

**ISIS POST-CALIPHATE: THREAT IMPLICATIONS FOR
AMERICA AND THE WEST**

HEARING

BEFORE THE

**COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

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ISIS POST-CALIPHATE: THREAT IMPLICATIONS FOR AMERICA AND THE WEST

Wednesday, May 23, 2018

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY,
Washington, DC.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:47 a.m., in room HVC-210, Capitol Visitor Center, Hon. Michael T. McCaul [Chairman of the committee] presiding.

Present: Representatives McCaul, Rogers, Perry, Katko, Hurd, Ratcliffe, Gallagher, Fitzpatrick, Estes, Bacon, Lesko, Thompson, Jackson Lee, Langevin, Keating, Vela, Watson Coleman, Rice, Correa, Demings, and Barragan.

Chairman McCAUL. The Committee on Homeland Security will come to order. My apologies, I was questioning the Secretary of State that made me a little bit late to this hearing. But the committee is meeting today to examine the near-term and long-term homeland implications of the recent terrorist losses by ISIS, including the current state of ISIS in Iraq and Syria. The heightened threat posed by the foreign fighter Diaspora, the growing role of ISIS affiliates, and the significance of the virtual caliphate.

Let's take a moment to welcome also the newest Member of our committee, Mrs. Debbie Lesko, representing Arizona's Eighth Congressional District. Welcome, it is good to see you.

Mrs. LESKO. Thank you.

Chairman McCAUL. I now recognize myself for an opening statement. The terrorist attacks of 9/11 took the lives of almost 3,000 innocent people, and left our Nation in shock. In the aftermath, it was clear that serious changes need to be made to keep our homeland safe. While I believe we are safer today, terrorist threats persist. Terrorists and their followers are still killing innocent people and attempting to destroy our way of life. This has been made clear by the recent attacks against the West, London, Paris, Nice, Madrid, Manchester, Barcelona, Brussels, Berlin, and even New York have been targets of vehicle homicides, shootings, bombings, and stabbings.

They are clearly following Sheik Adnani's call to kill by whatever means necessary, wherever they are. Although many jihadists are resorting to small-scale attacks, the thwarted plot to take down an airliner in Australia last summer was a reminder that our aviation sector is still their crown jewel of targets.

I continue to be concerned about the security at last-point-of-departure airports throughout the Middle East. Many of the world's most dangerous terrorists are only one plane ride away. They will

not halt their blood-thirsty campaign to take innocent life unless they are directly challenged. Fortunately, we have had some recent success on the battlefield. Our military victory over the so-called caliphate in Iraq and Syria was a great achievement. However, there are remnants that remain in the Middle East and foreign fighters who have scattered throughout Europe and parts of Africa.

Comprehensive strategy is needed so ISIS cannot rally, regroup, and rebuild from a new location. The strategy should address root causes that breed terrorists, including a lack of economic opportunity and good governance structures. We must also keep our eye on al-Qaeda. In recent years, al-Qaeda has expanded its global presence, and now is comprised of tens of thousands of fighters across 2 dozen branches. They, too, want nothing more than a devastating attack against the West.

Mitigating the terror threat from these groups has always been one of my top priorities. At my direction, we established multiple task forces to discover ways that we can prevent terrorist entry into the United States. As a result of their work, we strengthen the Visa Waiver Program, enhanced our intelligence collection, and bolstered coordination to stop terrorist travel.

Currently, we are examining ways that special interest aliens and potential foreign fighters are exploiting illicit pathways into our country from South and Central America. Just yesterday, ICE Director Thomas Homan, confirmed to me that, "Many known terrorists," are taking this path as well.

America is facing threats from all directions. To keep our homeland safe, we need to be prepared to confront each one. So I would like to thank our witnesses for joining us. Each of you have served as, or advised as, America's top National security officials. Every Member of this committee is grateful for your service to our Nation, your time, and your expertise. I look forward to the discussion.

[The statement of Chairman McCaul follows:]

STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN MICHAEL T. MCCAUL

MAY 23, 2018

The terror attacks of 9/11 took the lives of almost 3,000 innocent people and left our Nation in shock. In the aftermath, it was clear that serious changes needed to be made to keep our homeland safe.

While I believe we are safer today, terror threats persist. Terrorists and their followers are still killing innocent people and attempting to destroy our way of life.

This has been made clear by recent attacks against the West. London, Paris, Nice, Madrid, Manchester, Barcelona, Brussels, Berlin, and even New York, have been targets of vehicular homicides, shootings, bombings, and stabbings.

They are clearly following Sheik Adnani's call to kill by whatever means necessary, wherever they are.

And although many jihadists are resorting to small-scale attacks, the thwarted plot to take down an airliner in Australia last summer was a reminder that our aviation sector is still their "crown jewel" of targets.

I am continually concerned about the security at last points of departure throughout the Middle East.

Many of the world's most dangerous terrorists are only one plane ride away.

And they will not halt their bloodthirsty campaign to take innocent life unless they are directly challenged.

Fortunately, we've had some recent success on the battlefield. Our military victory over the so-called caliphate in Iraq and Syria was a great achievement.

However, there are remnants that remain in the Middle East, and foreign fighters who have scattered throughout Europe and parts of Africa. A comprehensive strategy is needed so ISIS cannot rally, regroup, and rebuild from a new location.

This strategy should address the root causes that breed terrorists, including a lack of economic opportunity and good governance structures.

We must also keep our eye on al-Qaeda. In recent years, al-Qaeda has expanded its global presence and is now comprised of tens of thousands of fighters across two dozen branches. They too, want nothing more than a devastating attack against the West.

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America is facing threats from all directions. To keep our homeland safe, we need to be prepared to confront each one.

I would like to thank all our witnesses for joining us this morning. Each of you has served as, or advised, America's top National security officials.

Every Member of this committee is grateful for your service, your time, and your expertise.

I look forward to our discussion and to working with you to strengthen our homeland security.

Chairman MCCAUL. With that, I now recognize the Ranking Member.

Mr. THOMPSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank our witnesses for their appearance today. Today, the committee is meeting to examine a threat posed by ISIS to America and the West. While ISIS has suffered significant losses in the wake of attacks by U.S.-led coalition forces under both the prior administration and the current one, the so-called caliphate is not yet gone. Indeed, even as ISIS has lost territory, funding, and fighters, its threats to the United States and our allies persist, albeit in new forms.

As the so-called caliphate has shrunk, you and I both know ISIS has turned to the virtual space and its affiliates and followers to recruit and radicalize new members around the world. Rather than planning or directing sophisticated attacks carried out by individuals traveling from overseas, ISIS can inspire lone wolves right here at home on-line with few resources and relative little effort.

This more-dispersed asymmetrical threat will be harder for the United States and our allies to combat. It is essential for the Trump administration to ensure a careful coordinated effort among all elements of our National security apparatus, military, and intelligence assets, diplomats working with foreign partners, and homeland security officials at home. It remains to be seen whether this administration is up to the task.

As Members of the Congress and Members of the Committee on Homeland Security, our role will be to conduct close oversight of the Trump administration's effort. This is a critical juncture, as the remnants of ISIS on the ground attempts to regroup and determine the future trajectory of the organization. As we have witnessed before, these groups do not disappear, but often morph into a new entity that poses new threats.

Unfortunately, as the virtual space becomes increasingly important to ISIS, the organization's existing efforts to recruit and radicalize followers are only furthered by the Trump administration's rhetoric and policies. President Trump's own hateful words about Islam and Muslims lend credence to ISIS's message about the West. This kind of rhetoric also undermines our relationship with key partners abroad, jeopardizing essential information-sharing relationships.

At the same time, the President's comments stoke fear and division among the American people, which is exactly the goal of terrorist organizations like ISIS. If President Trump's rhetoric has been harmful in this regard, his policies have been worse. From the Muslim travel bans to the Trump administration's almost exclusive focus on Islamic groups in its counterterrorism efforts, his policies have actually made us less safe.

Today, I hope to hear from our witnesses about the future of ISIS, and how the United States can best counter its threats to the homeland, both now and in the future, while upholding our American values. I appreciate the witnesses joining us today, and look forward to your testimony. With that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

[The statement of Ranking Member Thompson follows:]

STATEMENT OF RANKING MEMBER BENNIE G. THOMPSON

MAY 23, 2018

Today, the committee is meeting to examine the threat posed by ISIS to America and the West. While ISIS has suffered significant losses in the wake of attacks by U.S.-led coalition forces under both the prior administration and the current one, the so-called caliphate is not yet gone.

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Chairman MCCAUL. Thank you. The Ranking Member yields back. Other Members are reminded, opening statements may be submitted for the record.

[The statement of Honorable Jackson Lee follows:]

STATEMENT OF HON. SHEILA JACKSON LEE

MAY 23, 2018

Chairman Mccaul and Ranking Member Thompson, I thank you both for the opportunity to receive testimony on “ISIS Post-Caliphate: Threat Implications for America and the West.”

As ISIS adapts to the changing environment and attempts to survive, we must adapt to prevent them from spreading its deadly influence throughout the region and the world.

I thank today’s witnesses for their testimony:

- The Hon. Ryan Crocker—Former Ambassador of the United States;
- Gen. Jack Keane (Ret.)—Chairman of the Board, Institute for the Study of War;
- Dr. Daveed Gartenstein-Ross—Senior Fellow, Foundation for the Defense of Democracies; and
- Dr. Joshua A. Geltzer—Former Senior Director for Counterterrorism, National Security Council (Democratic witness).

This hearing will examine the threat of Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), given its territorial losses.

The hearing will also allow for the consideration of:

1. ISIS’ current operational state,
2. The threat posed by returning foreign fighters,
3. ISIS financing methods,
4. The “virtual caliphate,” and
5. The role of ISIS affiliates.

ISIS continues to pose a threat as it continues to inspire and enable foreign fighters and Home-grown Violent Extremists to conduct attacks in the United States as well as strengthening ISIS affiliates world-wide in the wake of their territorial losses in Iraq and Syria.

President Donald Trump’s travel ban announced in January 2017 against 7 Muslim-majority nations was reportedly used by ISIS as a recruitment tool, giving the militant group a major propaganda boost.

The actions taken on the battlefield reduced the number, coordination, and ability of ISIS to retain territory, but their objectives to strike at the United States and other nations has not been eliminated.

CURRENT STATE OF ISIS

Since late 2017, U.S. officials have stated that ISIS has lost more than 90 percent of the territory it once held.

While the U.S. intelligence community assessed that ISIS will seek to maintain a robust insurgency in Iraq and Syria, experts have predicted that ISIS will also plan international attacks and encourage sympathizers to carry out attacks at home.

Moreover, ISIS’s battlefield losses will not destroy its terrorism capabilities due to its significant investment in external operations over the last 2 years.

As senior officials in the U.S. intelligence community have noted, ISIS has proven to be extremely resilient and continues to use attacks and propaganda to attract violent extremists and to protect its influence world-wide.

