points with terrorism. You know, I am sort-of the Forest Gump of terrorism in terms of being in the wrong place at the wrong time. But each of those events that I—that I witnessed personally really seared into me the danger that terrorists pose and the importance of our counterterrorism work.

You know, in short, I have lived and breathed it for the last 18 years of my career. It defined, it defined my career. That is even before 9/11, right? Because I went to work—I went to work for George Tenet in 1998, and I walked into a situation where he was obsessed with al-Qaeda. That is where I really learned about the group for the first time. So I was focused on it before 9/11.

What I really want to spend a little bit of time on is the lessons that those 18 years taught me and what the implications of those lessons are for today. So there are 4 that I want to share with you.

The first is that terrorism is a symptom. It is not a disease. I think that is very, very important for us to remember that. Until we address the disease, Mr. Chairman, I think we are going to be dealing with the symptoms. I think we are going to be dealing with the creation of terrorists and their actions for a long time to come. I have real doubts about whether we are going to be able, we and our partners, will be able to deal with that disease. So I really believe that my children's generation and my grandchildren's generation and maybe your son's generation is still going to be fighting this fight.

At the end of the day, you can't capture and kill your way out of this. You know, that is an important aspect of keeping ourselves safe, but it is not going to solve the long-term problem.

A second lesson learned is that—and this could well be the most important, Mr. Chairman—terrorist groups are very easy to degrade. Once you get the intel and once you get the military assets in the right place, they are extraordinarily easy to degrade. But they are also very easy to rebuild. We have seen it time and time again.

Whether they are in degradation mode, whether they are being degraded, or whether they are in rebuild mode, depends on a lot of things. But the most important thing it depends on is the degree of counterterrorism pressure that is on the group. When that pressure is there, they tend to be in degrade mode. When that pressure is released, they tend to immediately shift to rebuild mode. I think the policy implication of that is pretty obvious to me.

The third lesson learned is it is impossible, I think, to overstate the importance of a physical safe haven to a terrorist group—a place in which they can feel relatively safe and secure. A place from which they can strategize, train, plot, and launch attacks. It is, therefore, absolutely critical that we deny sanctuaries to these groups. When we don't do that, history is clear that the threat increases dramatically, including the threat to the homeland.

Then the last—the last lesson learned is that the smartest of terrorists are creative and they are innovative. You know, there are not too many Muhammadatists. There are not too many that you would put in the category of extraordinarily bright and extraordinarily capable, but those that are are very dangerous.

I think examples abound that include Khalid Sheikh Muhammad, right, who was the first to conceive of using aircraft as guided missiles. The folks in AQAP in Yemen who came up with innovative bomb designs, from the underwear bomb, from printer cartridge bombs, from nonmetallic suicide vests, to even experimenting putting explosive devices into human bodies through surgery, to the ISIS Hollywood-quality, Madison-style—Madison Avenue-style quality propaganda that is a real danger to us and to the self-radicalization of Americans, as you know.

Then I would put also in the creative category what AQAP just did at Pensacola, right. They found a way around the immigration defenses that we put in place after 9/11, and they did that consciously. It resulted in the first foreign-directed terrorist attack on the homeland since 9/11. That was just several months ago. I think the implication is we need to be equally imaginative in thinking about what they may be doing and try to get in front of them.

Mr. Chairman, when I put all of these lessons together, I come to the strong conclusion that we need to stay focused on foreign terrorist groups. We need to continue and collect the best intelligence we can on their plans, intentions, and capabilities. We need, and I will emphasize this, working with our allies and partners, to continue to keep pressure on them and to make sure that they continue to be degraded.

I think we also need to think about—this is very, very hard, and we should talk about it a little bit in the Q&A—but it is very, very hard, but I think we need to think about how do we—how do we play a role in getting at the disease rather than just dealing with the symptoms?

In looking around the world, I have had, you know, many specific concerns. Southeast Asia, South Asia, and Middle East, Africa, but let me conclude my opening statement by pointing out two issues of particular concern to me.

The first is ISIS in Iraq and Syria. Despite our destruction of the caliphate, which was critically important and needed to be done, and people who did that should be given an awful lot of credit for it, you all know that ISIS is on the rebound in the Middle East, in Iraq and Syria; that it is reconstituting. ISIS attacks in Iraq are on the rise, 2 years in a row now, including a significant one just a few weeks ago in Samarra, just an hour's drive from Baghdad.

Even more worrisome, Mr. Chairman, and you mentioned this, German authorities recently arrested 4 Turkmen sent by ISIS to conduct an attack on a U.S. military facility in Germany. The 4

had already acquired weapons, and they were in the process of acquiring explosives when they were—when they were arrested. This suggests to me that ISIS may be in the process of rebuilding its attack capability in Europe, which was a capability we saw in devastating effect in Paris in 2015 and in Brussels in 2016.

The second thing I worry a great deal about is al-Qaeda in Afghanistan. The Taliban today is militarily and politically stronger than at any time since 9/11. I believe that the Taliban in its peace negotiations with the United States have told us exactly what we want to hear in order to encourage us to leave the country. I don't believe what they are saying about what their intentions are. In fact, I believe that their intention, which is absolutely achievable, is to overthrow the current Afghan government and reestablish a dictatorship based on Sharia Law.

I also believe that the Taliban will provide safe haven to al-Qaeda, and that it will not do what is necessary to prevent al-Qaeda from again becoming a significant threat to the United States of America. The ties between the 2 groups are just too close. It is years and years of fighting side-by-side. It is years and years of shedding blood together. It is years and years of intermarriages of their children. These 2 groups are not, in my mind, separable.

Mr. Chairman, to sum up, I believe strongly, and let me just emphasize this, I believe that we need to stay on the CT watch or we are going to be hit again. Can't emphasize that strongly enough.

Mr. Chair, that concludes my opening remarks, and I look forward to you—to your and the committee's questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Morell follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF MICHAEL MORELL

JUNE 24, 2020

Chairman Rose, Ranking Member Walker, and Members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to talk with you today about the threats that our Nation still faces from al-Qaeda and ISIS.

I want to emphasize the word "still" because I fear that we are losing our focus on terrorism—in large part because most Americans think al-Qaeda and ISIS have been defeated and that a significant attack on the homeland is no longer possible. I believe those perceptions are wrong.

I spent 33 years at the Central Intelligence Agency. I spent the first 15 years covering East Asian issues. The last 18 years, in assignments of increasing responsibility, I covered the entire world—but my focus was on counterterrorism.

As DCI George Tenet's executive assistant, I was the first person called by CIA's Operations Center when al-Qaeda attacked our embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in August 1998; as President George W. Bush's daily intelligence briefer, I was with him on 9/11 itself; as the senior focal point for liaison with the British analytic community, I was in London for Britain's 9/11, the subway and bus attacks there in July 2005; I was part of the CIA leadership team when we, the British, and Pakistanis foiled in August 2006 an al-Qaeda plot to blow up 10–15 airliners over the Atlantic Ocean, and as CIA's deputy director, I was with President Obama when bin Ladin was brought to justice in May 2011.

I lived and breathed counterterrorism. It is what defined my career, even in the 4 years before 9/11.

My 18 years focused on CT taught me, what I believe, are 4 critical lessons about terrorism and counterterrorism. Allow me to share them with you.

- Terrorism is a symptom; it is not the disease. And, until the disease is addressed, we will be dealing with the symptoms. And because I have significant doubts that the disease will be dealt with, I believe that my children's generation and my grandchildren's generation are still going to be fighting this fight. At the end of the day, you can't only capture and kill your way out of this.

- Terrorist groups are easy to degrade, but they are also easily rebuilt. And, whether they are in degradation mode or in rebuilding mode depends on many factors—but the most important is the degree of counterterrorism pressure on the group. The policy implication of this lesson is, I think, obvious.
- It is difficult to overstate the importance of a physical safe haven to a terrorist group—a place in which they feel relatively safe and secure and from which they can strategize, train, plot, and launch attacks. It is therefore critical that terrorist groups be denied a sanctuary. When we don't do that, the threat to the homeland increases significantly.
- The smartest of terrorists are creative and innovative. Examples abound and include Khalid Sheikh Muhammad who conceived of using aircraft as guided missiles; ISIS operatives who built a Hollywood-quality and Madison Avenue-quality, on-line propaganda effort that resulted in ISIS-inspired attacks in the United States; and, most recently, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula finding a way around the border and immigration defenses we put in place after 9/11, a success on their part that resulted in the recent attack in Pensacola, the first directed foreign terrorist attack on the homeland since 9/11. We need to be equally imaginative in defending ourselves.

When I put these lessons together, I come to the conclusion that we need to stay focused on foreign terrorist groups; we need to continue to collect the best intelligence on their plans, intentions, and capabilities; and we need, working with our allies and partners, to continue to keep pressure on them and continue to degrade them. And, we need to be part of, to the best we can, an international effort to deal with the disease, not just the symptoms.

In looking around the world, I have many specific concerns—ranging from South East Asia to South Asia and from the Middle East to Africa. Let me conclude my opening statement by pointing out 2 issues of particular concern.

- *ISIS in Iraq and Syria.*—Despite our destruction of the ISIS caliphate, which was critically important, I believe ISIS in the Middle East is on the rebound, that it is reconstituting. ISIS attacks in Iraq are on the rise, including a significant one just a few weeks ago in Samarra, just an hour's drive north from Baghdad. Even more worrisome, German authorities recently arrested 4 Turkmen sent by ISIS to conduct an attack on a U.S. military facility in Germany. The 4 had already acquired weapons and were in the process of acquiring explosives when they were arrested. This suggests ISIS is rebuilding its capability to attack Europe—a capability that resulted in both the 2015 ISIS attack in Paris that killed 130 and wounded 413 and the 2016 attack in Brussels that killed 32, wounding over 300.
- *Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan.*—The Taliban today is militarily and politically stronger than at any time since 9/11. I believe that the Taliban, in its peace negotiations with the United States, have told us what we want to hear in order to encourage us to leave the country. I believe that the Taliban's intention, which is achievable, is to overthrow the current Afghan government and reestablish a dictatorship based on Sharia Law. I also believe that the Taliban will provide safe haven to al-Qaeda and that it will not do what is necessary to prevent the group from again becoming a significant threat to the United States. The ties between the two groups are close. One of the most important is al-Qaeda's extremely tight relationship with the Taliban's Haqqani Group. Siraj Haqqani, head of the group, is one of the deputy leaders of the Taliban.

To sum up, I believe that we need to stay on the CT Watch or we will be hit again.

Chairman, that concludes my opening remarks. I look forward to your questions.

Mr. ROSE. Mr. Morell, thank you so much again.

I now recognize Ambassador Kaidanow to summarize her statement for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF AMBASSADOR TINA KAIDANOW, FORMER ACTING ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF STATE FOR POLITICAL-MILITARY AFFAIRS, FORMER COORDINATOR FOR COUNTERTERRORISM, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Ms. KAIDANOW. Yes. Thank you. I think I will say just at the outset that I associate myself with everything you said and then some. We can talk a little bit more about some of those issues.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Walker, honorable Members of the subcommittee, first of all, it is an absolute privilege to be here and to talk to you today on this really critical issue of the potential threat that is coming still, as Mike says, from ISIS and from al-Qaeda, as well as from other groups that we are not discussing here today, but nevertheless, existing and pop up now with regularity all over the world.

The esteemed panel of witnesses that you have assembled are all veterans of the U.S. Government effort to contain the threat of terrorism over the past years and to ensure the security of the homeland. All of them, and I as well, have grappled with I think what Mike was trying to, you know, to very well give you a picture of, and that is the key questions of how, No. 1, we can best protect our borders; No. 2, how we can enlist our overseas partners in the counterterrorism effort. Because, you know, this can't all be ours to do.

Unfortunately, we don't have the resources. We don't have the ability—he mentioned the German attack. That's just one. But we find ourselves now sort-of subject to a lot of the resource issues. I will get to that in a minute. We don't have the resources on our own to be doing this, and nor should we, you know, portray it that way. We really need to give it to our partners as something that is both beneficial to us but beneficial to them as well.

A number of the attacks that we see these days are not necessarily in the homeland, but, you know, they are associated with us because they happened in Paris, they happened in Brussels, they happen in places where our people are, and they happen in places where we care about what happened in democratic society.

So a key question, as I said, is how we can, you know, enlist them in the counterterrorism effort. Then, finally, and I think we, you know, again, this deserves a little bit of thought, of how we can, or perhaps better said, whether we can do anything to destroy the absolute root causes of the terrorist problem. That question has consumed enormous amount of attention, certainly in the U.S. Government, and I think outside the Government as well.

I wish I could tell you that I thought, you know, (A), there was an easy way to do that, and (B), we have made some progress in it. I will tell you personally, I don't think that is the case. I will come back to that in a second. But I think it is really important to try to reach and grapple with that question.

When I became the State Department coordinator for counterterrorism, which is a statutorily-created position that is designed to centralize all Department efforts on terrorism and provide advice directly to the Secretary of State on those matters, as well as coordinate closely to the National Security Council with other important institutional players on CT and Homeland Security, it was the beginning of 2014. Quite frankly, nobody, perhaps other than some of our very good intelligence analysts sprinkled through the system, had really heard of ISIS as a feature of global terrorism.

When I left the job in 2016 to become the acting assistant secretary for political-military affairs at the State Department, the world had changed pretty dramatically. In the span of about a year, a year-and-a-half, ISIS had gone from small regional leftover presence from the first Iraqi war to an absolute global threat, al-

most as virulent in its own way as the COVID-19 virus pandemic is now. Which I know is a strange kind of analogy, but it really has some, I think, some power, because the idea is we never knew that something like this could hit us in that way.

So what was the difference? What made it so lethal, more lethal even when we think of al-Qaeda as a terribly, horribly lethal group. Of course, it is. But in a very interesting way, ISIS was something even very different, like a virus. I think the answer lies in the ISIS-created tools and methodology that had never been before been utilized as successfully by any other group, and that had to do with social media.

Social media became what I would consider a vital hunting ground for signing up an ISIS-foreign component, which Mike mentioned—or I think actually the Chairman mentioned in his opening statement—and building support outside of Iraq and Syria. Absolutely, the Iraq and Syria problem remains. Absolutely ISIS is a feature there. But guess what, it is a feature pretty much everywhere. How did that happen? The West, and not only the West, but those countries where recruitment was especially large-scale, like Indonesia, like Jordan, other places, were absolutely completely unprepared for these new approaches and unable to muster that kind of flexibility to push back.

Governments, for the most part, and I will just tell you certainly democratic governments, are neither comfortable nor effective as propaganda or counterpropaganda machines. They are just not good at it. You know, we always talk about how do we push back on that social media approach, how do we push back on ISIS' ability to recruit. It ain't so easy. You know, it is not so easy. You can't just hire a PR firm and then decide there is an inherent and underlying lack of trust in what we say as a Government all over the world. That, unfortunately, you know, it gives us a handicap right from the start.

I think I am running out of time here, so I don't want to go too much longer. But I do want to say, again, there is this question of—Mike put it very well—what is the—what do we do now if we are going to address some of this? Well, the basic question comes back to resources. If we are going to do anything, whatever it is we do, we have to decide it is a priority for us strategically.

At the outset of the administration, we relooked at all the things that we want to be doing, and we decided that, you know, for good or for bad, we have let our ability to, you know, contain or to stop the Russians and the Chinese all over the world from doing things we didn't want them to do. Great power competition has now become our No. 1 priority. That is fine. But that is going to take up resources that, unfortunately, used to be, at least in some measure, put against the terrorism problem.

I think we are always going to have to constantly be reevaluating where are we with these issues and how much effort, resource energy, presence, you know—do we send drones, as I said, to Africa? Do we send the same drones to Iraq and Syria? Do we put them somewhere else entirely because we believe the Chinese in Southeast Asia are making inroads? What are we doing as a matter of priority?

So it is not an easy question to answer, but it is something we really have to think about. That is why our allies and partners overseas become very important. Again, we can't fight this fight alone.

I am going to, I think, stop there. I do want to say, again, I don't think there is an easy answer to the question of how do you stop terrorism at its root. I don't think it is a question of poverty. There is a lot of that that comes into this, you know, sort of CVE approach, the combating violent extremism. Maybe if we can, you know, create income and turn people in a different direction, we will be able to stop them from engaging in terrorist activities.

I don't think it is those people. I don't think it is the people who, you know, are hungry. I think it is the people who, unfortunately, feel disaffected, they are sitting in, you know, Paris, they are sitting somewhere in Minnesota, they are sitting somewhere. It is a second-, third-generation problem. Their parents were poverty-stricken, very unfortunately came here, wanted a better life, established themselves that way, and now their children, unfortunately, are not feeling empowered for whatever reason. That is something we have to try and grapple with. It is not an easy thing.

I am going to stop there. I know there will be questions. Thank you so much.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Kaidanow follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF TINA KAIDANOW

JUNE 23, 2020

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, Honorable Members of the subcommittee, it is a privilege to be here and speak with you today on the subject of examining the potential threat emanating from ISIS and al-Qaeda. The esteemed panel of witnesses you have assembled are all veterans of the U.S. Government struggle to contain the threat of terrorism over the past years and ensure the security of the homeland.

All of them, and I as well, have grappled with the key questions of how we can best protect our borders, how we can enlist our overseas partners in the counterterrorism effort, and how we can—or perhaps better said, whether we can—do anything to destroy the root causes of the terrorist problem. That last question, in particular, has consumed a considerable amount of time and attention, and I wish I could say we have made great strides in eliminating the underlying sources of terrorism. Unfortunately, I don't think that is the case, but I will come back to that in a moment.

When I became the State Department coordinator for counterterrorism, a statutorily-created position designed to centralize all Department efforts on terrorism and provide advice directly to the Secretary of State on these matters, as well as coordinate closely through the National Security Council with other institutional players on CT and homeland security, it was the beginning of 2014. Quite frankly, no one—perhaps other than intelligence analysts sprinkled throughout our system—had heard of ISIS as a feature of global terrorism. When I left the job in 2016 to become the acting assistant secretary for political military affairs at the State Department, the world had changed dramatically. In the span of about a year, ISIS had gone from a small regional leftover presence from the first Iraqi war to a global threat—almost as virulent in its own way as the COVID-19 virus pandemic now.

How did this happen? What was the difference between ISIS and other terrorist groups that had preceded it, even including al-Qaeda, which—though highly dangerous and deadly—could not hold a candle to ISIS in its rate of expansion or degree of lethality (and in fact there were places in the world where al-Qaeda lost membership to ISIS as a competitor)? The answer lies in the ISIS-created tools and methodologies, which had never before been utilized as successfully by any other group. Social media became a vital hunting grounds for signing up an ISIS foreign component and building support outside of Iraq and Syria. The West—and not only the West, but those countries where recruitment was especially large-scale, like Indo-

nesia or Jordan—were completely unprepared for these new approaches and unable to muster the flexibility to push back. Governments, for the most part, and certainly democratic governments, are neither comfortable nor effective as propaganda or counter-propaganda machines.

That put us all on the defensive more than the offensive, and although we have gotten better at what we do, that is still largely where we find ourselves. We do a better job these days at protecting our borders and weeding out the individuals whose intentions may be problematic. We have convinced many of our neighbors and our European and other global allies that by enforcing their own borders and encouraging a more robust law enforcement effort, they benefit both themselves and the United States. We have stymied many attacks and worked with communities across the United States, including immigrant communities, to address the threat before it manifests itself in an attack on the ground.

However, many issues remain. One is a resource problem—we can only have so many priorities at a time. At the outset of the administration, the White House and Defense Department drafted a new set of National Security and Defense Security strategy documents to guide our efforts, and it was decided that we had permitted our capabilities vis-à-vis the great powers—specifically Russia and China—to atrophy, necessitating a renewed push to regain our position in key parts of the world. The war on terrorism, though important, was no longer the first or only objective. All resource allocations are a function of strategic priorities and necessities, and this is something that I believe needs to be constantly reassessed. If we wish to push back on terrorism, we will need to consider whether, for example, AFRICOM should have a larger or smaller presence in the Sahel and elsewhere in the African continent, or whether those resources—drones, personnel, etc.—are more useful elsewhere.

Finally, I return to the question of whether we can truly eliminate the sources of terrorism such that we would be able to wipe it out entirely and be able with clear conscience to move our resources to other efforts. I remain skeptical this is fully possible. As I indicated, governments are not good at public relations—they and their PR contractors are inherently subject to suspicion no matter how clever we think we are in getting out a message. Nor is the elimination of poverty or the creation of income-generating programs overseas likely to quash the terrorist impulse, which is the idea behind the money being thrown toward what's referred to as CVE or Combating Violent Extremism. It's most often not the desperately hungry or work-starved individual who turns to terrorism; it's the disaffected youth whose immigrant parents probably tried hard to provide him or her a better life and instead found their offspring attracted by the ISIS or extremist message. We need to be vigilant in finding and dealing with this small but potent group, here in the United States and overseas, and ensure we are able to stop any potential violence before it comes to us.

I'm sure we'll have a stimulating conversation today, so I will stop here and allow the rest of the proceedings to move forward.

Mr. ROSE. Thank you so much, Ambassador Kaidanow, for your important testimony.

I now recognize Mr. Joscelyn to summarize his statement for 5 minutes.

**STATEMENT OF THOMAS JOSCELYN, SENIOR FELLOW,
FOUNDATION FOR DEFENSE OF DEMOCRACIES**

Mr. JOSCELYN. Well, thank you, Chairman Rose, Ranking Member Walker, and other Members of the subcommittee. I greatly appreciate the invitation to testify today.

Obviously, we are living in turbulent times, and Americans face many types of challenges. I think that is evident, in fact, most immediately for myself that, even though I have testified before Congress 21 times, this is the 21st time, this is the first time I have done so from my dining room as opposed to there in front of you. So, obviously, we are living in a new world here.

But I do appreciate the fact you guys are taking the time to address al-Qaeda and ISIS, even with everything that is going on and all the threats that we face, because they both do remain active

threats to the United States. I am going to point my comments today mostly toward al-Qaeda. The reason for that is I think there is more agreement on the ISIS side of the coin than there is on the al-Qaeda side of the coin. I want to sort-of clarify a few things in my oral testimony.

You know, ISIS grabbed headlines in 2014 with its caliphate claim and its over-the-top barbarism. That is understandable. But what I think is often overlooked and people don't realize is that al-Qaeda's goal from the very beginning since its inception in the late 1980's was to create a caliphate. Osama bin Laden was on the record saying this over and over and over again. So was Ayman Al-Zawahiri. It is in their literature. It is in their publicly-facing media, their propaganda. They say it all the time. I think we have to take that seriously that that is their overarching goal, even though they are very far away from that today.

In some ways what ISIS did was they capitalized on al-Qaeda's drive request to build a caliphate. They basically claimed that they were able to bridge fruition or fulfill Osama bin Laden's original mission.

Today, al-Qaeda and ISIS remain looked in a competition across many different battlefields in many different areas where they are waging insurgencies. The purpose of those insurgencies is to clear out the existing political order or to fill political vacuums with new Islamic emirates based on Sharia law. The idea of that is to then use these Islamic emirates as the basis for a new caliphate.

When you understand that, that explains why I think there is an overarching idea. There many causes of radicalization, many causes of terrorism, of course. This isn't the only one. But as the glue that binds together their project, that explains why we see threats everywhere from West Africa to Afghanistan to this day. You can identify the groups that are parts of ISIS or al-Qaeda in each one of those areas, and you can show that their main goal is to establish a new Islamic emirate in those areas.

Just to flash forward a little bit here and talk about how, you know, the al-Qaeda threat and how it has persisted after all these years. I wanted to give a sort-of a quick rundown on recent activity, which I think a lot of Americans probably don't even know has occurred since September 2019. Just to give you an idea of what the threat sort-of perception that the counterterrorism community, the CIA, the NSA, and others are dealing with, the FBI here at home—obviously, I'm an independent observer, but I watch what they are doing and what they are dealing with. They are still dealing with an enormous number of threats around the globe.

So in September 2019, the U.S. and Afghan forces hunted down a guy named Asim Umar in Musa Qala of Helmand. Why is that important? Well, Asim Umar was the first emir of al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent. He is a guy who repeatedly threatened Americans. He was a guy who was involved in a very audacious plot against U.S. warships in 2014. He is someone who oversaw al-Qaeda's operations not only in Afghanistan on behalf of where they were fighting on behalf of the Taliban, but also throughout the region as al-Qaeda has tried to expand, indeed as the name implies, throughout the Indian Subcontinent.

Now, what is interesting is another guy who was killed during that operation was the courier of Umar, who was running back and forth to Ayman al-Zawahiri, the head of al-Qaeda. Now, Ayman al-Zawahiri still has, by a conservative estimate, thousands of followers around the globe, perhaps tens of thousands of people who are loyal to him up through the chain of the command. I can map that out for you later, if you would like.

But what is interesting too is that not only was this courier running messages back and forth between Asim Umar and Ayman al-Zawahiri, but just recently, General McKenzie, the head of CENTCOM, says Ayman al-Zawahiri himself is in eastern Afghanistan. A very curious and important remark. Because, again, this is a guy who sits at the top of the chain of command of a global organization.

Now, you flash forward from there, from September 2019 to December 2019, December 6 to be precise, and that is when Mohammed Alshamrani, the second lieutenant in the Royal Saudi Air Force, perpetrated this shooting at Naval Air Station Pensacola. As Mike Morell noted, this is a very significant attack. It is the first one that received some level of explicit direction and was successful since 9/11 by al-Qaeda. There are lots of security challenges involved there. We can talk about it.

The main thing, the main innovation that Alshamrani was able to rely upon was basically easy-to-use encryption technology on his two iPhones. You know, there has been some discussion about trying to install backdoors on iPhones or other personal devices to give our security and counterterrorism officials a window and to try and monitor these type of things. I am very wary of that. I think that raises real civil liberty concerns and other issues for tyrannies around the world where dictators can take advantage of that back door. I hope we can talk about that a little bit more as well.

But after Alshamrani executed this attack, the FBI realized, after they cracked the security on his iPhone, that he was communicating with AQAP operatives over the course of 4 years. So going from 2015 all the way up to December 5, the night before his attack, in Pensacola via these 2 iPhones, which he tried to destroy afterwards.