ISIS fighters and communication networks have not been eliminated, but rather they have been dispersed in ways that will challenge the Trump administration to continue to fight obvious high-value targets, while also identifying and countering less obvious threats, including from Home-grown Violent Extremists, returning foreign fighters, and fighters who relocate to ISIS affiliates and conflict zones other than Iraq and Syria.

RISE OF THE VIRTUAL CALIPHATE

ISIS’s territorial decline has resulted in a decrease in volume of propaganda and a messaging shift away from a narrative about building the so-called caliphate and toward inciting violence.

By November 2017, ISIS’s media operation was producing 20 materials per week, down from a high of more than 200 materials per week in 2015.

ISIS has also shifted to encrypted applications.

These tactical and messaging shifts will cause continued problems for law enforcement and intelligence services seeking to counter ISIS.

ISIS has proved capable in their on-line messaging and recruitment utilizing a “virtual” means to “real-world” end. Many have begun framing ISIS’s future in terms of a “virtual caliphate.”

FOREIGN FIGHTERS

The mobilization of foreign fighters to Syria and Iraq outnumbered all other mobilizations of jihadist conflicts during the past 40 years. At least 40,000 fighters from 120 countries traveled to Iraq and Syria to engage in warfare, estimates hold. The foreign fighter flow came to a virtual standstill, however, as ISIS began to lose territory and countries implemented better measures to prevent travel.

Authorities have expressed concern about the lack of specific numbers of returnees and unaccounted-for foreign fighters.

A *New York Times* report in February 2018 shows that thousands of ISIS foreign fighters and family members escaped the U.S. military campaign in eastern Syria to the south and west through Syrian army lines, calling into question whether the group has been largely defeated.

There are also large discrepancies in statistics collected by the United Nations from member states between the total number of foreign fighters and those recorded as having been killed, detained, returned, or relocated.

In January 2018, the United Kingdom, for instance, noted that around 50 percent of its foreign fighters remain unconfirmed.

HOME-GROWN VIOLENT EXTREMISTS (HVES)

The most immediate threat to the United States is violence carried out by Home-grown Violent Extremists (HVEs).

ISIS’s capacity to reach sympathizers around the world through its social media capability gives the group access to large numbers of HVEs.

In the United States the larger issue is the influence they be able to have over disaffected youth or the mentally ill who may be vulnerable to ISIS messaging.

The greatest threat comes from ISIS is its training material on how to plan and carry out an attack that may provide instruction to those in the United States who wish to commit mass violence.

On March 2, 2018, in the city of Austin Texas, the first of 7 bombs were detonated in what became a terrorizing series of attacks that killed Anthony Stephan House, 39, and Draylen Mason, 17.

On April 15, 2013, two homemade bombs detonated near the finish line of the annual Boston Marathon, killing 3 people and injuring several hundred others, including 16 who lost limbs.

It has been 5 years since that terrible day, but we still remember the people of Boston, who said they would not be made to fear the terror that hides its face, to attack the innocent.

An essential component of the success that local, State, and Federal law enforcement had during the investigation of the Boston Bombing was the full engagement of the public who shared valuable information with authorities, which provided important clues that led to the identification and ultimate capture of the terrorists.

Today’s hearing is important because it allows Members of the Homeland Security Committee to assess the threat that ISIS continues to pose to the United States.

Prior to September 11, 2001, the Federal Government had a wide range of law enforcement, National security, and benefits management agencies that collected information, but jealously guarded this information from other agencies.

The 9/11 Commission Report allowed an in-depth assessment of the failures that led to the horrific terrorist attacks against the United States that cost the lives of nearly 3,000 people.

I look forward to the testimony of today’s witnesses.

Thank you.

Chairman McCAUL. We are pleased to have a distinguished panel of witnesses before us here today. First is probably the—when I think of an ambassador, I think of Ryan Crocker. He is currently a diplomat-in-residence of Princeton University, on leave of absence from Texas A&M. He has served in probably more hotspots than any Ambassador I know. I had the honor to be with him overseas in many of these locations, and saw his service to his country.

It is amazing to think, sir, you served in, you know, in Lebanon when the Marines were killed in Beirut. You served in Syria when we had an ambassador in Syria. You served in Pakistan. Served in Iraq. Served in Kuwait. Then the last time, I think, I saw you overseas in Kandahar and Kabul in Afghanistan. Your service is really extraordinary as a diplomat, and I know that is why you received the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the Nation's highest civilian award, in 2009.

Second, we have General Jack Keane, he is the president of GSA Consulting, serves as chairman of the board for the Institute for the Study of War. He served as a 4-star general. Completed 37 years of public service in December 2003, culminating his appointment as acting chief of staff and vice chief of staff to the United States Army. Since 2004, General Keane conducted frequent trips to Iraq and Afghanistan for senior defense officials with multiple visits during the surge in that period in both countries. We thank you, sir, for your service as well.

The third witness is Dr. Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, a senior fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, an expert on jihadist movements. He is also the chief executive officer of Valens Global, a fellow with Google's Jigsaw, an associated fellow at the International Center for Counterterrorism, the Hague, and adjunct assistant professor at Georgetown University's security studies program. I have had the opportunity to visit with you in my office. Thank you for being here as well.

The fourth and final witness is Dr. Joshua Geltzer, who is the founding executive director of the Institute for Constitutional Advocacy and Protection, as well as visiting professor of law at Georgetown University Law Center. Dr. Geltzer served from 2015 to 2017, a senior director for counterterrorism at National Security Council, the NSC, and thank you, sir, also for being here. Your full written statements will appear in the record.

The Chair now recognizes Ambassador Crocker for an opening statement.

STATEMENT OF RYAN C. CROCKER, FORMER AMBASSADOR OF THE UNITED STATES

Mr. CROCKER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Thompson, Members of the committee. It is a privilege to be here at this very important time, a moment at which, as both you, Mr. Chairman, and Mr. Thompson noted, that Islamic State is on the verge of military defeat. They have been defeated in Iraq, and we are in a mopping-up mode now, I think, in Syria. So the hearing is very timely and is very important.

It doesn't stop with military defeat of ISIS, as you both have suggested. I have seen this movie before, in part. I was in Iraq as ambassador from 2007 to 2009, at the time of the surge, and at a time when the horrific bloodshed in that country was wound down. As the surge took effect, but especially as the political surge, if you will, took effect. The efforts to bring different Iraqi leaders together for a common cause.

So as we look at the Islamic State on down the road here, I think it is very important not to believe that because they were defeated on the field, they have gone away. Islamic State's predecessor, al-

Qaeda in Iraq, was something that General Petraeus, and later, General Odierno, as well as myself, were fully focused on. But even at the height of the surge, we knew we had not completely eliminated them. Little pockets in Mosul, little pockets up the Euphrates River Valley, and it is, of course, in the Euphrates River Valley that we are operating with our allies today to try and destroy that presence. But even then, even when we have no more military targets, we will still have an adversary. That is what al-Qaeda in Iraq showed us. They went to ground and they waited for better days. Better days for them, or course, came with the beginning of the Arab Spring, particularly in Syria.

So that is what we will see, I am ready to predict, with Islamic State. Because ultimately, Islamic State is, itself, not the problem, it is the symptom of the problem. You, Mr. Chairman, I think, got this exactly right. The lack of good governance in this region has given the space for groups such as al-Qaeda, such as Hezbollah, back in Lebanon at a time I was there, and, of course, for Islamic State. So unless these governance issues are addressed, the problem will still be there, and we will see another manifestation somewhere down the road. Maybe it will use Islamist's language, maybe it won't. We don't know. We do know that the failure of governance is going to create space unless or until those problems of governance are addressed.

I would say one thing here briefly about the United States. We are in 100-year cycle now, more or less, of momentous events related to the First World War. In the peace after the First World War, we were basically not present. The British and the French were quite ready to administer the Middle Eastern lands of the former Ottoman Empire, they did not really want to see us there. In any case, with the Senate in 1918 making it clear it was not going to ratify our membership in the League of Nations, we had no role to play.

After World War II, it was completely different. We designed the post-war order. The San Francisco conference gave us the United Nations, Bretton Woods, the International Monetary Order, and not only did we create it, we led it. We led it for almost 70 years. Beginning in 2009, we saw a shift. Should the United States play that role or should it not? Those questions were asked then, those questions are being asked today.

I would say, from my perspective as a foreign policy National security professional, while it was an imperfect order that we would be wise to work to preserve it, an order that we continue to lead because the world pretty clearly is not ready to lead or come together without us. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Crocker follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF RYAN C. CROCKER

MAY 23, 2018

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Thompson, Members of the committee, it is a privilege to be here today to discuss this critically important topic. We are close to the moment when the Islamic State will no longer hold ground in Iraq or Syria. When one considers that less than 4 years ago, an ascendant Islamic State had surged through western Iraq, taking its second-largest city Mosul in a matter of hours and had reached the gates of Baghdad, this is a stunning development. It

demonstrates the extraordinary capabilities of our military forces, exercised in an extraordinarily complicated environment. It also shows the importance of U.S. leadership. We were not in this fight alone. Seventy-five other nations have joined us, making this a truly global coalition. Islamic State threatened the world; the world responded by coming together to eliminate their so-called caliphate.

ISIS AND THE FAILURE OF GOVERNANCE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

But is this fight really over? Does Islamic State teeter on the brink of extinction? Both the Trump and Obama administrations have largely treated Islamic State as a military problem with a military solution. That is a dangerous over-simplification. Islamic State itself is not the problem. It is the symptom of a much more complex, largely political problem: A chronic failure of governance.

We are in a cycle of 100-year anniversaries that are relevant to our conversation here. WW I ended a century ago. The question of the political future of the lands of the Middle East had to be answered by the victorious Allies. The area had been a part of the Ottoman Empire for centuries. The future of this region was on the agenda for the Versailles peace talks, which concluded with the treaty of Versailles in 1919. But this was a formality. Those decisions had already been made by the British and the French, embodied in the Sykes-Picot accord of 1916 which was still secret when the Versailles talks began. Under its terms, these two countries would divide the region between them. The lines on the map that define the Middle East today were largely drawn by foreigners. As the British and French took over the mandates assigned to them, one element that was not on their minds was good governance, the building of stable institutions, respect for the rule of law, and preparations for peoples of the area to govern themselves. To project the image of independent states, the mandatory powers installed monarchies in a number of areas—Egypt, Iraq, Transjordan and by the Italians in Libya. These monarchies had no connections to the peoples over which they allegedly ruled, and certainly no interest in establishing the institutions and traditions of good governance.

Lacking legitimacy and perceived as puppets of the imperialists, these monarchies were overthrown, replaced largely by military rulers. Other “isms” were developed to replace imperialism and monarchism. In Egypt, it was Arab nationalism personified by Gamal abd-al Nasser. In Iraq, undiluted authoritarianism following the 1958 coup by Abdal Karim Qassim. Later, a Libyan military officer named Qadhafi overthrew King Idris. Other isms followed—Arab socialism (Baathism) in Iraq and Syria. Communism in South Yemen. Republicanism in Tunisia and Egypt post-Nasser. They all had one element in common: They failed to provide good governance for their people, and they all failed. This was the essence of the Arab Spring—a popular demand for better governance. But that takes time and respect for the rule of law as well as the development of institutions that provide for the common good. These are in exceedingly short supply throughout the region. In Egypt, for example, it was no surprise that the Muslim Brotherhood won the first election since it was the only political party independent of the Mubarak regime. But it was also no surprise it failed completely to provide good governance. It had no experience and found no experience of institutionalized democracy.

Now we have yet another ism, Islamism. It too has failed. Interestingly, a recently-translated trove of documents suggests that Islamic State understood the problem and was making an effort to develop the skills of governance.

So what happens next? It is impossible to predict with accuracy. However, it is a safe bet that without significant progress toward better governance in the region, another ism will arise. Perhaps it will be ISIS 2.0, just as ISIS was al-Qaeda 2.0. Perhaps it will be of a completely different nature. Whatever it is, it will not be good. To borrow from the great Irish poet W.B. Yeats, “What rough beast, its hour come around at last, slouches toward Bethlehem to be born?”

And what does it mean for our interests in the region, especially in Iraq and Syria after the military defeat of the Islamic State? As we consider these questions, we need to look at Iraq and Syria as related but distinct challenges. I will start with Iraq.

IRAQ

As you know so well, Mr. Chairman, we have been here before. I was Ambassador to Iraq during the surge, 2007–2009. As you know, the surge was built on the Awakening movement in the Sunni province of Anbar, when Iraqi tribal leaders who had stood with Islamic State’s predecessor, al-Qaeda in Iraq, turned against them with our encouragement and support. By any measure, the surge was a success. Shortly before my departure from Iraq in February 2009, I visited Ramadi, the once and future stronghold of al-Qaeda and its successor, the Islamic State. The security situ-

ation was so good that Awakening leader Ahmad Abu Risha and I spent an hour walking through the Ramadi market. This owed a great deal to the courage and sacrifice of our troopers, so brilliantly led by General Petraeus and later by General Odierno. But even at the height of the surge, there remained small pockets of al-Qaeda in Mosul and the Euphrates river valley. Why? Because elements of the Sunni Arab population in those areas feared the Shia-led government in Baghdad at least as much as they feared al-Qaeda. Those elements, including future ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, went to ground and awaited better days.

Those days came with the beginning of a civil war in Syria in March 2011 and the military and political withdrawal of the United States from Iraq, also in 2011. In our absence, Prime Minister Maliki and other Iraqi leaders reverted to a default position of zero sum thinking. When we were there in force, politically as well as militarily, we could help broker deals among Iraqis that they could not reach by themselves. For many leaders, compromise was a threat. In their world, compromise meant a concession, concessions equaled defeat and defeat meant death. Often in this country, we become impatient with leaders in countries like Iraq who do not speedily commit to the institutions of democracy. We consider that they lack political will and do not deserve our support.

The reality is more complicated. In the case of Maliki, his greatest fear was of a military coup that would return the Baathists to power. Given Iraq's history, this was not completely unreasonable. Iraq's first military coup came in 1958, and was followed by a series of others until the Baath cemented its power a decade later. When we were there in force, we constituted a security guarantee to Maliki that allowed him to make senior military appointments on the basis of ability. As Dave Petraeus can tell you, it was not easy but we could do it. After we left, Maliki's fears took over and commanders were not appointed on the basis of proven combat experience or leadership qualities. They were chosen on the basis of one quality only—loyalty. These were the commanders who fled the field as ISIL advanced.

The post-ISIS phase in Iraq is significantly different and more encouraging than that which prevailed before ISIS swept through the country. Iraqi security forces, with new commanders, performed well through a long, hard ground campaign. They took significant casualties but morale and commitment remained significantly high. The United States has reinvested in Iraq. Our advisors, air power, and enablers had a meaningful impact on the campaign, and the Iraqis know it. We have some leverage, and the opportunity to use it.

Why is this important from a homeland security perspective? Simply put, we are more secure if we are dealing with potential threats well before they reach our borders. Ultimately, it is good governance in the region that will prevent the re-emergence of terrorist organizations that target Americans, whether at home or abroad. In the interim, doing what we can to insure that the Iraqi government does not take actions that will further alienate its Sunni Arab population and give space to those who wish us harm is an imperative. If the Iraqis can get the politics right with our help, the military/terrorist threat ISIS has posed can be contained. If the politics are not right, we will be facing new security challenges in the region and at home.

Here, I would like to say a word about terrorism. Over a long career in the Middle East, I have seen a lot of it. It's part of life in the Foreign Service. I was an ambassador six times. In three of those countries, a predecessor as the American ambassador was assassinated. One of those was Frank Meloy in Lebanon. He and another Embassy officer were kidnapped and then killed in Beirut. The organization that murdered them was the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). Was that an Islamic terrorist organization? No—its communist ideology was the antithesis of any religion, including Islam. But perhaps its leader harbored secret Islamic tendencies? Its leader was George Habash, a Palestinian Christian.

I make this point as a reminder that terror is a tactic, not an ideology. When there are major unresolved political problems in a society or a country that cannot be dealt with through the political process because of a lack of institutions and the absence of rule of law, the chances increase that some in that society will use terror to pursue their agenda. Von Clausewitz was right—war, whether regular or irregular, arises from politics and to politics it must return. There are no more purely military problems any more. This includes ISIS. Its roots lie in politics, and unless those political problems are addressed, it—or something like it—will be back.

In Iraq, we have something to work with. By all accounts, Iraqi government forces have avoided retaliatory actions against the overwhelmingly Sunni civilian population. It will be important to stay politically engaged with the Government and support a stabilization process that will be political as well as economic. Revitalization of the 2008 Strategic Framework Agreement would be a good place to start. It provides a broad basis for bilateral cooperation in the economic, political, technological, and security fields. On the latter, it is vital that we continue the robust

train-and-equip mission with Iraqi security forces that we began in 2014. We must not repeat the mistake we made in 2011 of disengaging from Iraq. That created the conditions that ISIS exploited so effectively 3 years later.

Iraq has just completed its fourth National election since 2006. The process of Government formation is likely to be long and difficult. We should support principles in this process, not individuals. In so doing, we will demonstrate a sharp contrast with Iran whose direct interference is likely to anger and alienate the Iraqi people. The Iranian influence in Iraq is a challenge to some of our core interests in the development of an inclusive, capable government that can address some of the ills of bad governance that has plagued the country for many years. Our best defense is the kind of constructive engagement that will offer an alternative to the heavy-handed effort by Iran to create clients, not partners.

SYRIA

If Iraq is hard, Syria is harder. The military defeat of ISIS will not end the civil war, nor will it lead to disengagement and withdrawal by Iran and its proxies. Iran is in Syria for the long haul, as it has demonstrated virtually since the establishment of the Islamic Republic. The United States and Israel paid a terrible price in Lebanon when Iran solidified its strategic partnership with the Asad regime and both worked to establish Hizballah. It is against this history that we must determine the future of our own military presence. Do we stay or do we go? If we stay, for what purpose and at what risk? If we go, with what consequences?

The Syrian conflict is as complex as it is dangerous. An unprecedented number of international, regional, and local actors are involved. The United States and Russia. Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar. Hizballah and other Iran-supported Shia militias, al-Qaeda, the Syrian Free Army, Syrian Democratic Forces, the YPG, Ahrar al-Sham and many others, including ISIS. ISIS may be on the verge of a military defeat, but that will not eliminate them as a future force. We saw the same thing in Iraq a decade ago. In Syria as well as in Iraq, we can expect ISIS to go to ground and wait for more favorable circumstances. And in the chaos that is Syria, there will be plenty of places to hide.

I spent a number of years in Lebanon during its civil war. The constellation of actors in Lebanon mirrored those in Syria, but on a smaller and less complex scale. The hot phase of the Lebanese civil war lasted 15 years, and ended only when the Syrian army occupied the Lebanese Presidential Palace. No army is going to occupy the Peoples Palace in Damascus to end that conflict.

THE UNITED STATES

Mr. Chairman, this is a moment to consider the role of the United States in the region and the world. Again, I will take you on a brief, 100-year journey. At Versailles in 1919 and after, the United States played no significant role in the Middle East or the world. The 1918 elections returned an isolationist Congress that would not ratify our membership in the League of Nations, Wilson was ill and the British and French did not want the United States challenging their influence.

What the world effectively got was a two-decade truce in the middle of one horrific world war. America played a very different role after World War II. The post-war international order was largely created by the United States. The United Nations was born in the San Francisco conference. The international financial order was created at Bretton Woods. We led on the establishment of NATO. We faced down the Soviet Union in Berlin, in Iran, in Turkey and in Greece. We launched the Marshall Plan. We rebuilt the economies of allies and adversaries alike. In short, we not only created the new order, we led it. There was broad agreement among Republican and Democratic administrations that the United States could and should lead. There were setbacks, certainly. But almost seven decades of U.S. leadership brought broad prosperity and averted another massive ground war.

But beginning in 2009, we called into question our own leadership role. The slogan that we can't do everything became a byword for not doing much of anything. America first came to be translated as America alone.

Mr. Chairman, American leadership made the world a safer place. I know the American people are tired of wars. I get that. I spent 7 years of my life post-9/11 in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Pakistan. I was in Iraq and Afghanistan beginning in 2001. I returned to all three countries as the American ambassador. So I get it about being tired. But there are worse things.

Mr. Chairman, in my judgment American leadership is vital to homeland security. I hope very much we will reassert that role. The Middle East and the world will not run by themselves.

Chairman MCCAUL. Thank you, Ambassador. The Chair recognizes General Keane for his opening statement.

STATEMENT OF GENERAL JOHN M. "JACK" KEANE, (RET.-U.S. ARMY), CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD, INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF WAR

General KEANE. Chairman McCaul, Ranking Member Thompson, distinguished Members of the committee, thank you for inviting me. I am honored to be here today with my esteemed colleagues, particularly my friend here, Ambassador Crocker, America's most accomplished Middle East envoy. In the summer of 2012, the Islamic State of Iraq, then an al-Qaeda affiliate under the command of al-Baghdadi was operating in the shadows around Baghdad, when he made the most critical decision in his reign as a jihadist leader. He seized the opportunity to take advantage of the stalemated Syrian civil war. Al-Baghdadi correctly assumed that the civil war participants, largely fighting in western Syria, would be so preoccupied that he could occupy Sunni-Arab territory in northeastern Syria with little resistance, and establish a bona-fide safe haven with several hundred fighters, mostly Iraqis.

Al-Baghdadi grew the organization to 30,000 fighters in 18 months, invading Iraq in January 2014, by seizing Fallujah. In June, they captured Mosul, gained world-wide attention by forcing the collapse of the Iraqi Army. The exponential growth of ISIS in less than 2 years, using the internet exclusively to recruit with sophisticated cinematography and messaging was a remarkable historic achievement.