Then afterwards, after they got this intelligence, they killed—the United States was able to hunt down and kill one of his main handlers in Yemen. The United States also reconstituted efforts to go after Qasim al-Raymi, the head of AQAP.

Well, why is that important? Well, Qasim al-Raymi is a guy whose biography, his dossier goes all the way back to 1990's in Afghanistan when he was identified as a potential new leader for al-Qaeda in al-Qaeda's camps in Afghanistan.

When he was killed, he was replaced by another al-Qaeda veteran that goes back to 1990's. He is a guy named Khalid Batarfi, another guy who is trained in al-Qaeda's camps and is deeply anti-American and deeply beholden to the mission that Osama bin Laden set forth so many decades ago now.

So that brings an issue that we talked about in FDD's *Long War Journal* quite often, which is that some of these guys that we are hunting and dealing with, they have careers that started in the 1990's. If you go through our general, our military chain of com-

mand, or our civilian leadership, just think about the turnover we have had during that time. Yet al-Qaeda has guys that have been groomed for literally a generation to lead these roles, and that speaks again to Mike Morell's point about this being a generational conflict. Some of these guys have literally been in the game for a generation, in some cases, even longer than that.

So going from there, from AQAP in Yemen, in March, *New York Times* reported that 2 Shabaab operatives were arrested after they were found to be engaged in flight training. So Shabaab is al-Qaeda's so-called affiliate. It is really its regional branch in East Africa where they are trying to build an Islamic emirate. No. 2, Shabaab operatives were hunted down and arrested, one in the Philippines, one in Africa, because they were basically involved in some sort of flight training, setting off concerns that they may be participating or planning some kind of hijacking operation or some other sort of aerial assault.

A lot of the details are murky, but I can tell you for a fact that Shabaab has been experimenting as part of a cross-regional team of al-Qaeda experts, Shabaab has been experimenting with high-end explosives that they can get on an airplane. In fact, I have got the photos from 2016 when they actually blew a hole in the side of a Turkish airliner.

Our perception is that al-Qaeda hasn't given the go-ahead to try that on other planes yet, but they are experimenting with it. They are trying to get suitcase bombs through X-rays and other technology in order to go after aviation. All these years after 9/11, after all the plots that have been stopped, they are still trying to do that.

Then if you go flash forward from there, on June 3 of this year, just earlier this month, the French killed Abdulmalek Droukdel, a long-time emir of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb. One of the arguments that we have combatted through the years is al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb—now I will let you focus on that for a second—al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb isn't really al-Qaeda. We have heard this a long time.

Well, in fact, Droukdel was communicating regularly with al-Qaeda team leadership. This was evidenced in Osama bin Laden's files, which we have processed quite a few now of. The French, after they killed him, they said that not only was Droukdel who was killed in northern Mali, the emir of AQIM, but he was also sitting on al-Qaeda's international or global management committee. In other words, this is a guy who had a say on al-Qaeda's global affairs far outside of his home base in North and West Africa. It is that sort-of important, sort-of connectivity or connective issue which we try and harp on because I think it tells you a lot about al-Qaeda in 2020.

Finally, I think that earlier this month, mid-June now, the United States launched a drone strike, a very targeted drone strike against 2 al-Qaeda operatives in Idlib, Syria. This is the latest in a series of drone strikes targeting al-Qaeda operatives in Syria that are thought to pose a threat to the West. One of them was a long-time companion of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the founder of al-Qaeda in Iraq. He was the guy who—this guy, Khalid al-Aruri his name is. He was implicated all the way back to 2003 in the suicide bombings in Casablanca. So this is a guy who has again another lengthy

dossier who has been in the game for a long time. He finally—I presume it was the CIA, got him with a very special design drone missile known as an R9X, which is very interesting, and we can talk about that. But this gives you the perception that the CIA is still hunting these guys around the globe.

I don't know how much—I think I am out of time. But I will just wrap up by saying this: This is supposed to be a very brief presentation, but think about the guys that I just surveilled there in my oral testimony. You have threats from Afghanistan, you have in Yemen, you have in Somalia, you have in Mali, and you have in Syria. That is al-Qaeda 2020. Al-Qaeda has a distributed leadership across those countries. It has a distributed external operations capacity across those countries. The United States is still hunting those guys on a regular basis. I think that is often lost in sort-of our discourse today about what is actually going, but it speaks to the idea that this is, in fact, a long-term threat and a long-term problem set that we are going to keep dealing with.

I thank you for giving me the chance to testify today, and I welcome any questions you guys have.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Joscelyn follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF THOMAS JOSCELYN

Chairman Rose, Ranking Member Walker, and other Members of the committee, thank you for inviting me to testify today. We are living in difficult times. Americans have many threats to worry about. The challenges we face are daunting—from the coronavirus pandemic to domestic terrorists to foreign actors seeking to exploit our divisions to various cyber threats. This committee has to monitor many different types of issues, so I appreciate that you have not lost sight of the fact that al-Qaeda and the Islamic State (ISIS) are still active. Even though most of their violence is carried out overseas, both groups are deeply anti-American and would like to exploit any holes in our defenses that they can find.

First, I would like to make several general observations. I will then turn to a brief analysis of recent events. My general points are as follows:

- The U.S. military started pivoting away from the wars against the jihadists in 2011 and 2012. Much of this pivot was already completed by 2016. By the beginning of 2017, the United States retained a small footprint in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria, as well as forces in Africa. Since 2012, the United States has attempted to buttress local partners, as they have been responsible for the bulk of the fighting on the ground in these areas. This has worked better in some countries than others. But the point is that America has not been invested in large-scale counterinsurgencies for the better part of a decade. Instead, the United States has complemented partner forces with air strikes, special operations raids, and other focused counterterrorism efforts. It appears that this ad hoc strategy may be coming to an end, as America's greatly reduced footprint could be withdrawn from several countries by next year. In that event, the challenges for homeland security will not go away. In some ways, the threats may become even more difficult to detect and thwart.
- Even if the United States stops fighting, the jihadists will not. Al-Qaeda's leaders sought to spark a jihadist revolution and, despite suffering many setbacks, they succeeded. The jihadists today are waging insurgencies across Africa, hotspots in the Middle East, and into South Asia. Their stated goal is to build Islamic emirates, which could eventually join together to form a new caliphate. Although some U.S. policy makers dismissed this goal in the past, ISIS proved that this motivation is very real.¹ But it is also al-Qaeda's chief goal and has been since the beginning. A new caliphate is not close at hand, and many obstacles stand in the jihadists' way. Yet an awful amount of violence has resulted

¹This is not intended to suggest that the jihadists' behavior is monocausal. They can have multiple motivations. But from my perspective, the jihadist ideology, including its caliphate quest, is the glue that binds.

from the jihadists' caliphate quest, and they already have nascent emirates in some regions.

- ISIS is not at the zenith of its power. But as many analysts predicted, the end of its territorial caliphate did not lead to the end of the group. ISIS is waging an insurgency across parts of Iraq and Syria. It also has noteworthy "provinces" in Khorasan (Afghanistan, Pakistan, and parts of the surrounding countries), the Sinai, Southeast Asia, Somalia, West Africa, and Yemen. ISIS has terrorist networks in other areas. Many across this network are openly loyal to Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi, the successor to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. After Baghdadi was killed last year, ISIS orchestrated a media campaign to emphasize the fealty of its "provinces."
- Al-Qaeda has survived the post-9/11 wars and America's counterterrorism campaign. The group's base has spread from South Asia into multiple other countries. Several organizations, often described as al-Qaeda "affiliates," serve as regional branches. These branches are each led by an emir who swears his allegiance to the head of al-Qaeda. Since Osama bin Laden's death in May 2011, that leader has been Ayman al-Zawahiri. The official al-Qaeda branches are: Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent, and al-Shabaab in Somalia. To this list we can add the "Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims" (Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin, or JNIM), a wing of AQIM. Hurras al-Din in Syria is also part of al-Qaeda's network, as are other groups based in Idlib. But al-Qaeda's chain-of-command in Syria has been upset by a number of internal rivalries, power struggles, and arguments over jihadist strategy.² In addition, al-Qaeda works through other groups that are not official al-Qaeda branches but are nonetheless part of its web. Such groups include the Pakistani Taliban. Still other jihadist organizations are closely allied with al-Qaeda.
- ISIS and al-Qaeda remain locked in a competition for the fealty of jihadists around the globe. Much of this competition will take place at the local level, but international terrorism could play a role in the rivalry, as these groups look to outbid one another for the affection of would-be jihadists. While there may be some cooperation between individual commanders, the two mother organizations are at odds. ISIS has developed an institutional hatred for al-Qaeda. In some areas, such as Iraq, ISIS is definitively stronger. In other areas, such as Somalia and Yemen, al-Qaeda has the upper hand. In West Africa, the two are currently close in strength, though that can change. Any assessment of relative strength in Syria is difficult due to al-Qaeda's management problems and other factors. And an assessment of their relative positions in Afghanistan is complicated by the fact that al-Qaeda and affiliated groups are embedded within the Taliban-led insurgency. Al-Qaeda has deliberately sought to mask the extent of its operations in Afghanistan.
- The Trump administration's withdrawal deal with the Taliban, signed on February 29 in Doha, has not put an end to the terrorist threats emanating from either Afghanistan or Pakistan. I have critiqued various aspects of the deal at length elsewhere, including during previous Congressional testimony, so I will not repeat all of those criticisms in writing here.³ But some basic observations are in order. Nearly 4 months have passed since that agreement was signed. During that time, the United States has drawn down to 8,600 or fewer troops. It is not clear what, if anything, the United States has received in return. The Taliban went on the offensive against the Afghan government immediately after the accord was finalized. The Taliban has not renounced al-Qaeda. In fact, the Taliban continues to lie about al-Qaeda's presence in Afghanistan, claiming the group has not been located in the country since the days of its Islamic Emirate in 2001.⁴ As far as I am aware, the Taliban has not taken a single action against al-Qaeda or any of the al-Qaeda-affiliated groups known to be fighting inside Afghanistan. Only 2 passages of the February 29 accord specifically mention al-Qaeda, and both of those repeat the same language. The Taliban has supposedly agreed to prevent al-Qaeda from using Afghan soil to threaten the

² Those disagreements have centered on Hay'at Tahrir al Sham (HTS), which both the United States and the United Nations continue to consider an al-Qaeda "affiliate."

³ See: "No Deal Is Better Than a Bad Deal," *The Dispatch*, March 4, 2020. (<https://thedispatch.com/p/no-deal-is-better-than-a-bad-deal>). See also: Thomas Joscelyn, "The Trump Administration's Afghanistan Policy, Testimony before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, September 2019." (<https://docs.house.gov/meetings/FA/FA00/20190919/109992/HHRG-116-FA00-WState-JoscelynT-20190919.pdf>)

⁴ Thomas Joscelyn, "Taliban falsely claims al-Qaeda doesn't exist in Afghanistan," *FDD's Long War Journal*, June 15, 2020. (<https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2020/06/taliban-false-ly-claims-al-qaeda-doesnt-exist-in-afghanistan.php>)

United States or its allies. But the Taliban has made that same claim repeatedly since the 1990's. It was clearly a lie then. Without any verification or enforcement mechanisms—and there are no such provisions specified in the text of the deal released to the public—there is no reason to think the Taliban is telling the truth now. As long as al-Qaeda's decades-long relationship with the Taliban remains unbroken, it will be a source of strength for al-Qaeda's global network, including in its rivalry with ISIS.

- Both al-Qaeda and ISIS spend most of their resources waging insurgencies. But a part of each organization is focused on attacking the West. With that in mind, I turn now to a summary of recent events, focusing on the al-Qaeda threat and how it ties back to terrorism in the United States and Europe.

A brief summary of recent al-Qaeda activity and counterterrorism operations.

The most recent al-Qaeda attack in the United States came on December 6, 2019, when Second Lieutenant Mohammed Alshamrani (Al-Shamrani) opened fire at Naval Air Station Pensacola in Florida, killing 3 U.S. service members and wounding 8 other Americans. AQAP claimed “full responsibility” for the Saudi's attack in a video released on February 2. AQAP's claim was not empty bluster. After cracking the security on Alshamrani's 2 iPhones, both of which he tried to destroy, the FBI discovered he had “significant ties” to AQAP.⁵

Alshamrani was a committed jihadist before he entered the United States. According to the Department of Justice (DOJ), Alshamrani was “radicalized” by 2015, “connected and associated with AQAP operatives,” and then joined the Royal Saudi Air Force with the intent of conducting a “special operation.”⁶ As a member of the Royal Saudi Air Force, he entered a prestigious training program that gave him access to U.S. military bases. Throughout his time in the United States, Alshamrani regularly communicated with AQAP members. While in the United States, Alshamrani “had specific conversations with overseas AQAP associates about plans and tactics,” was “communicating with AQAP right up until the attack,” and “conferred with his associates until the night before he undertook the murders.”⁷ Alshamrani also made sure that AQAP could exploit his attack for propaganda purposes. He saved his final will to one of his iPhones and obviously sent a copy to AQAP. AQAP's media operatives displayed it on-screen during its February video claiming “full responsibility” for the shooting.⁸ The United States also used intelligence recovered from Alshamrani's phones to identify his associates, including an AQAP operative known as Abdullah al-Maliki, who was subsequently targeted in an air strike.⁹ It is possible that the United States stepped up its efforts to kill AQAP's emir, Qasim al-Raymi, as a result of the Pensacola shootings. While the United States and its allies have hunted Raymi for years, he was finally killed in a drone strike in Yemen in January.

Khalid Batarfi succeeded Raymi as AQAP's emir. Like Raymi, Batarfi is an al-Qaeda veteran whose career traces to the 1990's in Afghanistan, where he was trained and indoctrinated. Batarfi is more of an ideologue and thinker than Raymi. Immediately upon assuming AQAP's top post, Batarfi continued to release a religious lecture series that is intended to purify the jihadists' ranks and counter the Islamic State. In addition to his religious work, Batarfi has long managed an operational portfolio that extends far outside of Yemen. According to a panel of experts that reports to the United Nations Security Council, Batarfi was responsible for a terrorist plot that was foiled in Jordan in July 2017.¹⁰ AQAP attacks, such as the one in Pensacola and the 2015 massacre at Charlie Hebdo's offices in Paris, are smaller in scale and focused on specific targets. Though the group is mired in a complex, multi-sided war in Yemen, it is always possible that AQAP will try to execute more deadly attacks abroad. Batarfi is openly anti-American. In a message released in 2018, Batarfi called on al-Qaeda's followers to “rise and attack” Americans “ev-

⁵Department of Justice, Press Release, “Attorney General William P. Barr and FBI Director Christopher Wray Announce Significant Developments in the Investigation of the Naval Air Station Pensacola Shooting,” May 18, 2020. (<https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/attorney-general-william-p-barr-and-fbi-director-christopher-wray-announce-significant>)

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Federal Bureau of Investigation, Press Release, “FBI Director Christopher Wray's Remarks at Press Conference Regarding Naval Air Station Pensacola Shooting Investigation,” May 18, 2020. (<https://www.fbi.gov/news/pressrel/press-releases/fbi-director-christopher-wrays-remarks-at-press-conference-regarding-naval-air-station-pensacola-shooting-investigation>).

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Thomas Joscelyn, “Analysis: AQAP remains under pressure,” *FDD's Long War Journal*, May 26, 2018. (<https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2018/05/analysis-aqap-remains-under-pressure.php>).

erywhere.”¹¹ Batarfi is likely a member of al-Qaeda’s senior management, as his predecessors in AQAP’s hierarchy have served similar dual roles as both AQAP’s leaders and top figures in al-Qaeda’s global network.

On June 3, Abdulmalek Droukdel, the long-time emir of AQIM, was killed in a counterterrorism raid in Mali. Florence Parly, France’s minister for the armed forces, announced that her country carried out the operation. U.S. Africa Command subsequently confirmed that it played a supporting role, providing intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance to the French. Droukdel was a major figure in al-Qaeda’s global network. For instance, files recovered in Osama bin Laden’s Abbottabad compound show that he reported directly to al-Qaeda’s senior leadership, requesting guidance on personnel, hostage-taking operations, negotiations with the government of Mauritania, and other matters.

France’s Parly identified Droukdel as a member of al-Qaeda’s “management committee.”¹² And the French government described him as Zawahiri’s “third deputy.”¹³ Therefore, from France’s perspective, Droukdel was not only the emir of AQIM, but was also a senior figure in al-Qaeda’s global hierarchy. This is consistent with our understanding of al-Qaeda’s current organizational structure, as the group’s senior managers and decision makers are found in multiple geographic locales.

While most of AQIM’s efforts are focused in North and West Africa, there is some connective tissue between the al-Qaeda arm and the group’s global terrorist ambitions. An operative known as Younis al Mauritani helped broker the merger of AQIM’s predecessor organization, the Salafist Group for Call and Combat, with al-Qaeda in 2006. Mauritani went on to play a senior role in al-Qaeda’s external operations arm, planning attacks against American and European targets. Mauritani was captured in Pakistan in 2011 and repatriated to his home country. But I always point to his biography as an example of how AQIM’s men are not entirely focused on Africa. It is possible that some other AQIM figures will follow a similar career trajectory. As of this testimony, AQIM has yet to announce a successor to Droukdel. But there are multiple capable replacements. And his demise is not the end of al-Qaeda’s war-fighting capacity in North and West Africa. Both AQIM and its spawn, the “Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims” (Jama’at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin, or JNIM), will continue to fight on. So will their rivals in the Islamic State’s local “province.”

In mid-June, 2 senior al-Qaeda operatives were targeted in a drone strike in Syria’s Idlib province.¹⁴ One of them, Abu al-Qassam (also known as Khaled al-Aruri and Abu Ashraf), was an al-Qaeda veteran whose jihadist career dates back to the 1990’s. He was one of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi’s closest companions, as the two grew up together in Jordan and then worked side-by-side from the early 1990’s until Zarqawi’s demise in 2006. He was also Zarqawi’s brother-in-law. The other was a jihadist known as Bilal al-Sanaani, a *nom de guerre* indicating that he was from Yemen. Abu al-Qassam was a top figure in Hurras al-Din (HAD), an al-Qaeda group that was established after months of jihadists infighting in Syria. HAD’s leadership objected to the moves made by Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), an organization formerly known as al-Nusrah Front, which was an official branch of al-Qaeda until July 2016. As result of various intra-jihadist disputes and other setbacks, al-Qaeda’s chain of command in Syria remains murky. Multiple groups fighting inside Syria have ties to al-Qaeda. And as the unclaimed air strike in mid-June demonstrates, the United States continues to target those terrorists who are thought to be especially worrisome.

It should be noted that Abu al-Qassam was 1 of 5 senior al-Qaeda figures set free by Iran in 2015. The 5 were reportedly exchanged for an Iranian diplomat who was held hostage by AQAP in Yemen. Abu al-Qassam and 2 of the others made their way to Syria, where all 3 have now perished in the U.S. drone campaign. The other 2, Saif al-Adel and Abdullah Abdullah (a.k.a. Abu Muhammad al-Masri), evidently decided to stay in Iran, and from there they have weighed in on the jihadist con-

¹¹U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Counterterrorism, “Country Reports on Terrorism 2018,” 2019, page 319. (<https://www.state.gov/reports/country-reports-on-terrorism-2018/>).

¹²“French forces kill al-Qaeda’s North African commander,” *Associated Press*, June 5, 2020. (<https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/french-forces-kill-al-qaeda-north-africa-commander-1.5601037>).

¹³The French military’s statement, claiming Droukdel was Zawahiri’s “third deputy,” can be found here: French Ministry of the Armed Forces, “Point de situation des opérations du 05 au 11 juin [Update on operations from 05 to 11 June],” June 11, 2020. (<https://www.defense.gouv.fr/operations/points-de-situation/point-de-situation-des-operations-du-05-au-11-juin>).

¹⁴Thomas Joscelyn, “U.S. reportedly targets 2 senior al Qaeda figures in air strike in Syria,” *FDD’s Long War Journal*, June 14, 2020. (<https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2020/06/u-s-reportedly-targets-2-senior-al-qaeda-figures-in-airstrike-in-syria.php>).

troversies inside Syria. During 1 on-line squabble, Abu al-Qassam himself wrote that the 2 al-Qaeda veterans “left prison and they are not imprisoned” inside Iran. Abu al-Qassam claimed that Adel and Abdullah “are forbidden from traveling until Allah makes for them an exit,” but “they move around and live their natural lives except for being allowed to travel.”¹⁵ Unlike their brethren in Syria, Adel and Abdullah are safe from America’s drones inside Iran, because the United States has never launched air strikes against al-Qaeda there. The Iranian regime has a complex relationship with al-Qaeda. Although the 2 are often at odds, the Iranians have also allowed al-Qaeda to maintain a “core pipeline” on their soil. This facilitation network allows al-Qaeda to shuttle operatives and communications across the Middle East and South Asia.¹⁶

The mid-June air strike in Idlib was the latest in an infrequent drone campaign in northern Syria. The targets have been select al-Qaeda leaders and operatives thought to pose a threat to the West. In February 2017, one of Ayman al-Zawahiri’s top deputies, Abu al-Khayr al-Masri, was killed in a drone strike. It appears that an R9X missile was used in that targeted air strike and then again earlier this month in Idlib. In late 2018, Iyad Nazmi Salih Khalil (a.k.a. Abu Julaybib al-Urduni), was killed in an air strike in late 2018. Like Abu al-Qassam, Abu Julaybib was close to Zarqawi. The United States then conducted air strikes against al-Qaeda targets in June and August 2019. And in December 2019, another senior HAD official, Bilal Khuraysat, was killed. Khuraysat was a significant ideological figure, as he penned tracts defending al-Qaeda and criticizing the Islamic State, among other topics.

Al-Qaeda’s senior leadership retains a presence in Afghanistan and Pakistan. In September 2019 American and Afghan forces killed Asim Umar, the first emir of AQIS, during a raid in the Musa Qala district of Helmand.¹⁷ Umar and his comrades were embedded within a Taliban stronghold and they were protected by one of the Taliban’s “shadow Governors.” Umar’s courier was also killed during the raid. According to the Afghan government, that same courier ran messages back and forth to Ayman al-Zawahiri.

That same month, the White House confirmed that Hamza bin Laden, Osama’s biological and ideological heir, had been killed in a “counterterrorism operation.”¹⁸ The White House did not explain when or where, only saying that Hamza had met his demise somewhere “in the Afghanistan/Pakistan region.” The Trump administration added that Hamza “was responsible for planning and dealing with various terrorist groups,” but did not name those organizations. In my view, it is likely that Hamza was working with the Afghan Taliban, among other groups. Like his father and Ayman al-Zawahiri, Hamza swore his own oath of fealty to the Taliban’s emir. A monitoring team that works for the U.N. Security Council recently reported that a Taliban delegation met with Hamza in the spring of 2019 to “to reassure him personally that the Islamic Emirate would not break its historical ties with Al-Qaeda for any price.”¹⁹ The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan is what the Taliban calls its totalitarian regime. Similarly, the U.N. team reported that Ayman al-Zawahiri met with a Haqqani Network delegation in February 2020 to discuss the agreement struck between the United States and the Taliban.²⁰ The Haqqani Network is an integral part of the Taliban.

The U.N. monitoring team cited intelligence and reporting from member states. It is not possible for me, as an outsider, to inspect these sources. But it is likely within the purview of this committee to ask the Department of Homeland Security

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Some commentators have claimed that merely pointing to Iran’s “agreement” with al-Qaeda is part of some conspiratorial scheme to start a war. That claim is nonsense. The formerly “secret deal” between the Iranian government and al-Qaeda was documented by the Obama administration in a series of terrorist designations and other official statements by the Treasury and State Departments. See: Thomas Joscelyn, “State Department: Iran allows al Qaeda to operate its ‘core facilitation pipeline,’” *FDD’s Long War Journal*, September 19, 2018. (<https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2018/09/state-department-iran-allows-al-qaeda-to-operate-its-core-facilitation-pipeline.php>). In addition, it should be noted again that Iran and al-Qaeda are often at odds, including in Syria and Yemen.

¹⁷ Bill Roggio, “Afghan intelligence confirms death of AQIS emir,” *FDD’s Long War Journal*, October 8, 2019. (<https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2019/10/afghan-intelligence-confirms-death-of-aqis-emir.php>).

¹⁸ White House, “Statement from the President,” September 14, 2019. (<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/statement-from-the-president-10/>).

¹⁹ United Nations Security Council, “Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban and other associated individuals and entities constituting a threat to the peace, stability, and security of Afghanistan,” April 30, 2020, page 12. (<https://www.undocs.org/S/2020/415>).

²⁰ Ibid.

and other agencies about these reports and the current status of Taliban-al-Qaeda relations. Such questions are especially important given that the head of U.S. Central Command, General Kenneth McKenzie, recently claimed that Zawahiri is based in eastern Afghanistan.²¹

This brief synopsis of al-Qaeda shows that the organization maintains a cohesive international network nearly 19 years after the 9/11 hijackings. Its leadership is distributed across several countries. And while much of al-Qaeda is focused on wars “over there,” some part of the organization remains focused on carrying out attacks over here.

Mr. ROSE. Absolutely.

I thank you all so much for your extraordinary testimony. I will remind the subcommittee that we will each have 5 minutes to question the panel.

Before I recognize myself, one last thing, without objection, the gentlewoman from New Mexico, Ms. Torres Small, will also be permitted to sit and question the witnesses.

With that, I will now recognize myself for questions.

I want to—it seems that what the 3 of you are saying is the threat is still here, but we also have to skate to where the puck is going. Let’s think about how this threat is evolving.

So I want to introduce 4 points, 4 ideas. Then, particularly, Mr. Morell and Ambassador Kaidanow, I would like to hear your thoughts on this.

The first is, is H.R. McMasters said, I think very pressingly, that you either fight America asymmetrically or stupidly. So with that being said, how—are we seeing the emergence of any State-level support for ISIS, al-Qaeda, or for other non-state actors, not with the explicit intent of regional power, as what I think we see more so with Iran, but with the intent of attacking the United States of America, attacking our homeland?

Second, one of the threats that I am most concerned with in 2020 and beyond is the notion of a multi-layered attack by a ISIS, al-Qaeda-like actor using cyber tools and let’s say a small arms attack of sorts. What are we seeing from ISIS and al-Qaeda with their capacity to utilize cyber tools to inflict harm?