With the eventual defeat of ISIS some 3 years later in terms of retaking territory that was lost in 2017 in Iraq—and also in Iraq and Syria, the ISIS caliphate was decimated, losing 90 percent of its territory, and reduced to several thousand fighters in Iraq and Syria combined. ISIS is badly damaged, but it is not defeated, as the Chairman and Ranking Member have mentioned.

It is still capable of insurgency, and its ability to inspire others to engage terrorist attacks. Indeed, ISIS is still a thriving global terrorist organization. The virtual ISIS caliphate maintains the connectivity with ISIS affiliate organizations world-wide. ISIS uses it also to help maintain its external terrorist organization, and to direct or support network cells and individuals. But mostly, to inspire others to kill and maim their own people.

The virtual caliphate, after considerable amount of effort, has finally been damaged, mainly because of physical destruction due to combat operations, but also due to offensive cyber operations that the United States has conducted. Further, the U.S. Government has enlisted the assistance of social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, to identify potential terrorist accounts and remove violent content from their platforms.

In protecting the homeland, the best defense since 9/11 is still a good offense, the United States and coalition partners deployed to fight terrorists in their breeding grounds overseas. U.S. law enforcement agencies at home have remained vigilant in thwarting terrorist plots, as demonstrated by the fact that there still has not been a major terrorist attack since 9/11.

However, despite law enforcement's best efforts, preventing inspired assailants from carrying out terrorist attacks remains a relentless challenge, as we experienced three attacks since 2015 in San Bernardino, Orlando, and New York. It is virtually impossible to monitor everyone of interest, which means we need the assistance of an informed population to report suspicious behavior.

In looking ahead, despite the success to date over ISIS in Iraq and Syria, the remaining ISIS fighters and leadership should be driven out of southeastern Syria along the Euphrates River Valley. The Iraqi security forces assisted by the United States and coalition partners must maintain its vigilance in Iraq to prevent a resurgence of ISIS. Key is the formation of a government in Iraq after this recent election that enfranchises the Sunnis and the Kurds, and does not make the mistake of previous Iraq governments that disenfranchised the Sunnis.

Political unity is vital to prevent the rise of ISIS again or another radical Islamic group. It appears likely that ISIS will resort to traditional terrorist tactics and attempt to exert control in weakly-governed space across Africa, the Middle East, South and Southeast Asia. They will always be seeking sanctuary or safe haven, and when they do, it must be rapidly destroyed.

Europe, more vulnerable than us, could be the next battlefield as ISIS activates and motivates followers to carry out attacks and prove it is still a threat to the West.

In conclusion, there is an understandable desire to declare victory over ISIS after retaking the lost territory in Iraq and Syria and go home. In my view, that is a serious strategic blunder. The lesson learned from the premature withdrawal from Iraq in 2011 before political stability was achieved is, we got ISIS as a result.

Similarly, we refused to assist the newly-elected moderate government in Libya after Qadhafi was deposed in 2011, and we got Benghazi in 2012, a failed state shortly thereafter. When we stay post-conflict to ensure political stability, as in Germany, Italy, and Japan, post-World War II, in South Korea, post-Korean War, and in Bosnia and Herzegovina for almost 9 years, significant and lasting success is achieved.

The United States, our allies, and partners know we are in a generational struggle in confronting the ISIS threat and, in general, radical Islam where the key to long-term success is defeating their ideology and certainly their propaganda, as well as addressing the conditions that help spread it, such as political and social injustice, lack of economic opportunity, corruption and governance instability.

Thank you. I look forward your to questions.

[The prepared statement of General Keane follows:]

STATEMENT OF JOHN M. "JACK" KEANE

23 MAY 2018

Chairman McCaul, Ranking Member Thompson, distinguished Members of the committee, thank you for inviting me to testify today. Am honored to be here with my esteemed colleagues, particularly Ambassador Crocker, America's most accomplished Middle East envoy, who I had the pleasure of visiting on many occasions when he was Ambassador to Iraq and Afghanistan during the 9/11 wars, while I was conducting assessments for General Petraeus.

In the summer of 2012 the Islamic State of Iraq, an al-Qaeda affiliate organization, under the command of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi was operating in the shadows and territory in the belt around Baghdad when al-Baghdadi made the most important strategic decision in his reign as a jihadist leader; he seized the opportunity to take advantage of the stalemated Syrian civil war, after Iran and Russia significantly assisted the Assad regime in halting the momentum of the Syrian opposition forces. As such, al-Baghdadi correctly assumed that the civil war participants, largely fighting in western Syria, would be so preoccupied that al-Baghdadi could occupy Sunni Arab lands in northeastern Syria with little to no resistance and establish a bona fide safe haven with several hundred Iraqi fighters.

THE CALIPHATE IN IRAQ AND SYRIA

Unprecedented in the history of terrorist organizations, al-Baghdadi grew the organization to 30 thousand fighters in 18 months, invading Iraq in January 2014 and seizing Fallujah. By June they were 40 thousand strong and captured Mosul, the second-largest city in Iraq, which gained world-wide attention by forcing the collapse of an Iraqi Army whose previous competent leaders were purged by PM Maliki as he pocketed the funds intended to train the Army for the past 3 years. The exponential growth of ISIS in less than 2 years using the internet almost exclusively to recruit with sophisticated cinematography and messaging was an outstanding achievement and quite unprecedented. Many of the fighters came from throughout the region, also Afghanistan, with approximately 5,000 alone from western Europe and about 250 from the United States. In June 2014, al-Baghdadi, announced from the Grand Mosque in Mosul the establishment of the Islamic State, the so-called ISIS caliphate.

Regrettably, it took the United States 9 months to respond to PM Maliki's emergency request in January for air power support when it was finally delivered 2 months after the fall of Mosul in August 2014.

With the final defeat of ISIS in Mosul and Raqqa in 2017, the ISIS caliphate was decimated. ISIS has been badly damaged but not defeated in its insurgency capacity and its ability to inspire others to engage in terrorist attacks elsewhere. Indeed ISIS is a thriving global terrorist organization. At its peak ISIS governed 7.7 million people and controlled roughly 40 thousand square miles of land essentially forming a proto-state as large as the United Kingdom, and earned \$80 million per month by the end of 2015. Mostly via illegal oil sales, while also relying on antiquities sales, the extortion and taxation of local populations, and kidnappings for ransom.

Since the coalition military operations against ISIS in Iraq and Syria it has lost 90 percent of the territory it once controlled to include its former capital Raqqa as well as Mosul. An estimated 3–5,000 fighters remain in the area, down significantly from the estimated 40–60,000 fighters from over 100 countries, while it still earns roughly \$4 million per month from oil sales and black market antiquities trading.

There is potential for an ISIS resurgence in Syria and Iraq if the United States pulls its forces out prematurely. What the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) would lose most significantly is the assistance of competent American ground and coalition forces and the devastating use of American air power, while forfeiting the political and diplomatic support that the U.S. military presence brings to the table.

VIRTUAL CALIPHATE

The virtual caliphate maintains the connectivity with ISIS affiliate organizations world-wide which indeed have expanded since the loss of the physical caliphate. Using the virtual caliphate ISIS maintains its external terrorist organization (ETO) to, at times, direct or support networks, cells, and individuals, but, mostly, to inspire others to kill and maim their own people. While it has taken longer than decimating the physical caliphate, the virtual caliphate has been severely damaged mostly because of physical destruction but also because of sophisticated cyber operations to reduce capacity. This was due to the combined efforts of the National Security Agency (NSA) and the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC). The United States works alongside foreign partners to strengthen their counter-messaging strategies. Further, the U.S. Government has enlisted the assistance of social media companies such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube to identify potential terrorist accounts and remove violent content from their platforms. To date Twitter has reportedly disabled nearly 1 million handles publishing pro-ISIS content. Despite that positive effort the social media companies must do more.

Reducing the virtual caliphate begins to break the bond that ISIS has so successfully maintained with its world-wide affiliate organizations and its ETO which was also the basis for past recruiting successes.

AFFILIATE ORGANIZATIONS WORLD-WIDE

With the loss of the ISIS caliphate in Syria and Iraq, the network has shifted its resources to expand the influence and lethality of its affiliates in Northern Africa, the Sahel, The Sinai, Afghanistan, and Southeast Asia.

- Libya—Despite losing its presence in Derna and Sirte, ISIS has maintained a strong presence in Libya and remains a potent regional threat having regrouped and established training centers and operational headquarters in the central and southern parts of the country. ISIS maintains a force of 4–6,000 fighters in Libya.
- Sahel region in Africa—Willingly ISIS roams this area and attacks local and out of region forces as it demonstrated in the October 2017 ambush of a joint U.S./Nigerian patrol along the Mali-Niger border, resulting in the deaths of 4 U.S. troops and 5 Nigerian soldiers. Given the unwarranted publicity, the United States admitted it had 800 U.S. troops in Niger and that the U.S. military was operating a key drone base in the area.
- Boko Haram—In northeastern Africa pledged allegiance to ISIS in March 2015 and rapidly became the most infamous and violent terrorist group to join the ISIS network. Boko Haram is currently divided into 2 factions and continues to strike government officials, troops, and civilians from northeastern Africa despite a multinational Joint Task Force of 8,700 troops. Boko Haram is listed as the world's deadliest terror organization.
- Sinai—The ISIS Sinai branch has been active in Egypt's Sinai Peninsula since 2011. Over the last few years Sinai Province has frequently attacked Egyptian military and security forces deployed in the Sinai. It has also conducted several attacks in Cairo and bombings of Coptic churches in Alexandria and Tanta.
- Afghanistan—ISIS in Afghanistan also called ISIS Khorasan Province (ISKP) operates in the east in Nangarhar province and in the north in Kunar and Jowzjan provinces combined. ISIS has carved out a dangerous foothold in Afghanistan which has potential to expand into a bonafide safe haven. ISIS conducts an increasing number of attacks in Kabul against civilian and military targets.
- Philippines—ISIS managed to overrun the city of Marawi located on the southern Philippine island of Mindanao. The Philippine forces encountered more than expected resistance, ISIS forces aligned with other pro-ISIS brigade groups. After 5 months and over a thousand deaths, Philippine forces finally defeated the pro-ISIS militias with U.S. assistance. ISIS is planning to regroup.