Second is the Southern Border. Can you please speak to what is the potential for a threat from ISIS or al-Qaeda at the Southern Border? This is something that the President speaks about very frequently, has used it as a justification for the border wall. I am going to ask you if you could speak to that, the nature of that threat.

Then last, if what you are saying is true in that this is now here to stay for generations to come, should we be considering building multilateral institutions as we have for peacekeeping, finance, health, and so on and so forth, to more permanently, as we have with NATO, address the issue of cyber—excuse me, of terrorism?

Mr. Morell, we will start with you.

Mr. MORELL. OK. So let me start at the bottom. Let me talk about multilateral institutions. I think the point I would make is that, you know, a huge part of counterterrorism operations are intelligence. A huge part of counterterrorism operations are intelligence, right. You can’t do them without first-rate intelligence. In-

²¹U.S. Central Command News Transcript, “MEI engagement with General Kenneth F. McKenzie Jr.,” June 11, 2020. (<https://www.centcom.mil/MEDIA/Transcripts/Article/2216473/mei-engagement-with-general-kenneth-f-mckenzie-jr/>).

telligence services outside of the Five Eyes, and even within the Five Eyes, it is quite compartmented.

Intelligence services don't like multilateral exchanges, multilateral sharing, multilateral cooperation. They like bilateral. The reason is pretty simple, because what you are willing to do and what you are willing to share is based on trust. So as you expand the number, you make it much more difficult for people to be willing to share.

So I don't think multilateral institutions are going to be particularly helpful, because I don't think intelligence services are going to be willing to share within those multilateral institutions.

On the question of any states supporting ISIS and al-Qaeda from the perspective of, you know, supporting a task, I don't see any. You know, I would love to hear what Tom has to say about that.

In terms of cyber tools, I left Government in 2013, so I don't know what the intelligence says now, but, you know, up to that point and what I see in the open media and in experts—in the work of experts like Tom is I don't see a lot of terrorist interests in cyber. It just doesn't have the same kind of effect that they are looking for.

I think another really important point with regard to cyber is the kind of effects that you might—that a terrorist group might see as catastrophic would be attacks on our critical infrastructure, right? So if a terrorist group is going to focus on a cyber attack, that is where they would focus, because that can create a catastrophe.

Those kind of cyber tools that can do that are the most sophisticated in the world, and that is where our defenses are the best. So it is only a handful of nation-states that have those kind of sophisticated tools. In fact, only 2 that I know, outside of—2 in terms of our adversaries have those kind of tools. So even if the terrorists wanted to get there, it would be extremely difficult for them to get there in terms of bringing about a catastrophic attack as opposed to just kind-of a nuisance attack on cyber.

The Southern Border, I am not an expert on, so I will leave that to somebody else.

Mr. ROSE. Ambassador, is there anything you would like to add to that? Feel free to pick any of the 4. You don't have to go through all.

Ms. KAIDANOW. Sure, and I appreciate that. I would associate, again, myself with everything Mike said. I would just add maybe a couple of thoughts.

It is not just that intelligence is the key to divining, you know, what the intent of some of these groups are and the level of trust, and the trust is bilateral, as he said, more than it is multilateral. That is absolutely correct. But it is also the case, I think, at least it was in my experience, you know, part of what we did at the State Department, the biggest part of what we did at the State Department was try and marry our homeland security needs on the one hand and the ability, again, to rope in, if you will, our European and other allies to do—not just European, all over the world, to do the kinds of things that would, in theory, extend our border out.

So in other words, our border is no longer, you know, on the East and the West Coast. Our border becomes Indonesia. Our border be-

comes Saudi Arabia. Our border becomes those places where otherwise we might find that people are coming we don't want.

The way you do that is, theoretically, is you engage, you know, the relevant institutions in those countries, whether it is their internal affairs ministry, which is usually where you want to be, you know—and that is not necessarily the same people who are doing their visa work. That is not necessarily the same people who are, you know, deciding who comes in and who goes out of those countries. It is not—and so there is a lot of—what you find was however disassociated we were before 9/11, in other words, FBI didn't talk to CIA and so on and so forth, that same disassociation, that same lack of communication exists almost everywhere in the world. Not only does it exist, but you can be shocked—even in places like France where, you know, they have, again, several various institutions that are dealing with these issues, homeland security-ish, you know, they have, again, you know, an intel agency, they have other agencies that are doing law enforcement and so forth.

The only way sometimes they talk to each other is through us. They don't like giving out their secrets. They don't like talking about, you know, what it is that they do for a living. They think that is their bread and butter.

So we find that it is a challenge for us almost anywhere we go, on a bilateral basis, to get what we need from the countries. I think that is a worthwhile effort, personally. I think it is really important, because again, we are not going to be able to do these things by ourselves. I think we have made some strides, actually.

The CIA, I can't talk about it in this particular, you know, venue, but the CIA has some programs that we utilize to try and, you know, get at these problems. You know, border issues are sort-of very, very—when you can't be always on the offensive, and you need to try, but when you can't be, you need to have a strong defense. That defense needs to be, you know, not just, again, us but us and our allies.

So I think that is an important point to think about when we think about, you know, multilateral versus bilateral. We are not even at the stage yet where we can get all of our bilateral friends together in a way that we can keep trying.

Just one other small thing, and that is, I agree with the cyber. I haven't seen any evidence necessarily that, you know, these groups necessarily—and Tom may have more on this—are, you know, there yet. But I would say, if they end up having even just a few people who are pretty good at the hacking thing, you can find that there is—you know, it is not resource-heavy. It is not resource-intensive.

So I think that you need to keep an eyeball on it. I don't think necessarily they are there yet; they are certainly not in the capability mode of like Iran or China. No, of course not. But I do think that they are in a place where, you know, if they decided, or if there was someone who was particularly interested in those issues. As you said, I think, Mike, they were extremely innovative at the outset of, you know, the caliphate push and so forth. They still remain innovative. They haven't shown us necessarily that they are doing these things on the cyber side, but I wouldn't exclude it.

Then, finally, just the last thing is the emergence of, you know, state support. I don't see that, but I will say, and I totally believe this, having served in Afghanistan, if that—if we give that up, if we are now in a position—I know you haven't talked about how much money we have wasted and so on, and I am not here to dispute a lot of that; you know, I get it, but “wasted” is a big word. I still find that we have created a system in Afghanistan that at least can sustain itself for the time being. If we give the Taliban, you know, complete political ability to kind-of come in there and now take over, I think we are taking an enormous risk. That is my particular feeling on the subject. But, again, I served there, so maybe I am biased. But that is my very strong feeling.

I know, Chairman, you have also been there and in—down in Kandahar, and I think, you know, you may feel differently, but we need to think about our investment. We need think about the dangers that are still associated with Afghanistan. I will stop there.

Mr. ROSE. Sure. No, no. I was just agreeing. You were thinking about the high-level stuff, so we really value your opinion.

Mr. WALKER, you have 5 minutes, my friend.

Mr. WALKER. Thank you, Chairman.

I want to start with Mr. Joscelyn. Your testimony highlights the long history and interconnectedness of the Taliban and al-Qaeda and that despite having signed an agreement with the United States, the Taliban will never disavow the terror organization, it seems. What are your recommendations for pressuring the Taliban into creating an international coalition to pressure the Taliban and strengthen the Afghan government? Can you address that?

Mr. JOSCELYN. Well, thank you, Congressman, for the question. As I am sure several of you are aware, I have been highly critical of the deal of February 29, the deal in Doha, that was signed between the State Department and the Taliban. I am a nerd who tracks the Taliban every day of my life and have for about 20 years, you know, so I know how they think. I think Mike Morell is exactly right when he says he doesn't trust them and that they want—they just said what they had to say in order to get us out.

We have inspected the language of the agreement, and what they are saying actually is no different from what they said since the 1990's. You can check the 9/11 Commission report, page 111, first, to be precise, and what the Taliban told Ambassador Richardson when they said that Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda didn't pose a threat to the United States or the West. They are saying the same thing now. As far as I can tell, there is nothing in the agreement to verify or ensure that they are not lying now as they have lied since the 1990's.

As one side note, one nerdy side note, we are in the middle of processing al-Qaeda's literature in Urdu, actually, which documents their role fighting on behalf of the Taliban against ISIS in eastern Afghanistan. I am happy to share all that once we are done. But why is that important? Well, that type of detail is the type of detail we deal in that shows exactly what Mike Morell said, that the relationship between al-Qaeda and the Taliban is very close, at a personal level. There is intermarriage. The 2 are wedded at different points. The *Long War Journal's* position has been that the U.S. Government hasn't taken a holistic view of that relation-

ship. Certainly, the U.S. military hasn't taken a holistic view of that relationship. For many years—I am very jaded at this point. I don't think they are going to get it right or actually put the pressure points on them to effect the real break between the two because, quite frankly, when I have these conversations, a lot of times, the policy makers don't even understand what that relationship looks like.

So what we have done is we have set forth a series of criteria in an article in *Politico* and in my previous testimony before House Homeland Security and other committees. We said, here are the criteria we would look for to affect a real break, what that would look like, and I can just—none of those have been satisfied by the Doha agreement.

Mr. WALKER. Thank you for answering that. I have got 2 more questions, so if we can move on to try to get these in, if possible, but the information is very important, so I don't want to cut anybody short.

I want to go back to Ambassador Kaidanow. Given your service in Afghanistan, you have had first-hand understanding of the violence and the inhumane treatment of the people, particularly the women of Afghanistan, under Taliban rule. Would you mind taking a moment and remind us of what life was like for the Afghan people and provide any recommendations for how the United States and the international community can pressure the Afghan government to protect its people and their rights?

Ms. KAIDANOW. Yes. I mean, you are, I think, quite right. The fact of the matter was that certainly under Taliban rule, it was a very, very difficult situation, certainly for women. I think, generally speaking, you know, the Taliban were not even effective as governance. Although what was attractive at the time, I think, to the people of Afghanistan was there had been so much turmoil and so much sort-of, you know, upheaval that at least what the Taliban brought, in their view, was some sort of measure of order. Yes, but a measure of order of what nature?

The problem is, you know, from our point of view, obviously, (A), provide safe haven for further terrorist attacks, not just there but anywhere, you know, globally that these groups operate. But more to the point, though, for the people of Afghanistan, it was a disaster, and for the women of Afghanistan, it was something so terrible that it is really hard to describe.

So I can tell you that when I was there—so I was there from about 2012 to 2013, through 2013. You know, the constant refrain from the women of Afghanistan was please don't desert us, please don't leave us. This law will go back to where it was, and we are deadly afraid. You know, some of that may have been rhetoric, but I honestly will tell you, I mean, if I were a woman in Afghanistan, I would feel the same way.

So I think the human rights picture will be, you know, at risk. No question. I mean, there just is no question, you know. We have to ask ourselves, of course, how much does that matter to us? Again, a new way of many, many things we care about in the world, and we do. We care about many things. What is our priority set? How do we send, you know, that to the top of the list or, you know, the No. 2 thing on the list?

We can't do everything. Is there a way to try and ensure—and Tom, you know, referenced this in the new, is it going to build a, you know, reliable and useful, you know, political agreement that is going to stand the test of time, the Taliban have to make some sort of meaningful—and “meaningful” is the key word and very hard to judge—but they have to make to some kind of meaningful, you know, promises that they can actually keep. I am not so sure I've seen that.

But, you know, again, that is what the administration needs to keep in mind. It is not just a matter of getting the hell out. If you get the hell out and the situation remains unstable, what you are going to find is you are right back where you were, you know, not that long ago, and it does have implications for us in terms of our security, even leaving the human rights picture aside, which we do care about. So yes.

Mr. WALKER. I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. ROSE. Thank you, Mr. Walker.

We will now move on to Ms. Lee from the great State of Texas.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Mr. Chairman, thank you so very much. This is a very important hearing. As I listen to the witnesses, I hesitate to say that I am traveling down memory lane. Thank you for your service to this Nation as well and those witnesses.

I visited Afghanistan on many occasions, and I certainly did not carry the burden of our brave men and women. But I did go during the time of the Afghan war, and I am reminded of Members of Congress, women Members of Congress that joined in the newly-formed government to help give input to the constitution which, in essence, gave much power and recognition to women. Those women were then ultimately elected to the parliament.

Unfortunately, as we deviated in policy from Afghanistan and went to Iraq, those same women, many of them as parliamentarians, were murdered in their home districts because of the rise of the Taliban, al-Qaeda. Schools that we had formed, girls' schools, were destroyed. So we are in an important moment as to what our next steps will be.

I want to raise the question on that backdrop to Mr. Morell to take a deep dive into the impact of the Taliban lying in the negotiations and where that puts us, and then to Mr. Joscelyn, where you have such a strong portfolio and memory of the characters, if you will, that played a role. Can you share with us the rising characters in the Taliban and al-Qaeda to speak to the issue of the disposing of the present government in Afghanistan and putting forward a Shia government, which would undermine all progress that has been made, and I fear, a bloodletting of all of those people who love democracy?

Mr. Morell, would you proceed with that question that I asked you?

Mr. MORELL. Yes, ma'am. So I think the biggest consequence of our deal with the Taliban, which would not have been possible had they been candid with us about their intentions, is that we have empowered them politically. We have given them much credibility inside Afghanistan and, quite frankly, outside Afghanistan than they deserve. That worries me as they move into negotiations with

the government of Afghanistan, and, you know, it worries me for where we ultimately end up.

Let me add to that, ma'am, that, look, I understand the dilemma that we find ourselves in here. You know, I understand that Americans want out. President Obama wanted out. President Trump wants out. The American people want us out. I get that. I don't want young men and young women fighting for the United States without political support. So unless somebody's willing to stand up and make a compelling case for why we need to stay, then our only alternative is to figure out, if we're not there—and believe me, we won't be there for long, even in an embassy. If we leave militarily, it won't be long before the Taliban takes over, and we won't be there at all.

So if we are not there, then we are going to have to figure out how to collect intelligence on al-Qaeda and ISIS and other groups in Afghanistan, from outside Afghanistan, and we are going to have to figure out, from a military perspective, how to reach out and touch those groups to degrade them if we have to. That is not impossible. Obviously, it is more difficult to do it from outside than inside, but it is not possible. We did it in the FATA. We were not in a FATA in Pakistan, and we successfully collected intelligence and successfully degraded the enemy in a FATA, so it is not impossible. But we have got to figure that out because I think that is where we are headed.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Thank you very much.

Mr. Joscelyn, a deep dive into who the characters are but as well with the backdrop of what Mr. Morell said and the danger that is created for the region in Afghanistan in particular.

Mr. JOSCELYN. Congresswoman Lee, let me first say this: I think of all the times that I have testified, I think I have testified before you more often than any other Member of the House of Representatives.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Yes.

Mr. JOSCELYN. I always say that you cut to the chase quicker than anybody, and you certainly did here with the question about the top leadership.

The Ambassador raises an important point, which is exactly right, which is the Taliban hasn't shown any willingness to compromise on its political objectives, really, in Afghanistan. What are those political objectives? Well, Hibatullah Akhundzada is the Amir of the Faithful for the Taliban. You may have heard that phrase, that title, Amir of the Faithful, before. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, of course, was the first Amir of the Faithful. That is the title that is known to be used by caliphs, Muslim rulers over all Muslims. It is absolutely an authoritarian title that they have taken upon themselves and for Hibatullah Akhundzada.

That is not the title that somebody takes if they are going to take a ministerial post in a new Afghan government, is it, right? You are not going to have the Amir of the Faithful who is going to run the border security or something for a new Afghan government. You know, this is something that speaks to a long-standing religious and ideological sort of commitment on their part to reinstall the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan and resurrect it to power. That has been their political objective all along.

Now, what is interesting too, I said earlier, that I set forth the criteria about what a real break to the Taliban al-Qaeda would look like. Well, the first thing I said was that Hibatullah Akhundzada would renounce, would publicly disavow Ayman al-Zawahiri's buyout, his oath of allegiance to him. This is a very serious matter for the jihadis. The buyout, the oath of allegiance, is something that they say hangs around their neck. What it means is that if you violate the buyout, the person you are swearing it to has the right to take your head off, right, and Zawahiri has sworn his buyout to Hibatullah Akhundzada.

So al-Qaeda, this al-Qaeda network that I mapped out in my oral testimony at the beginning, all those entities that I mentioned, they have all recognized the religious legitimacy of that buyout, that oath of allegiance. Yet to this day, Hibatullah Akhundzada has not renounced Ayman al-Zawahiri's buyout. So that is a very important point from a theological and ideological perspective.

Now, underneath Hibatullah Akhundzada is a guy named Siraj Haqqani, Sirajuddin Haqqani. He is a U.S.-designated terrorist. I am sure Mike Morell, in particular, is well aware of him because his guys were involved in one of the deadliest operations against the CIA ever in December 2009, I think it was, when they killed, I think it was 7 or 8 CIA officers, a really horrible attack. It was orchestrated by Ayman al-Zawahiri.

The Haqqanis have their hooks into all the nasty characters in the region. Haqqanis actually bred and incubated al-Qaeda in eastern Afghanistan. You go back all the way to the 1980's. Haqqani—Siraj's father, Jalaluddin, was one of Osama bin Laden's first and earliest benefactors. He is somebody who was personally invested in Osama bin Laden's rise. Today, his son is the Deputy Amir of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. His network is—we can detail at some length all the ties between the Haqqani network and al-Qaeda, including the fighting that is going on right now. That remains unbroken. There is no evidence of a break there. There is all sorts of intermarriage and all sorts of confluence of interest there.

I can go on, but that gives you two examples just of the top leadership here where Hibatullah Akhundzada we know has—there is a blood oath that has been sworn to him by al-Qaeda that is unbroken, and Siraj Haqqani is part of a legacy that goes back to the 1980's of an unbroken alliance between the Haqqanis and al-Qaeda. These are 2 very, very important points that I think have not been addressed by the February 29 Doha agreement.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you to the witnesses. As we pursue domestic terrorism, we cannot leave these vital—how should I say it—information points and potential danger to the United States and the world. I look forward to continuing this discussion, and thank you all for your service.

Mr. ROSE. Ms. Lee, thank you for the last few decades, striking fear into the witnesses of Homeland Security testimony. You are absolutely phenomenal. It is an opportunity—it is a great opportunity to serve with you.

Mr. Green, our Ranger, you are up.

Mr. GREEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and again, congratulations on the newest member of the Rose family. We are with you guys.

My question is, I think, to Mr. Morell. First, let me thank all the witnesses for being here and for the Chairman putting this together. I served—to give you a little bit of my background, I served as a Night Stalker, Task Force 21, Task Force 121, Omaha, many others, in both Afghanistan and Iraq, worked with other Government agencies on many missions downrange. I want to thank you and your people and your organization for all that they do for the safety of this country.

My question is about the alignment that we see in the Middle East, creating an almost bipolar Sunni versus Shia axis and those Shia militia, in particular in Yemen and in Syria. I wondered if you or someone could comment on the Shia militia and where they are today in this un-Classified setting.

Mr. MORELL. Sure. The Shia militia is in Iraq. The Shia militias in general, but primarily in Iraq, pose a significant threat to the United States, to our diplomats, and to our military, the folks in Iraq. We have seen that time and time again. They are linked significantly to the Iranians in terms of funding, in terms of weapons, in terms of even training.

That link between the Iranians and the Shia militia in Iraq has been broken a bit as a result of the death of Qasem Soleimani. You know, he was extraordinarily hands-on and had a tremendous amount of influence with those groups. The new leadership of the Quds Force, less dynamic, doesn't speak Arabic, less well-known to the west of Iran, doesn't have the same clout. I mean, I was just struck recently where he paid a visit to Iraq, I think it was his first visit, and he actually had to get a visa. Qasem Soleimani never needed a visa to go to Iraq.

So I think there is less Iranian control today over those Shia militia. It is not totally gone, but it is still—it is still there, but it is less, and that is both a good thing and a bad thing. You know, it gives the Iraqi government an opportunity to possibly pull them in a little closer, but it also creates the opportunity that they do something stupid with regard to the U.S. presence in Iraq that even the Iranians don't want them to do.

It is a very serious problem, and, you know, the whole Shia terrorism piece, right, is something we don't talk about very much. But Hezbollah in particular has significant capabilities that, since 9/11, they have decided to stay away from us because of what we would do to them if they take a significant attack. But we all should remember that prior to 9/11, Hezbollah killed more Americans than any other terrorist group.

Mr. GREEN. Yes. Thank you for saying that. I want to shift gears a little bit but stay in the same place. Again, this may be a better question for you, but anyone who wants to chime in. Erdogan and some of the activities in northern Syria that have been going on, how does that disrupt U.S. security? How does that disrupt our efforts to take on Shia militias, Shia militia groups, Iran's efforts to again align this Shia access from Lebanon all the way around to Yemen? What are your thoughts on where Erdogan fits into this and how it is interrupting what we are trying to do there?

Mr. MORELL. Yes. Let me ask Tom if he has thoughts on that.

Mr. JOSCELYN. Yes. Well, what is interesting about this question is, right now, on the same computer, I have a bunch of telegram channels the jihadis are running. One of the hot debates is over the relationship between Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham, which is in Idlib, and its relationship with Turkey, because what HTS, we will call it, what they did was they basically came up with a compromise position with the Turks in order to allow Turkish forces in Idlib to prevent Assad, Russia, and the Iranians from overrunning the province.

Now, this brings us back to Chairman Rose's question earlier. This actually raised a theological issue of jurisprudence on their behalf about how close you can get to Turkey or how close you can work with them, and that is the subject of the on-going dispute because, basically, al-Qaeda decided a long time ago they can cut deals with apostate governments if it sort-of furthers their long-term objectives. There are all sorts of details. We can talk about that. Turkey, though, has become at the center of the controversy because of everything that is in Idlib. Right now, infighting, another round of infighting has broken out between the jihadis in Idlib over this issue and related issues.

The problem I have with Turkey is that too often I find them to be duplicitous in all of this. So there were members of ISIS, commanders of ISIS, including one of the amirs of Mosul, that actually left for Turkey after Mosul fell, and the United States Treasury Department and the Iraqi government had taken an unusual step of identifying him and his address in Turkey from where he was operating because the Turkish government was not being cooperative. We can identify other ISIS figures along those lines, and we have identified al-Qaeda figures in Turkey who have operated there for years. In fact, there is a guy named Mohammed Islambouli. He is the brother of Khalid Islambouli, the assassin of Anwar Sadat.

I have Mohammed Islambouli's Facebook page as one of my favorite go-tos every day because he would document his journey through Istanbul and where he was going. He is somebody I am certain came across Mike Morell's radar at CIA through the years because CIA has known who he is for a long time. He is a fully made man in al-Qaeda. It was always curious to me that he was advertising that he was bouncing from block to block in Istanbul, Turkey, and the Turks didn't do anything about it.

So it is that sort of duplicity and problems that you are dealing with here. It is very complex, there is a lot to it, but that sort-of gives you my lay of the land, anyway.

Mr. GREEN. Thank you. It doesn't seem like it is any harder than right there, that northern strip of Syria. So thanks.

Ms. K Aidanow. Do you mind? I would add just maybe like a couple of lines on that.

You know, Erdogan is constantly overreaching, constantly thinking that he can manipulate, you know, groups and ideas and places that he is not as good as he thinks he is at doing. But just the fact that he thinks that means that we need to be very, very cautious, again, about how we deal with Erdogan, how we deal with Turkey. You know, it was, it is, it remains clear that he wants to be the key player in that part of Turkey—and I am sorry—in northern

Syria to preserve what amounts to an offshoring of all of the, you know, refugees that came into Turkey that now they can push back out because it is such a burden on the Turkish State.

So there is that aspect of it, not to mention the security aspect of, you know, again pushing out borders. He has to be good to the Russians for that reason. He has to be—even if he doesn't like it, he has to be—he has to do deals, you know, obviously with the Syrians who are embedded with the Russians. So he is very confident, and that is what he conveyed to our President. He is very confident that he can—you know, just leave me alone and let me do what I want to do in northern Syria; life will be dandy. We have given him an awful lot of swag, and that is very dangerous for a whole host of reasons.

So I don't want to get into too much more into it, but just—I mean, I think we have to think of the Erdogan side of this, not just the, you know, the ex-realist view.

Mr. GREEN. Absolutely.

Mr. ROSE. OK. Thank you.

We will now move on to Ms. Slotkin from the great State of Michigan, who I am sure you all have actually worked with. She spent her entire career fighting this fight, and if she wasn't a great Member of Congress, we would have had her bump one of you to be a witness.

Ms. Slotkin, you are up.

Ms. SLOTKIN. Thank you, Chairman Rose.

Good to see everybody and, indeed, I have very fond memories of working with many—2 of the 3 panelists at least. So I guess my quick questions are, you know, Tina, as you were saying and Mike referred to, you know, we got out of Iraq in 2011. I remember very clearly in the winter of 2014, you know, the CIA came up for the “World-wide Threat” hearing and told Congress, I mean, I was at the Pentagon at this time, that we are seeing al-Qaeda affiliates, al-Qaeda types kind-of take over more towns and more areas in Anbar, and we are worried to see them more active. Then by the time June rolled around, they had rolled through Mosul. They had taken over, you know, a huge swath of territory in Iraq and Syria.

So I guess my question is, what signs do we have, if any, that similar type of behavior is going on and reconstituted? Maybe I will start with Mike, if you wouldn't mind. Just what are some similarities between what we see them starting to do now and what we saw them starting to do in early 2014?

Mr. MORELL. You know, I think—so, first of all, Elissa, it is great to see you. Congresswoman, I am sorry. I am sorry.

Ms. SLOTKIN. That is OK.

Mr. MORELL. It is great to see you, and congratulations to you on all you have accomplished since you left.

So I think, you know, when I think back to the growth of ISIS and the explosion, right, it really started with the withdrawal from Iraq, and that led to a rebound, an almost immediate rebound in al-Qaeda in Iraq. You could almost feel it immediately because the pressure came off. The Iraqis—not only were we not there militarily to help the Iraqi military deal with AQI, but for some reason, the Iraqis stopped all cooperation, including intelligence cooperation. You know, I guess they wanted to define their sovereignty,

you know, in as significant way as possible, and all of that led to an immediate rebound in AQI.