PROTECTING THE HOMELAND

The best defense since 9/11 has been a good offense, U.S. and coalition partners deployed to fight terrorists in their breeding grounds overseas. U.S. law enforcement agencies have remained vigilant in thwarting terrorist plots against the U.S. homeland as demonstrated by the fact that there has not been a major terrorist attack since 9/11. However, despite law enforcement's best efforts, preventing highly motivated and inspired assailants from carrying out terrorist acts remains a relentless challenge. The December 2015 San Bernardino shooting, the June 2016 Orlando nightclub attack and the October 2017 deadly car ramming in New York are all stark reminders of the difficulty in containing the domestic terrorist threat. It's virtually impossible to monitor everyone who you would want to. With 1,000-plus investigations in the United States spreading across the breadth of the Nation and 23,000 persons of interest in the United Kingdom as reported by the director of MI-5, it is inevitable some people are going to get through. Our agencies hope to minimize and reduce those possibilities and turn the odds in our favor. This is the price of a free society. It's also an allocation of resources issue. Do we want to deplete everything else we are doing with Government funding and throw it all at this problem, when in fact more people are killed in opioid overdose and in automobile accidents than are killed in terrorist attacks? We must make tradeoffs and with people operating alone who are not talking to people or linked to a terrorist group, it is very difficult to find them.

LOOKING AHEAD

Despite the tactical victories over ISIS in Iraq and Syria, the remaining ISIS fighters and leadership should be driven out of southeastern Syria along the Euphrates River valley. And the Iraqi security forces assisted by U.S. and coalition partners must maintain its vigilance in Iraq to prevent a resurgence of ISIS. Key is the formation of a government after this recent election that enfranchises the Sunnis and the Kurds and does not make the mistake of previous Iraq governments

that disenfranchised the Sunnis. Political unity is vital to prevent the rise of ISIS again or another radical Islamist group.

It appears likely that ISIS will resort to more traditional terrorist tactics and attempt to exert control in weakly governed space across Africa, the Middle East, South and Southeast Asia. It will always be seeking sanctuary or safe haven and when they do, it must be destroyed as rapidly as possible.

Europe, much more vulnerable than the United States, could be the next battle-front as ISIS activates cells to carry out attacks and prove it's still a threat to the West.

In conclusion, there is a tendency and an understandable desire to declare victory over ISIS after retaking the lost territory in Iraq and Syria and go home both physically and psychologically; a serious strategic blunder. The lesson learned from the premature withdrawal from Iraq in 2011 before political stability was achieved is, we got ISIS. Similarly we refused to assist the newly-elected moderate government in Libya after Qaddafi was deposed in 2011 and we got Benghazi in 2012 and a failed state shortly thereafter. When we stay post-conflict to insure political stability such as in Germany, Italy, and Japan post-WWII, in South Korea post-Korean War and in Bosnia Herzegovina for almost 9 years, significant and lasting success is achieved.

The United States, our allies and partners know we are in a generational struggle in confronting the ISIS threat where the key to long-term success is defeating their ideology and propaganda as well as addressing the conditions that help spread it, such as political and social injustice, lack of economic opportunity, corruption, and instability.

Thank you and I look forward to your questions.

Chairman McCAUL. Thank you, General. The Chair recognizes Dr. Gartenstein-Ross.

STATEMENT OF DAVEED GARTENSTEIN-ROSS, SENIOR FELLOW, FOUNDATION FOR DEFENSE OF DEMOCRACIES

Mr. GARTENSTEIN-ROSS. Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Thompson, and distinguished Members, it is an honor to be here to discuss this important topic at this vital time. We have agreement in all of the opening statements thus far that the territorial collapse of ISIS does not, of course, mean the end of the threat that the organization poses.

What I want to focus on in this statement is the role of technology, because when we look at the rising threat level against Western States, including the United States, technological developments and geopolitics have been the two key factors over the past several years. We have seen three key developments that largely blindsided us.

The first of these was just a few years after the 2011 Arab Spring Revolution in which we saw social media mobilization bring very idealistic protesters out to the streets. We then saw social media mobilization used for much more nefarious purposes, as ISIS was able to draw through both physical networks, but also virtual networks, a record number of foreign fighters to the Syria and Iraq theater.

Just a few years after that, we saw a major iteration in the way terrorism occurs, something which I called the virtual planner model. This is terrorist groups taking advantage of the intersection of both social media accessibility to operatives throughout the world, and also the boom in end-to-end encryption, which allows them to talk to more people, and to do so in secure ways.

In this manner, terrorist networks half a world away can perform all the functions that physical networks used to perform. Scouting for operatives, recruiting them, helping to select the target and timing of attacks, even providing various kinds of technical

assistance, bomb-making assistance and the like. This has been a major development, which has had a transformative impact on terrorism.

In recent years and months, we have also seen the wide-spread adoption of consumer drone technology work to the advantage of militant organizations. We have, of course, seen that in Iraq and Syria. I can tell you for a fact that the weaponization of drones has already made its way to Africa. I was recently in Tunisia and got to talk to the members of the African Union Peacekeeping Force, who have seen Shabaab in Somalia pick up drone technology.

In all of these cases, we see a clear pattern, which is something is widely adopted by consumers, and then it is taken by terrorists and adapted in a way that can serve their purposes. I think that we need to stay apprised of this, because when you look at the homeland security implications of the continued threat posed by ISIS, their adoption of technology and use of consumer-oriented technology is going to be absolutely critical and something we need to stay ahead of.

Now, in terms of what we can do. One thing that we need to maintain at a Government level is dialog with leading tech firms, that is an area where over the course of the past 3 to 4 years, especially with ISIS's exploitation of social media technology, there has been much more liaison between the U.S. Government and tech firms in such a way that they are now somewhat speaking the same language.

Second, getting out ahead of technological uses that can be exploited by terrorists is important. This is something that we have had a hard time doing, in part, because often we are blindsided by these adoptions of technology. One thing I highlight, both in my written statement, and also instead of my recent popular press writing, is that artificial intelligence is likely to be an area in which terrorists are able to exploit the more wide-spread adoption of artificial intelligence at a consumer level.

Finally, in terms of what we can do. I think that a lot will require international cooperation. When you see, for example, AI researchers arguing for international covenants to prevent automated weapons from being adopted wide-spread. Whether you agree with them or not on the issue, one of the reasons why they are doing this is because they believe that proliferation of automated weapon systems will help rogue states, and will help terrorist organizations.

I think about what is needed at an international level is very important, as well as harnessing the potential of current technological development, including for such things as counter network warfare. For us, technology is not a panacea, it is simply a tool. I think that Ambassador Crocker puts his finger on the right question. Are we going to lead?

It is not just a matter of our will to lead, but all the technological developments I put my finger on have really changed the way that so many spheres do business, including especially in the entrepreneurial space. But it has that impact in government and politics sphere. Within my organizations, we often think of violent non-state actors as the equivalent of start-up firms in the political organizing space.

These organization tend to be very good organizationally at what we are not good at. So asking the question not just about our will, but also our organizational design is, in my view, vital. Thank you. [The prepared statement of Dr. Gartenstein-Ross follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF DAVEED GARTENSTEIN-ROSS

MAY 23, 2018

Chairman McCaul, Ranking Member Thompson, and distinguished Members of the committee, it is an honor to appear before you today to testify about the threat implications as the militant group known as the Islamic State (hereafter ISIS) moves into the post-caliphate phase of its existence.

The collapse of ISIS's "caliphate" is indeed an important milestone for the region, and will reduce both the threat of ISIS's external operations (that is, terrorist plots abroad) and the extraordinary appeal that ISIS displayed in electrifying jihadist sympathizers and inspiring lone-actor attacks across the globe. When it controlled significant territory spanning Syria and Iraq, ISIS brutalized the population under its yoke, openly boasted of instituting sex slavery, adopted genocidal policies toward the Yazidis and other religious minorities, and planned large-scale terrorist attacks across the world. The fact that the group no longer controls its own proto-state is a positive turn of events that is hard to understate. But recent geopolitical developments have provided ISIS with breathing room. And even if ISIS's decline were continuing apace, ISIS is not the whole of the jihadist movement, which remains in a relatively strong position. ISIS's territorial decline should be understood in the context of a larger movement that remains dynamic, adaptable, and dangerous, and that has grown significantly in strength since the 2011 "Arab Spring" revolutions. Further, technological advances and geopolitical developments have helped to enhance the global jihadist movement in definable ways.

My testimony addresses five critical points that I believe can inform how we should understand and address the threat implications of jihadism after the fall of ISIS's caliphate:

1. Recent geopolitical developments have given ISIS important breathing room.
2. ISIS's ability to preserve or reestablish its "virtual planner" model of external operations will have a significant impact on the threat that the group will pose against the United States and other Western countries.
3. The global jihadist movement's overall trajectory is one of growth, not of decline.
4. Al-Qaeda has exploited the heightened counterterrorism focus on ISIS in recent years.
5. Tackling jihadists' exploitation of consumer-oriented technological advances will be critical to mitigating the threat in the future.

RECENT GEOPOLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS HAVE SLOWED ISIS'S DECLINE

ISIS began to experience a precipitous territorial collapse in 2017. When a militant group that had previously held territory experiences sudden decline, as ISIS did, the speed of its decline is often determinative of the extent to which it is able to preserve its most critical functions. ISIS will scramble to preserve its key leaders, as much of its forces as possible, its capacity for external operations, its monetary assets, and records necessary to allow the group to reestablish a viable network, all while trying to keep critical information away from adversaries trying to kill or capture its members.

ISIS's rapid collapse continued until recent months, but the group's losses are now being reversed to some extent. One demonstration of this fact is the recent admission of Col. Ryan Dillon, the spokesman for the American-led coalition against ISIS, to the *New York Times*. Col. Dillon said that "he and senior coalition commanders are now saying the coalition and its Syrian militia partners have reclaimed more than 90 percent of the territory the Islamic State captured in Iraq and Syria in 2014, instead of the 98 percent figure officials have been using for weeks."¹ In other words, the relevant metric concerning ISIS's territorial loss appears to be moving in the wrong direction, at least for now.

The key reason why ISIS has experienced recent gains is the major offensive that Turkey launched in northern Syria against the Kurdish People's Protection Units

¹ See: Eric Schmitt, "American Warplanes Shift Tactics to Target Last ISIS Pockets in Eastern Syria," *The New York Times*, April 24, 2018. (<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/24/world/middleeast/american-warplanes-isis-syria.html>)

(YPG) earlier this year.² The Turkish assault diverted the highly effective YPG from its advance into ISIS's territory, and has no doubt given ISIS more breathing room. In turn, this gives ISIS a better chance of preserving some of the vital functions enumerated above, including leadership, forces, external operations capabilities, and finances.