Then they look across the border, right, and they see the civil war going on in Syria, and they decide that is the place to be, right? That is where the fight is, that is where we want to be, and they go across the border. The al-Qaeda senior leadership in south Asia doesn't like that and tells them not to do it but, you know, they do it anyway, and they change their names. Al-Qaeda in Iraq operating in Syria isn't a cool name, so they changed their name.

Then they grew, you know, rapidly in Syria because they were, (A), fighting, and as you fight, you get better; and (B), they were acquiring weapons as they overran Assad's weapons depots. So they were getting their hands on some pretty sophisticated weapons. They were getting this flow of foreigners, right, to come fight with them because it was the place to be.

You know, we were watching all of that, and I say—what I tell people is, up to that point, the IC did a pretty good job in telling that story and being on top of that. Where we fell significantly short was when they came back to Iraq and they started to grab territory, we misjudged the capabilities of the Iraqi military. You know, we thought the Iraqi military would do a better job fighting what is now ISIS, what used to be AQI, and they didn't, right. They fell apart, and they broke and they ran, essentially. So that is how they got to where they got to in terms of the size of their caliphate. So they are constrained now, right, in being able to do that.

I don't know how good the intelligence is today. I don't see it, so I don't know how good it is. I would assume we have a decent picture into what the ISIS leadership is up to and what it is thinking, but they are constrained from doing the same thing they did before by the fact that the coalition, although less than it was, right, and putting less pressure on ISIS than it did before, it is still operating. The fact that the Iraqi military, with us there—I would worry again about what would happen if we left, but with us there, it is capable of dealing with an ISIS that tries to grab territory.

So I don't see them being able to go down the road they did before and being able to move and gain strength in different places and being able to, without the United States there, take on the Iraqi military. So I am not as worried—I am not as much worried about them creating another caliphate and grabbing territory.

I am very worried about them finding safe haven along the Iraq-Syria border from which to plan operations in Europe, from which to create new propaganda videos. Don't forget, all these old ones are still available for people to go look at. Hey, that is still there. But to be able to create new ones and create a new narrative about their reconstitution and their rebound that again motivates young people to go out and people in general to go out and conduct attacks on their behalf. You know, most concerning, as we talked about, is the ability to direct an attack in Europe.

Ms. SLOTKIN. Mr. Chairman, I know my time has expired, so I will leave it there. But thanks, and great to see Mike and Tina, and thanks to all of our witnesses.

Mr. ROSE. Thank you again, Congresswoman Slotkin.

I think we are all going to take the liberty now of doing a second round of questioning. So with that, I do want to give—if anyone else would like to respond to Congresswoman Slotkin's question, I want to give you the opportunity to do so.

Ms. KAIDANOW. If you will allow me just, again, a couple of words. First of all, Elissa, congratulations. It is so nice to see you. If you ever want, I am happy to kind-of come and talk to you about some of the other stuff, you know, not just this, but some of the defense stuff that we were doing when I was there, but I will leave that off-line.

But, you know, I think Mike is exactly correct. I hate to say this, but this is really—you know, we are trying to grapple with not just what is the problem set, but what is the—how do you address this? I mean, you know, this is—the tough question for us always is OK, so we know. ISIS is a threat of one variety or another. Al-Qaeda remains a threat of, you know, a very large variety. We have all these other, you know, regional issues that we are going to have to deal with. We have the potential of a European-based or European attacks, all that. What do we do to effectively, at least semi-effectively, push back on any of that? It is a very tough question, very layered, very complex.

You could stay here all day talking about, you know, some of this. But I will say, and this is an uncomfortable answer, and it gets right back to the question of, you know, Afghanistan and so on, our presence means something. Our presence there, just what Mike was describing in Iraq and Syria, what we know about Afghanistan, other places where, you know, our being there matters.

Now, it is expensive. It can be very, very costly. It is—you know, it is all sorts of painful. But on the other hand, I will just tell you, you know, let's look at, you know, Afghanistan. It is not just, you know, what does the Taliban do. No, no. It is what does the government of Afghanistan can mean for our Government that is actually, you know, substantively going to sit and mean anything. It is what is the calculus of the Pakistanis when they look at that, you know, situation, and are they willing to invest in a stable Afghanistan? What do the Indians do and how, you know, do the Pakistanis regard the Indians, because for them, this is just a three-way war kind of situation. You know, all sorts of regional concerns and regional stability issues that also impact on our overall security.

All this goes right back to, are we there or aren't we there? I am not saying—please believe me, I am not saying that we have to, you know, sort-of send our people everywhere in the world. I am just saying there are costs that you really have to think about. If you are willing to accept that cost, that is fine. Mike is exactly correct. If we are going to leave Afghanistan, we at least need to know how the hell we are going to get the intel and how we are going to address the immediate terrorism problem because it is going to come.

But the larger question, I think, is not even just the, you know, potential for attack. It is the, oh, my God, what happens if the Pakistanis and the Indians start to go at it, the Taliban sides—there is that element of the Taliban becomes more prevalent in Afghanistan, sides with the, you know, with the Pakistanis—I see

Mike wants to add to this. So, you know, I think that there is a lot of consequence here that we need to think about.

But, you know, we stayed 40, 50, 60 years in Germany for some of the same reasons. You know, why is it that the cost of a, you know, relatively small presence, which means something and says something to, you know, our allies and our partners or to our enemies sometimes, is that too much to bear? We are going to have to think about those things. So anyway, sorry to have to throw the hard—you know, the hard questions into this, but it really is important to think about.

Ms. SLOTKIN. Thanks, Tina.

Mr. ROSE. Mr. Joscelyn or Mr. Morell, anything you would like to add to that?

Mr. MORELL. Yes, sir. I just wanted to add that we tend to be—and I would love to know what Tom thinks about this. We tend to be focused—when we look at Afghanistan, we tend to be focused on the reconstitution of al-Qaeda and the potential for attacks against the United States, whether somewhere else in the world or, you know, God forbid, in the homeland. But I think one of the things that we need to think about is a reconstitution of a Taliban state in Afghanistan, the potential impact of that on radicalization in Pakistan.

You know, the influence used to come the other way, right, from Pakistan to Afghanistan. Now I worry that if Afghanistan ends up where I think it is going to end up, then I worry about the influence going the other way and an increase of radicalization in Pakistan, which could lead to a disaster scenario of a radical government in Pakistan that happens to have nuclear weapons.

Mr. JOSCELYN. So if I may add to that just real quick, that is exactly right about Pakistan. The big problem here in Pakistan and Afghanistan is what I have termed the wheel of jihad. So the Pakistani state supports and harbors the Afghan Taliban, Afghan-Taliban leadership, which is then in bed with al-Qaeda and al-Qaeda-affiliated groups, some of which actually attack the Pakistani state and Pakistani civilians. So that is why the wheel of jihad that remains sort-of unbroken after all these years.

The problem in the Pakistani calculation, precisely to Mike Morell's point there, is that their calculation is that they contain this piece indefinitely and that they basically can use it to gain control and access over Afghanistan. The problem is that when you take one notch down the wheel, when you move from Afghan-Taliban senior leadership to the next step over to al-Qaeda senior leadership, they are already aggressively looking at what they are going to do in Pakistan, Kashmir, and the region. That is why al-Qaeda and the Indian Subcontinent was stood up in 2014. They were saying we are not just about Afghanistan. We are looking at the whole Indian Subcontinent. So that is inherently an idea that is destabilizing that they are trying to accomplish.

Now, we have also been following their literature, which is not often looked at in Urdu and Pashto. Their Urdu literature earlier this year for al-Qaeda, they have already repositioned it from looking at Afghanistan to saying, no, we are looking at the whole region now. So they had a lengthy periodical that would come out every month, it was about 120 pages or so in Urdu, that was

named after the Afghan jihad. That has already been repositioned to look at Kashmir and India and Pakistan. The naming, the branding, everything, it is all now saying we have got—the Americans are leaving, we have won. This a victory for the Taliban and our allies in Afghanistan. We are going to consolidate the emirate there, but we are looking at the whole region.

So in my oral testimony, I mentioned Asim Umar, who was the first head of al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent. His mission under Ayman al-Zawahiri was, in fact, to use Afghanistan and other safe havens as a place to launch operations and extend their networks throughout the Indian Subcontinent, and that is going to keep coming.

But just one other point on Iraq to answer your question just for 1 minute. You asked about ISIS in Iraq. One of the things that has happened is there is a seam, a political seam that has led to a security seam between Kirkuk, the Kurdish regional government's area of control, and the Iraqi federal government's area of control. ISIS has exploited that routinely because, basically, again, wherever there is a vacuum there, we know that they are going to find it, and they found it, and they have been executing a large number of attacks. They are mainly low-scale attacks but not the big, massive operation we saw in Hadith or elsewhere in previous years. But they have got a steady drumbeat of these attacks going on in Kirkuk, in the Kurdish-controlled areas, in Diyala and other areas outside of Baghdad, so it is something to keep a look on.

Just to wrap this up, one of the reasons why—you know, as Mike mentioned earlier, that you keep the pressure on them, you can degrade them, but they bounce back. One of the reasons they bounce back is they are organized as insurgencies, and there is all sorts of redundancies and built-in sort-of in these insurgencies to basically keep them coming, so that when you do knock out the top tier, there are guys right underneath them.

In fact, you know, the guy who is now the leader of ISIS right now, Abu Ibrahim al-Qurashi, otherwise known as Hajj Abdullah, right, he has been in the game since al-Qaeda and Iraq's formation all the way back to 2003, 2004. How many more guys are there like that, you know? I don't think anybody really knows, but they have got enough to keep going, that is for sure.

Mr. ROSE. Again, thank you all. I think we have time for a few more questions. So let me kind-of try to refocus this around protecting the homeland and as that relates to technology and Afghanistan. I say this as a Member of Congress, a New Yorker, and someone who was a platoon leader in Afghanistan. The American people cannot fathom us staying there forever, so it is already America's longest war. I have got buddies who have deployed 4, 5, 6, 7 times there. The area I patrolled in Shah Wali Kot is now completely controlled by the Taliban. So we also just don't want to be stupid and waste blood and treasure.

Mr. Morell, you hit on a great point, which is that this is a global threat, and we have done this in other places without acting as a land-holding power. So let's say we do leave Afghanistan. What do we do then? How do we utilize the tools we have been employing, whether it is in Libya or the 20 other countries where we have fought this threat? What then do we do? Because the American

people should not stand this much longer, and I say this as someone who deeply cares about National security.

Then, second, how are these terrorists communicating right now, would you say? I think that we have seen progress with the major social media companies cracking down on this, the establishment of global internet forums to counter terrorist resident NGO, the appointment of an esteemed executive director, resourcing the problem. Still much more to be done, but it seems to me that now the problem really does lie in the telegrams, in the video games, and the other forms of communications. What do we do about them? How do we go on the offensive as it pertains to that issue as well?

Just in reverse order. Maybe, Mr. Joscelyn, we will start with you.

Mr. JOSCELYN. Well, just on the communications piece real quick, you know, the issue is social media and other platforms, they evolve very quickly, exactly what the Ambassador said earlier about the extensive use of their tools and just how innovative and how they have been able to evolve so quickly in this regard.

For example, you know, obviously, Twitter was the first generation, and Facebook, were the first generations of ISIS' foray into the social media world. They migrated very quickly. They use Telegram more often than anything else. I can show you at some point in time my own computer. I have about 400 jihadis channels on Telegram I follow, many of the ISIS channels that regenerate, many al-Qaeda channels that don't need to regenerate because nobody takes them down, you know they have been there for a long time. In fact, earlier last year, the European Union—Europol—I am sorry. Europol actually worked with Telegram to take down hundreds of ISIS channels.

Now, what was interesting about this is I have nom de guerres and aliases on the channels, with Telegram as well; I also operate under my own name. The account under my own name was taken down, and it took me about 3 or 4 weeks to convince them that, in fact, you know, I am just a guy who works on this stuff. I am not somebody who is actually on their side, you know. When they reinstated me, I came back, and I was able to see what channels existed.

None of the al-Qaeda channels had been taken down. Many of the ISIS channels remained in place. So the sweep got people like me but didn't get a lot of the bad actors, so it is an on-going issue.

But when they did this, when Telegram and Europol did this, and they went to go knock out all of these channels, what it created for us was this problem where we now have to follow—I now have accounts on platforms called Riot, RocketChat, Hoop. I am forgetting some. There are just so many of these now, and they are on all of them, and they generate content very quickly.

All of these have—not all of them, but many of them have private messaging capabilities, which means you don't even need to be in an actual messaging app like WhatsApp or Signal. You can go through one of these social media messaging applications and you can connect with somebody very quickly and start getting instructions or start getting the details on how to operate. It has become a complete nightmare from all the people I talk to in the counter-terrorism world and law enforcement world, a complete nightmare

for them on that. I will leave it there, but that is how I would address the cyber part of this or the communication part of it.

Mr. ROSE. Thank you, sir.
Ambassador.

Ms. KAIDANOW. Yes. Just in addition on this communication thing, absolutely, Tom is right, they are innovative like you would not believe. I think there is a good-faith effort being made by a lot of the—especially the larger, you know, firms on the communication side, you know, the Facebooks, the others, but I would [inaudible] what they are using is exactly what was described.