The Turkish offensive into Afrin is not the only recent offensive against Kurdish actors that has helped militants to regroup. The Iraqi government's military offensive against the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) following its independence referendum in October 2017 depleted the KRG's effectiveness in eradicating ISIS and other militant groups in northern Iraq. Outgunned by Baghdad, the Kurdish Peshmerga were quickly overpowered and were forced to withdraw from, among other places, the strategic Hamrin mountains in Iraq's northeast Diyala region. The Hamrin traditionally served as a stronghold for al-Qaeda in Iraq and other anti-government groups. Prior to the Baghdad-directed assault, KRG forces controlled the mountains, limiting their use as a militant safe haven. It is no coincidence that we have seen a significant uptick in militant activity in that area following Iraq's offensive: After the KRG's withdrawal, Iraqi government forces declined to set up a presence across the mountains, leaving a vacuum of authority.³

In addition to the recent breathing space that ISIS and other militant groups have gained, militants are likely to capitalize on festering Sunni grievances in Iraq. In the campaign to roll back ISIS gains in Iraq, many Sunnis (Arab or Turkmen) were forcibly displaced by the Iranian-backed Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), just as a large number of Kurds have been displaced by Shiite Arabs since the PMF helped Iraq's government to suppress the KRG last year. Tens of thousands of young men with military training (ISIS or Peshmerga) now stand in limbo, and could potentially be spurred to action by a charismatic and well-resourced patron. The electoral success of Muqtada al-Sadr's Sairoon Alliance, as well as the significant influence that Iran wields inside Iraq, could further fuel the attractiveness of Sunni militancy.

ISIS'S ABILITY TO PRESERVE ITS VIRTUAL PLANNER MODEL IS CRITICAL

It is extremely likely that ISIS's ability to launch complex attacks abroad, such as the November 2015 Paris attacks, will decline significantly in the short to medium term. However, in recent years we have seen ISIS pioneer a new model of external operations, dubbed the "virtual planner" model, which combines easy accessibility to operatives via social media with advances in end-to-end encryption.⁴ While ISIS's territorial losses will significantly constrain its capacity to launch attacks that rely on traditional safe havens, it is more likely that the militant group will be able to preserve or reestablish its virtual planner attack model.

The virtual planner model allows on-line operatives to provide the same offerings that were once the domain of physical networks, including recruitment, coordinating the target and timing of attacks, and even providing technical assistance on topics like bomb-making. In this manner, ISIS has engineered a process by which the group's operatives can directly guide lone attackers from thousands of miles away. The virtual planner model is a highly significant development, as it has helped transform lone attackers relying on the internet from the bungling wannabes of a decade ago into something much more dangerous.⁵ The operatives who are recruited and coached by virtual planners have been seamlessly incorporated into jihadist groups' global strategy in a way that "lone wolves" never were before.

In many ways, ISIS's virtual planner model is an outgrowth of, and improvement upon, the radical preacher Anwar al-Awlaki's approach. Awlaki, an official and

²For an informative snapshot of the Turkish offensive, see: Martin Chulov, "Syria's New Exiles: Kurds Flee Afrin After Turkish Assault," *The Guardian* (London), March 18, 2018. (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/mar/18/syrias-new-exiles-kurds-fee-afrin-after-turkish-assault>)

³The most significant militant group operating in this area is the White Banners (Al-Rayat al-Bayda), which is accurately referred to as "shadowy" in press coverage. See discussion in: Borzou Daragahi, "After the Black Flag of ISIS, Iraq Now Faces the White Flags," *BuzzFeed*, April, 1, 2018. (https://www.buzzfeed.com/borzoudaragahi/isis-iraq-white-flags-syria-new-name?utm_term=.maLzwqZq0#.htO9ZMAM6); Jeff Schogol, "A 'Post-ISIS Insurgency' is Gaining Steam in Northern Iraq, Analysts Say," *Task & Purpose*, April 24, 2018. (<https://taskandpurpose.com/post-isis-insurgency-is-gaining-steam-in-iraq/>)

⁴See discussion in: Daveed Gartenstein-Ross and Madeleine Blackman, "ISIL's Virtual Planners: A Critical Terrorist Innovation," *War on the Rocks*, January 4, 2017. (<https://warontherocks.com/2017/01/isils-virtual-planners-a-critical-terrorist-innovation/>)

⁵For a good synopsis of the ineffectiveness of DIY terrorism a decade ago, see: Emily Hunt, "Virtual Incompetence," *The Weekly Standard*, August 17, 2006. (<http://www.weeklystandard.com/virtual-incompetence/article/13724>)

propagandist for al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), became notorious for using the internet to call for lone-wolf attacks. He hoped that lone-wolf attackers would complement, rather than replace, al-Qaeda's centrally-directed plots—some of which, such as Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab's Christmas Day 2009 underwear bomb plot, Awlaki himself helped to plan.⁶ Through his public statements, particularly his infamous YouTube sermons, Awlaki mobilized scores of people, even after a U.S. airstrike took Awlaki's life in 2011. Recent plots influenced (at least in part) by Awlaki include the September 2016 bombings in New York and New Jersey, the 2016 shooting at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, the 2015 San Bernardino attack, and the 2013 Boston Marathon bombings. Yet despite his skill as an inspirational figure, all Awlaki could do was put out the call and hope someone would take up arms in response. He was a product of the age of mass communication and global interconnectivity, but even Awlaki's superb oratorical skills could not match the feelings of "remote intimacy" with people halfway across the world that can be fostered through social media, or the volume and two-way nature of communications that medium allows.⁷ As one example of the strength of social media-based recruitment activities, Indian intelligence officials believe that ISIS's South Asia virtual planner, Yusuf al-Hindi, was in touch with over 800 Indians through Facebook and WhatsApp.⁸ While ISIS's various propagandists seemingly lacked the same kind of raw magnetism that Awlaki had for English speakers, they had the advantage of exploiting a medium that is simply more engrossing due to the constant contact it allows.

This continuous contact seemingly allowed a higher recruitment rate than the essentially one-way communication of video postings. By building an "intimate" relationship with the potential attacker, the virtual planner provides encouragement and validation, addressing the individual's doubts and hesitations. Virtual planners can replicate the same social pressures that exist in in-person cells. As Peter Weinberger of the University of Maryland's National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism put it, "People will get in these chat rooms and they will feel like they have a relationship with someone. That's where the peer-to-peer contact is drawing them in."⁹

In some instances, virtual planners have been in contact with attackers until the very moment of the attack, supporting and prodding these individuals into action even when they grew hesitant. In a July 2016 suicide bombing outside a concert in Ansbach, Germany, attacker Mohammad Daleel told the virtual planner with whom he was communicating that he found the security measures outside the concert daunting. The *Long War Journal* reports their ensuing conversation:

"The unnamed operative told Daleel . . . to look for an appropriate place to put his bomb and then try to 'disappear into the crowd.' The jihadist egged Daleel on, saying the asylum-seeker should 'break through police cordons,' run away and 'do it.' 'Pray for me,' Daleel wrote at one point. 'You do not know what is happening with me right now,' Daleel typed, in an apparent moment of doubt. 'Forget the festival and go over to the restaurant,' the handler responded. 'Hey man, what is going on with you? Even if just two people were killed, I would do it. Trust in Allah and walk straight up to the restaurant.'¹⁰

And that is what Daleel did. He walked into a wine bar and blew himself up, injuring 15 people. Had Daleel not been communicating with a virtual planner up until the moment of attack, his cold feet very likely would have prevented him from completing his terrorist mission.

⁶See: Peter Finn, "Al-Awlaki Directed Christmas 'Underwear Bomber' Plot, Justice Department Memo Says," *The Washington Post*, February 10, 2012. (https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/al-awlaki-directed-christmas-underwear-bomber-plot-justice-department-memo-says/2012/02/10/gIQArdOt4Q_story.html?utm_term=.805626d41421)

⁷See discussion in: J.M. Berger, "The Metronome of Apocalyptic Time: Social Media as Carrier Wave for Millenarian Contagion," *Perspectives on Terrorism*, 2015. (<http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/444/html>)

⁸"Yusuf al-Hindi: The Mysterious Islamic State Recruiter in India Who's Got Intel Agencies Worried," *First Post*, July 19, 2016. (<https://www.firstpost.com/world/yusuf-al-hindi-mysterious-islamic-state-recruiter-in-india-whos-got-intel-agencies-worried-2902536.html>)

⁹Quoted in: Stacy Meichtry and Sam Schechner, "How Islamic State Weaponized the Chat App to Direct Attacks on the West," *The Wall Street Journal*, October 20, 2016. (<https://www.wsj.com/articles/how-islamic-state-weaponized-the-chat-app-to-direct-attacks-on-the-west-1476955802>)

¹⁰Thomas Joscelyn, "Terror Plots in Germany, France Were 'Remote-Controlled' by Islamic State Operatives," FDD's *Long War Journal*, September 24, 2016. (<https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2016/09/terror-plots-in-germany-france-were-remote-controlled-by-islamic-state-operatives.php>)

In the past, virtual planners were integrated into ISIS's geographical command structure. ISIS's virtual planners were assigned areas of responsibility according to their nationality and linguistic skills, and tasked with actively recruiting and handling attackers from those areas. The decision to assign virtual planners to geographic areas with which they were familiar allowed them to reach back to contacts they still had in the domestic militant scene.

So will ISIS's virtual planner model survive into its post-caliphate phase? On the one hand, the main equipment that virtual planners require is an internet connection and good encryption, which militates in favor of the model surviving. On the other hand, there are at least a couple of countervailing considerations that will create complications for ISIS's efforts to make this model continue with the same tempo and the same deadly results. First, it is no coincidence that ISIS's most prominent virtual planners were based in its caliphate territory. While an internet connection and encryption are theoretically all that a virtual planner requires, the fact that virtual planners in ISIS's territory were not forced to constantly run from authorities helped them to focus on their external operations tasks. Further, the virtual planners were in close proximity to all the expertise they needed to help their operatives do their jobs, if those operatives needed technical assistance. The geographic dispersion of ISIS's virtual planners may diminish the model's effectiveness.

Second, the available evidence suggests that ISIS's model is losing a considerable amount, though not all, of its luster. ISIS recruitment and plots are in decline, a drop that is particularly noticeable in the United States. This fact is consistent with predictions I made in previous testimony before the U.S. Senate, when I described ISIS's appeal as a "winner's message."¹¹ As ISIS's ability to portray itself as a winning organization declines, so too does its ability to recruit and inspire attacks. Thus, ISIS's plummeting fortunes may also hamper the virtual planner model. However, it is worth noting that new high-profile attacks or a major territorial advance—such as the advance that overran the city of Marawi in the Philippines for several months last year—could breathe new life into virtual planner efforts.

The continuation of the virtual planner model, including the tempo, success, and lethality of virtual planner attacks, will be a leading indicator of the continuing external operations threat that ISIS poses in its post-caliphate manifestation.

GLOBAL JIHADISM'S GROWTH

As noted at the beginning of this testimony, the global jihadist movement's overall trajectory is one of growth, not of decline. One factor that for years has been highly relevant to analysts' evaluation of the threats posed by jihadist groups has been the presence of ungoverned spaces that they can use as safe havens. Such spaces allow jihadist organizations to establish key organizational functions, train recruits, communicate, and plan terrorist plots or insurgent military operations relatively unimpeded. Ungoverned spaces that jihadist groups can exploit continue to play a larger role in the geopolitical picture than they did at the time of the Arab Spring revolutions, and this remains true even after ISIS's territorial collapse.

While ISIS is the group that observers associate most closely with the holding of territory, several different jihadist groups now hold or contest territory, even in Syria. In Libya, the government could never reestablish its writ after the fall of Muammar Qaddafi's regime in 2011. Jihadists have predictably exploited this situation. ISIS succeeded in capturing and holding the city of Sirte for months, while other jihadist groups have experienced even more sustained success. The Abu Salim Martyrs Brigade (ASMB) and the Mujahedin Shura Council (MSC), an umbrella organization in which ASMB plays a leading role, have been major players in the eastern coastal city of Derna, frequently exercising control over it. Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb officially endorsed the MSC in July 2015.¹² Jihadists also have significant operating space in Yemen despite the United States escalating its kinetic campaign against al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. As the *New York Times* recently reported, "the threat of a terrorist attack—with the most commonly feared

¹¹ Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, "Jihad 2.0: Social Media in the Next Evolution of Terrorist Recruitment," Testimony before the Senate Committee on Homeland Security & Governmental Affairs, May 7, 2015. (http://www.defenddemocracy.org/content/uploads/documents/Gartenstein_Ross_HSGAC_Testimony_Jihad2.0.pdf)

¹² See discussion in: Thomas Joscelyn, "Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb Backs Jihadists Fighting Islamic State in Derna, Libya," FDD's *Long War Journal*, July 9, 2015. (<https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2015/07/al-qaeda-in-the-islamic-maghreb-backs-jihadists-fighting-islamic-state-in-derna-libya.php>)

target a commercial airliner—emanating from the chaotic, ungoverned spaces of Yemen remains high on the government’s list of terrorism concerns.”¹³

Both Mali and Somalia face burgeoning jihadist-led insurgencies. In Somalia, African Union forces have already begun to reduce their numbers, bolstering the jihadist group al-Shabaab’s hopes that it could again become the dominant military force in southern Somalia. In the place where the “global war on terror” began—Afghanistan/Pakistan—not only has the Taliban been gaining ground, but available evidence, including the discovery of a 30-square-mile al-Qaeda training facility near Kandahar, suggests that the Taliban has not severed its ties to al-Qaeda.¹⁴ ISIS has also established a foothold in Afghanistan, where it has been responsible for a string of mass-casualty terrorist attacks.¹⁵ And although it does not fit the mold of other safe havens, which are typically made possible by ungoverned spaces, Turkey merits a mention. In recent years, U.S. officials have openly expressed alarm about Turkey’s growing willingness to shelter violent jihadists, including those connected to al-Qaeda.¹⁶

In addition to ungoverned spaces and safe havens, jihadism has experienced growth in areas where it had previously been marginalized. Prior to the outbreak of the Arab Spring, analysts held that Egypt’s Hosni Mubarak had defeated the country’s militant Islamic groups after they overplayed their hand in the 1997 Luxor massacre.¹⁷ Today, jihadism has powerfully reemerged, and there are more frequent attacks than ever before by militant groups like ISIS’s Wilayat Sinai, including the devastating November 2017 attack on a Sufi mosque in northern Sinai that claimed over 300 lives.¹⁸ In countries like Tunisia and Jordan, jihadism has moved from an afterthought to a first-order strategic concern. Meanwhile, there is a visible jihadist resurgence from South to Southeast Asia, most dramatically underscored last year by the months-long capture of the Philippine city of Marawi by a regional ISIS affiliate.

As jihadist groups are growing stronger, states face a growing number of challenges. Populations are burgeoning while ecological challenges and resource constraints are growing increasingly burdensome. Some ecological challenges amplify one another: Climate change makes food scarcity and water shortages more acute, which in turn can contribute to more environmental degradation, such as deforestation, as hungry populations scour for sustenance. Many economies cannot keep up with the expectations of their growing populations, while multiple states are saddled by unsustainable debt, leaving them with fewer resources to navigate the extraordinary challenges they confront.

The overall direction of the global jihadist movement is thus one of growth, while the states that the movement seeks to topple face growing challenges.

AL-QAEDA HAS EXPLOITED THE CT FOCUS ON ISIS

For years, while international efforts focused on ISIS, al-Qaeda flew relatively below the radar, building its support base in countries like Syria and Yemen, establishing safe havens, destabilizing enemy states, and preparing for a post-ISIS future.¹⁹

¹³ Eric Schmitt and Saeed al-Batati, “The U.S. Has Pummeled Al Qaeda in Yemen. But the Threat is Barely Dented,” *The New York Times*, December 30, 2017. (<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/30/world/middleeast/yemen-al-qaeda-us-terrorism.html>)

¹⁴ See: Dan Lamothe, “Probably the Largest al-Qaeda Training Camp Ever Destroyed in Afghanistan,” *The Washington Post*, October 30, 2015. (https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/checkpoint/wp/2015/10/30/probably-the-largest-al-qaeda-training-camp-ever-destroyed-in-afghanistan/?utm_term=.afd665dd3af8)

¹⁵ See discussion in, for example: Krishnadev Calamur, “ISIS in Afghanistan is Like a Balloon that Won’t Pop,” *The Atlantic*, December 28, 2017. (<https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/12/afghanistan-isis/549311/>)

¹⁶ Joby Warrick, “Double Game? Even as it Battles ISIS, Turkey Gives Other Extremists Shelter,” *The Washington Post*, July 10, 2016. (https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/double-game-even-as-it-battles-isis-turkey-gives-other-extremists-shelter/2016/07/10/8d6ce040-4053-11e6-a66f-aa6c1883b6b1_story.html?utm_term=.93214ed047f5)

¹⁷ See discussion in: Hassanein Tawfik Ibrahim, “The Rise and Fall of Militant Islamic Groups in Egypt,” *Violent Non-State Actors in World Politics*, Ed. Klejda Mulaj (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

¹⁸ Declan Walsh and Nour Youssef, “Militants Kill 305 at Sufi Mosque in Egypt’s Deadliest Terrorist Attack,” *The New York Times*, November 24, 2017.

¹⁹ The arguments in this section are adapted from a longer piece that I co-authored. For a more in-depth explanation of how al-Qaeda has been able to exploit ISIS’s rise, see: Daveed Gartenstein-Ross and Nathaniel Barr, “How al-Qaeda Survived the Islamic State Challenge,” *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology*, March 1, 2017. (<https://www.hudson.org/research/12788-how-al-qaeda-survived-the-islamic-state-challenge>)

Even before ISIS's rise, al-Qaeda had adopted a strategy for growth in the MENA region that entailed minimizing the amount of attention the group attracted. Al-Qaeda's strategists saw the 2011 Arab Spring revolutions as "a great historical event," to quote bin Laden's only public statement on the uprisings.²⁰ Al-Qaeda's strategists assessed the uprisings as significant in part because they were a "historical opportunity" for the salafi jihadist movement, as senior al-Qaeda official Atiyah Abd al-Rahman put it in a February 2011 statement.²¹ Al-Qaeda strategists calculated that the political turmoil and instability of the post-revolutionary environment would play to the group's strengths. Further, dozens to hundreds of veteran jihadists were released from prison during and after the region's revolutions, giving al-Qaeda an immediate infusion of experienced manpower.²²

Al-Qaeda also concluded that political dynamics in post-revolutionary countries had created a fertile environment for the group to expand its support base, and to introduce new populations to its theology and ideology. Post-revolutionary governments sought to distinguish themselves from their authoritarian predecessors by lifting restrictions on religious expression. Al-Qaeda saw this as an opportunity, as it allowed the group to publicly disseminate its salafi jihadist views to the general public in post-revolutionary states without fear of an immediate crackdown. As Hamid bin Abdallah al-Ali, a Kuwait-based jihadist commentator, remarked: "The Islamic project [will be] the greatest beneficiary from the environment of freedom."²³ Al-Qaeda strategists directed supporters in Tunisia, Egypt, and other post-revolutionary countries to engage in dawa (evangelism), and to "spring into action and initiate or increase their preaching, education, reformation and revitalization in light of the freedom and opportunities now available in this post revolution era."²⁴

This is where the group's emphasis on minimizing the attention that it attracted came into play. Al-Qaeda calculated that use of its own moniker could alienate potential supporters and invite negative attention from Western counterterrorism actors. Al-Qaeda thus established or supported groups with ambiguous names, including Ansar al-Sharia in Tunisia and Libya, to mask its presence and spearhead its public campaign in new places. Thus, the group's political operatives focused on dawa: Preaching, providing social services, and gaining the support of local populations. These political efforts were designed in part to lay the groundwork for an eventual military confrontation with the state. Al-Qaeda's emphasis on dawa and community outreach allowed it to amass a considerable following in Libya and Tunisia. A 2012 conference in Tunisia hosted by Ansar al-Sharia, for example, drew between 3,000 and 10,000 participants.²⁵ In this way, al-Qaeda came to maintain a presence in almost every country that experienced significant turmoil during the Arab uprisings.

After this initial stage of growth, ISIS's emergence as a jihadist competitor presented al-Qaeda with a challenge unlike any other the group had encountered. Among other challenges, ISIS's rapid ascent threatened to disrupt al-Qaeda's deliberate growth model, and oust al-Qaeda from its position of supremacy over the jihadist movement. ISIS's strategy was diametrically opposed to al-Qaeda's. While al-Qaeda often grew through clandestine means, ISIS stole the spotlight at every opportunity. ISIS built a robust propaganda apparatus suited for the digital age, pumping out a constant stream of videos, photos, and statements advertising its vic-

²⁰ Osama bin Laden, "Ila Ummati al-Muslima," *Al-Sahab (Al-Qaeda)*, May 19, 2011.

²¹ Atiyah Abd al-Rahman, "The People's Revolt . . . The Fall of Corrupt Arab Regimes . . . The Demolition of the Idol of Stability . . . and the New Beginning," distributed by the Global Islamic Media Front, February 16, 2011.

²² See contemporaneous discussion in: Daveed Gartenstein-Ross and Aaron Zelin, "How the Arab Spring's Prisoner Releases Have Helped the Jihadi Cause," *The Atlantic*, October 11, 2012. (<http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/10/how-the-arab-springs-prisoner-releases-have-helped-the-jihadi-cause/263469/>); Hani al-Siba'i, in particular, chronicled these prisoner releases as they were occurring in the midst of the regional upheaval. See: Hani al-Siba'i, "The Release of Prisoners After Nearly Twenty Years of Injustice," *Ansar Dawlat al-Iraq al-Islamiyah*, February 23, 2011; Hani al-Siba'i, "The Release of a New Batch After Long Years Behind Bars," *Al-Jahafal*, February 27, 2011; Hani al-Siba'i, "Urgent: The Release of a New Batch of Those Charged with Military Verdicts," *Ansar Dawlat al-Iraq al-Islamiyah*, March 4, 2011; Al-Maqrizi Center for Historical Studies, "Names of the Released Detainees from the al-Aqrah, al-Istiqbal, al-Wadi, and Burj al-Arab Prisons," *Shumukh al-Islam Network*, March 18, 2011.

²³ Hamid bin Abdallah al-Ali, "The Joy Lies in the Harvest of the Two Revolutions," posted on al-Ali's official website, February 15, 2011.