Not only are they using that stuff, but here is the deal. We are never going to catch up. We can't do counter content because we cannot ever create content fast enough, well enough, whatever, to give them something that is going to be meaningful to them or trustworthy to them. So that whole effort, as far as I am concerned, I am sorry, is not well-used, and our money there is not well-used, and we continue to do it. I am not sure why.

I think what you need to be doing is monitoring that stuff. But then as an adjunct, as Mike can attest, all intel is a conglomeration of many things. You have got the incoming from the communications side. You have HUMINT. The HUMINT is also what you need to develop because you are going to have to rely on somebody to tell you something or at least to give you some signal you should be watching X, Y, or Z or whatever.

There are ways—it is not going to be foolproof ever, but you are going to be able—and we are better at this than we used to be. It is not to say, again, that we are going to catch all the bad guys. We are just not. But there are ways to collate, let's say, what we do know, you know, so some of that will be successful, and we have to just keep trying to get better at that. I think that is the way.

Tom just demonstrated to you some really cool, innovative things he is doing even on, you know, the non-Classified side. So I think that, you know, there are ways of addressing this.

The other thing I would say, though, and again, we go back to the presence, no presence, staying, not staying. I don't know that we need the kind of presence that we had, let's say, the size of presence that we have had in some of the places. I think it is possible to have a very small, very targeted presence in some of the places that we really hear about, Afghanistan being one of them, in which we signal just by virtue of this very small group of people. You know, our tail tends to be larger than it should be, you know. You don't need 18 cooks for, you know, a platoon of guys. They are very resourceful. They can do what they need to do, especially if they are CT-oriented and so forth.

What you need is, you know, a very, very targeted, very small but nevertheless, you know, present bit of business, and that is really what you have to decide. Is that worth it to you or is it not worth it to you? Because otherwise, you are going to be doing both, on the intel side what Mike described, and then on the political side, you are going to have to think about what the implications are so that you, you know, are cognizant that more will have to be done to make up for your loss of presence. I just—you know, I think that is an honest assessment. It is not a pleasant one, it is not an easy one, but it really is the case, so—

Mr. ROSE. Mr. Morell.

Mr. MORELL. Mr. Chairman, I would just add I agree completely with the Ambassador and with Tom. You know, in particular, the point about the more advanced the technology that the bad guys are using in particular with regard to encryption, the more HUMINT becomes important, right. The more it becomes important to be at one of the ends of the conversation, and having a human being there is—becomes more important in this new technology world we are in. So I think that is an important point.

You know, with regard to Afghanistan, I think we have to think about how we leave, you know. I think we are leaving. That is my judgment. I don't think it is necessarily the right answer, but I think that is what is happening. So I think we need to think about how we leave, and I would strongly encourage us not to empower and embolden the Taliban as we do so, No. 1.

No. 2, we really have to think about not only our presence there, but also the financial assistance that we provide to the Afghan government, which is well over \$5 billion. Don't know the exact number.

But, you know, pulling our forces out is one thing. Taking away that financial assistance? I believe the Afghan government would collapse overnight without that financial assistance. So nobody talks about that. I don't know where that stands in the negotiations or how the administration is thinking about it. I just don't know, but it is incredibly important that that money continue to flow even if the troops are out.

Then, as I said, we are going to have to figure out how we collect intelligence and how we are able to reach out and touch them, and I think we have got to think about both partners, particularly on the intel side. On the military side, we have got to think about, OK, where do we do that from? What are the platforms? You know, are they sea-based? Are they in central Asia, central Asia-based? Where are those platforms going to be? I think the intel piece is actually easier than the action piece in terms of taking care of the problem once you are not there anymore.

Mr. ROSE. Thank you again.

Mr. Walker.

Mr. WALKER. Thank you, Chairman. I do have one more question for Mr. Joscelyn, if I could get that in.

In your testimony, you suggest that there has been a decade-long reduction in U.S. counterinsurgency activities in Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, and Northern Africa, and that these activities have been placed with more of an ad hoc targeting strategy. Without committing more U.S. Forces to the battlefield, I would like to know what recommendations you might have to improve intelligence collection and counterterrorism targeting to ensure a sustained pressure campaign against these terror organizations.

Mr. JOSCELYN. Well, thank you for the question, Congressman. What I would say is, you know, there is a lot of talk these days about endless wars, and believe me, I get it. I never thought that I would be covering this stuff for as long as I have, but I don't have any skin in the game like others do or deployed to Afghanistan over and over again or other areas, so I have a tremendous amount

of respect for them and their families. I understand that there are a lot of people who are frustrated and just want out.

What I would say is, when you look at the big picture, the United States shifted away from the large-scale counterinsurgency platform of a decade ago. It really ended around 2011, 2012. At the peak, we had about 200,000 U.S. service members in Iraq and Afghanistan. When I first did this assessment last year, the number was less than 30,000 across Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria. I think today it is less than 20,000.

My view is I don't think we can go to zero in all these areas and still have intelligence collection, still have the capacity to go get terrorists, go get the guys that I am talking about in my oral testimony and that you see in my written testimony. I think we are going to need some sort of footprint, and that is the problem right now is I don't think that the talks are really aimed at what it should be, which is what is the right size of this sort of footprint overseas.

Afghanistan provides all sorts of challenges going forward. You know, as we have said, the U.S. military, you know, has had a hard time tracking al-Qaeda in Afghanistan all these years. We have had many conversations along these lines, even with larger number of forces there. I think it is going to get even more difficult if we fully depart from the country, which I think I agree with Mike Morell and I said publicly, I think it is coming.

In that vein, I would get the agreement that was signed with the Taliban on February 29, and I would look particularly at section 1, subclause F. What that clause says is that the United States, not only after it says we are leaving Afghanistan, it says the United States will not use military force or even threaten military force against Afghanistan going forward after the U.S. withdrawal.

That agreement, in effect, taken at face value, says the United States doesn't have the right to protect itself and defend American interests and Americans going forward from the emergence of counterterrorism threats in Afghanistan. It is one of the clauses that hasn't received any public scrutiny but really should. Because even if all you want is for the United States to get out of Afghanistan today and leave all the troops, nobody should pretend like we are not going to have terrorist threats emerging from that region going forward because, of course, we are.

So I think the big question, really, to my mind, is it seems that we have come to this place now where even the lower footprint, the smaller footprint is not tenable. In Africa, you have around 6,000 American service members who are basically working with the French and local partners and others to keep these insurgencies at bay and take out high-value targets.

To the Ambassador's point about, you know, building coalitions and working with partners, that is exactly right. It is what we should be doing, but unfortunately, right now, everything is about just removing American troops as opposed to finding stable alliances or stable platforms for going forward. Because the bottom line is we are going to have to reintroduce American forces in some of these areas once these threats sort-of metastasize to a point where it becomes obvious to everybody that is a threat, just like ISIS did in 2013 and 2014.

Mr. ROSE. Thank you again, Mr. Joscelyn.
Is there something else?

Mr. WALKER. No. I just yield back to you, Chairman. Thank you.
Mr. ROSE. Thank you, Mr. Walker.

Ms. Slotkin, if you would like to close us out with another question.

Ms. SLOTKIN. Sure. So just on the conversation of what our successful presence looks like abroad. You know, I am a former CIA officer, and I did 3 tours alongside the military in Iraq and worked on this issue, basically, my entire professional life. So I am a big, big believer that you have to keep pressure on these terrorist networks or else they do grow back, they do expand, they do claim territory, and then they do threaten us directly and our allies.

So I am a big believer, but I am also the representative of a lot of people who say is the juice worth the squeeze? You know, most people would say I want to know that my Government is protecting me from terrorist groups and from attacks on the homeland. Absolutely. But then when they see that the cost of the counter-ISIS campaign from 2014 to 2019 was \$765 billion, that is the entire cost of funding our entire Defense Department for 1 year. The question is, is the juice worth the squeeze? When the request that has come in this year is \$845 billion for Iraq and Syria when we have less than 7,000 forces on the ground in those two countries, I am as big a believer as anyone, but we have got to be able to look at people with a straight face and say that the juice is worth the squeeze.

So can one of you explain to me, and more importantly to our constituents, how the juice is worth the squeeze? If it is not, on these present locations, how do we get to a leaner, meaner presence that allows us to have that cost-benefit analysis that makes sense to the average person?

Mr. MORELL. So maybe I will go first, but I look forward to the comments of my colleagues. It is the question. I mean, you are at the heart of it, and as I think, there are two answers that come to mind for me, Congresswoman.

One is that I think it is incumbent upon our political leadership to include Members of Congress to make the case that the threat remains and that the threat is dangerous and that we need to protect ourselves. You know, I have a particular political philosophy. I don't know if it is widely shared, but my view is that political leaders need to lead, not follow; lead their constituents, not follow them, but that is for another debate. So I do think it is incumbent upon the President and Members of Congress to tell the American people exactly what the threats are and why it is important that we stay focused on them. So that is one.

Two is that is—the figures you cited, that is way too much money for the number of troops we are talking about. That is shocking to me that that is the number. If I were the President, I would send them back to the drawing board and have them resize that number, because it sounds outrageous to me.

But I think the more important point to me is as I would think about how to structure our ability to both spy on and then degrade these groups, I would want to do it as a coalition. So I would want to bilaterally on the intelligence side use as many partners as we

can use to get the information we need. As you know, there are partners we can count on, and there are some partners we can't, but I think we should rely on our partners as much as we can to collect the intelligence we need. Then I think we should rely on our partners as much as we can to actually action those targets and that we, the United States of America, only action targets when we absolutely have to, when there is no other choice.

So, you know, I look at some parts of the world where U.S. Special Forces have been able to train local partners to be fairly effective against the radicals who happen to live in their countries. I think that is a great model. I think we should be very thankful to the French government for what it has been able to do in Africa, in West Africa, and that should be a model, right, where we encourage our partners to actually take action that if they didn't take, we might have to take.

So I think we really have got to think hard about what does a coalition look like to do both the intelligence piece and the degradation piece, because I don't think we can justify the numbers even with a truthful and candid evaluation of the threat.

Mr. JOSCELYN. So, you know, the Defense Department budget is [inaudible] figures, and part of what I learned is that transparency is not always forthcoming and that their categories are fuzzy. So I strongly encourage Congress, of course, to continue its oversight efforts, and some effort within the Defense Department to classify portions of the budget or parts of the budget, I just don't agree with that. I think the American people need to know how much money is being spent and what it is being spent on.

Now, my understanding of this is that, you know, a lot of the wasteful spending—although I am sure there is absolutely wasteful spending on what I will call the 9/11 wars for sure in Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere. Absolutely. A lot of the wasteful spending is on these big defense platforms it may not even be necessary to use going forward. You can see this in this new book, *The Kill Chain*, by Chris Brose, who used to work for the Senate and Senator McCain, which goes into great detail. He has all sorts of detail that I didn't have which really explains how this wasted money on basically big, high-end weapons didn't really make any sense for the threat environment we are in.

You can also look at Anthony Cordesman for CSIS. He has an announcement he does of the budget, the defense budget, and he tries to break it down in as much detail as he can. What he has shown, to my satisfaction, is that, basically, the 9/11 wars became a priority part of the defense budget a long time ago. So I think, you know, he said, for example, in Afghanistan, it is still a lot of money. I am not saying there isn't waste, there is a lot of waste, but it is about \$30 billion a year now out of over \$700 billion in total budget and maybe even less than that. The projections are showing it is going to be less than that.

So, overall, I think 9/11 wars don't cost the lion's share of the defense budget, but there is still money to be trimmed there. I am sure there is still waste, absolutely. You can go through that.

On Iraq, Congresswoman, what number did you say for the Iraq number? Was that 845? How much was that, exactly?

Ms. SLOTKIN. So the fiscal year 2021 request for the Department of Defense, and I am on the Armed Services Committee, is \$845 million.

Mr. JOSCELYN. Million. OK.

Ms. SLOTKIN. Yes. Not billion.

Mr. JOSCELYN. Yes. I thought so. Yes. I was a little taken aback when I heard billion. I said, whoa, you know. No, million: \$845 million is probably about right. My understanding of it is less than a billion. I am sure there is money that could be trimmed there as well.

I think the point, to my mind, is you are asking the absolute right question. It is a question I have struggled with, and I am not going to claim to have all the right answers. I know after covering this for many years, there is a lot of wasted money. Sometimes, some places we are much more efficient. The United States is much more efficient at using a small-scale footprint than in others. The problem going forward is I don't think the people are having that right cost-benefit analysis question that you are asking right now or debate about this. I think the question is much more about just getting out of everywhere, and that is certainly what I see the President has wanted to do for quite some time. Thanks.

Mr. ROSE. OK. So with that, I do just want to thank our witnesses for their absolutely invaluable testimony, and of course, your extraordinary service. You have really dedicated your lives and your careers to this fight, and we are just extraordinarily grateful, Democrats and Republicans, for all that you have done for this country.

So the Members of the subcommittee may have additional questions for the witnesses. We ask that you respond expeditiously in writing to those questions. Without objection, the committee record shall be kept open for 10 days.

Hearing no further business, the subcommittee stands adjourned.
[Whereupon, at 12:59 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