²⁴ Atiyah Abd al-Rahman, "The People's Revolt."

²⁵ Daveed Gartenstein-Ross and Bridget Moreng, "An Escalation in Tunisia: How the State Went to War with Ansar al-Sharia," *War on the Rocks*, February 24, 2014. (<http://warontherocks.com/2014/02/an-escalation-in-tunisia-how-the-state-went-to-war-with-ansar-al-sharia/>)

ories that were widely disseminated by its social media legions. With this brash approach, ISIS openly wooed al-Qaeda's affiliates, attempting to absorb its parent's global network.

It was widely assumed at the time that the only way al-Qaeda could remain influential was by replicating ISIS's conspicuous model—for example, by carrying out spectacular terrorist attacks to reassert the group's relevance.²⁶ But rather than trying to replicate ISIS's model, al-Qaeda took the opposite approach. Al-Qaeda reduced its public profile, downplayed its successes rather than publicizing them, and embedded further within local populations. In this way, al-Qaeda presented itself to the world as a more palatable alternative to its bloodthirsty rival.

The interactions al-Qaeda leaders had with the media provide a valuable lens through which to understand the group's strategy for benefiting from ISIS's rise. In a discussion with an Al-Jazeera documentarian in early 2015, Abu Sulayman al-Muhajir, a high-ranking Nusra Front religious official who hails from Australia, accused ISIS of "delegitimizing" other Sunni Muslim groups.²⁷ Muhajir contrasted ISIS with the al-Qaeda-affiliated Nusra Front, which he portrayed as trying to "restore the right of the Muslim people to choose their leaders" in Syria. Further, in June 2015, the *Guardian* published an extended interview with Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi and Abu Qatada, two of al-Qaeda's most senior religious figures, that revealed another remarkable aspect of al-Qaeda's strategy. Rather than trying to convince the audience of al-Qaeda's strength or continued relevance, they instead concentrated on fueling the illusion that ISIS had already destroyed al-Qaeda. Maqdisi claimed that al-Qaeda's organizational structure had "collapsed," while Qatada alleged that al-Qaeda emir Ayman al-Zawahiri had become "isolated."²⁸

Consistent with these media themes, when al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) seized control of the Yemeni port city of Mukalla, the group appointed a local council, known as the Hadhrami Domestic Council, to govern the city. Initially AQAP adopted a gradualist, rather lenient approach to the implementation of Sharia law (though it eventually began cracking down more heavily on Sharia violations).²⁹ In this way, AQAP tried to win over local Yemenis.

Ultimately, al-Qaeda was able to make some gains based on its response to ISIS's rise. While ISIS horrified the world and alienated Sunni Muslims with its excessive violence and brutality, al-Qaeda appealed to local populations and other armed factions by casting itself as a less extreme, more tolerable, and more effective alternative to ISIS. At the same time, al-Qaeda avoided advertising its victories, and resisted the temptation to engage in a bloody battle for supremacy with ISIS.

TACKLING JIHADISTS' EXPLOITATION OF CONSUMER-ORIENTED TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCES

Turning from the present threat to what we may face in the future, anticipating and mitigating jihadists' ability to leverage technological advances is critical. Technology has historically had an ambiguous impact on sub-state violence. On the one hand, states can leverage new advances, including for surveillance purposes and gathering information from local populations.³⁰ On the other hand, militant groups can capitalize on these same platforms. But many key recent advances appear to, on the whole, favor jihadists. This is likely because the world has witnessed breakthroughs across so many spheres—including social media, encrypted end-to-end communication, and consumer drone technology—that exploiting new advances has seemingly proven easier for those who would use these technologies for the more straightforward task of destruction than for those who want to use them to protect.

An early post-Arab Spring indication of jihadists' ability to leverage technological advances was the manner in which these groups drove a record number of foreign

²⁶ See: Clint Watts, "Al Qaeda Loses Touch," *Foreign Affairs*, February 4, 2015. (<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/middle-east/2015-02-04/al-qaeda-loses-touch>)

²⁷ The Al-Jazeera documentary featuring al-Muhajir can be found at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OD_A3CHzvJQ.

²⁸ Shiv Malik, Mustafa Khalili, Spencer Ackerman, and Ali Younis, "How Isis Crippled Al-Qaida," *The Guardian* (UK), June 10, 2015. (<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jun/10/how-isis-crippled-al-qaeda>)

²⁹ Ayesha Amr, "How al Qaeda Rules in Yemen," *Foreign Affairs*, October 28, 2015. (<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/yemen/2015-10-28/how-al-qaeda-rules-yemen>)

³⁰ One of the most important studies on this issue, by political scientists Jacob Shapiro and Nils Weidmann, used micro-level data from Iraq to compare trends in cellphone network penetration with insurgent violence. The trends in declining violence that Shapiro and Weidmann found suggested "that cellphone coverage reduces insurgent violence largely because it enhances voluntary information flow from noncombatants to counterinsurgents by reducing the risks of informing." Jacob N. Shapiro and Nils B. Weidmann, "Is the Phone Mightier Than the Sword?: Cellphones and Insurgent Violence in Iraq," *International Organization*, March 2015, page 271.

fighters to the Syria-Iraq theater. ISIS, in particular, combined a deft exploitation of social media's potential with breakthroughs in do-it-yourself video production techniques to craft slick and effective propaganda.³¹ Suspensions of pro-ISIS accounts by service providers later reduced, but did not eliminate, the returns that ISIS could expect from social media.³² As I explained earlier in this testimony, ISIS's exploitation of social media would ultimately lend itself to the highly effective virtual planner model.

There are also technological advances that jihadist groups have not yet employed in Western countries, but that they have already begun using in Iraq and Syria. In January 2017, researchers from West Point's Combating Terrorism Center and Harvard University's Belfer Center published an article examining documents that the Iraqi military had captured that shed light on ISIS's program for developing and enhancing its unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) capabilities.³³ They found that ISIS had "a formal, institutionalized, and resourced drone unit as early as 2015," and that the group already planned to use UAVs in an offensive capacity. And ISIS did indeed use UAVs for military purposes. *BuzzFeed's* Mike Giglio did some valuable embedded reporting from Iraq during the campaign to push ISIS from its territorial stronghold. In a report published in June 2017, he graphically described ISIS's use of UAVs against Iraqi Counter-Terrorism Force (ICTF) fighters with whom he was embedded:

"ISIS drones swarm overhead as the battalion's convoy pushes into the outskirts of western Mosul the next morning. One after another they drop grenades, wreaking havoc as soldiers fire their weapons wildly into the sky. From one of the Humvees, I watch as the battalion's portly cook makes his lunch rounds in an armored truck, driving up and down the convoy to deliver Styrofoam boxes of food. The drones track him, dropping grenades as soldiers gather to collect the boxes. They are remotely piloted by militants who weave in and out of civilian neighborhoods on motorbikes to take cover from airstrikes. ISIS also uses the video feeds on the drones to coordinate mortars and car bombs. On the front lines, its fighters are standing their ground, and soldiers at the head of the convoy can hear them shouting, 'Allahu Akbar.'"³⁴

In January of this year, Russian forces in Syria destroyed a swarm of 13 improvised UAVs as they approached the Khmeimim air base and Tartus naval facility to carry out an attack. Though no Russian forces were killed, this fact should not cause undue complacency: As militant groups innovate, their early efforts often seem to be failures, but instead are sometimes better understood as steps in the learning process. Moreover, the Russian investigation of the UAVs revealed their impressive range. The UAVs were "launched from a site more than 50 kilometres (31 miles) distant from their targets," and had a 62-mile attacking range.³⁵

The militant uses I have outlined of social media, encryption, and drones illustrate a key pattern: As a consumer technology becomes widely available, terrorists will look for ways to adapt it. Looking to the future, artificial intelligence (AI) will almost certainly end up fitting into this pattern. Like drones, AI will become more widely available in commercial markets at reduced costs, and individuals will be able to modify and repurpose it.³⁶ AI already enjoys diverse applications, from prod-

³¹See discussion in: J.M. Berger and Jonathon Morgan, *The ISIS Twitter Census: Defining and Describing the Population of ISIS Supporters on Twitter* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 2015).

³²J.M. Berger and Heather Perez, *The Islamic State's Diminishing Returns on Twitter: How Suspensions Are Limiting the Social Networks of English-Speaking ISIS Supporters* (Washington, DC: George Washington University, 2016). Since the publication of this study, it has become even more difficult for ISIS and some other jihadist groups to exploit mainstream social media platforms, but their migration to alternative platforms has escalated.

³³Don Rassler, Muhammad al-Ubaydi, and Vera Mironovo, "The Islamic State's Drone Documents: Management, Acquisitions, and DIY Tradecraft," *CTC Sentinel*, January 31, 2017. (<https://ctc.usma.edu/posts/ctc-perspectives-the-islamic-states-drone-documents-management-acquisitions-and-diy-tradecraft>)

³⁴Mike Giglio, "Inside the Fight for Mosul," *BuzzFeed*, June 3, 2017. (https://www.buzzfeed.com/mikegiglio/on-the-front-lines-of-the-fight-with-isis?utm_term=.derRjnBnX#-gy94lZxZ2)

³⁵Peter Dockrill, "First-Ever Drone Swarm Attack Has Struck Russian Military Bases, Sources Claim," *Science Alert*, January 11, 2018. (<http://www.sciencealert.com/swarm-home-made-drones-strike-military-base-first-attack-kind-russia-uavs>)

³⁶Stuart Russell, Daniel Dewey, and Max Tegmark, "Research Priorities for Robust and Beneficial Artificial Intelligence," *AI Magazine*, Winter 2015. (https://futureoflife.org/data/documents/research_priorities.pdf?x70892)

ucts like Apple's Siri, to voice-to-text, to Facebook's counter-extremism detection systems.³⁷

So how might terrorists use AI? Perhaps they will start with social-network mapping. ISIS's early battlefield victories were enabled, in part, by ex-Baathist intelligence operatives who mapped a city's key players and power brokers, monitored their pattern of life, and then helped ISIS to arrest or kill them. Similarly, when North African ISIS operatives attacked the Tunisian town of Ben Gardane in March 2016, the available evidence—including the efficient way they killed key security officials—suggested that the militants had similarly worked to learn the human terrain in advance.³⁸ Will social networks built using AI capabilities reduce the intelligence burden on militant groups and make it easier for them to conquer towns and cities? What of the next generation of terror drones? Will they use AI-enabled swarming to become more powerful and deadlier? Will terrorists use self-driving vehicles for their next car bombs and ramming attacks?

How about assassinations? Max Tegmark's book *Life 3.0* notes the concern of UC Berkeley computer scientist Stuart Russell, who worries that the biggest winners from an AI arms race would be "small rogue states and non-state actors such as terrorists" who can access these weapons through the black market.³⁹ Tegmark writes that after they are "mass-produced, small AI-powered killer drones are likely to cost little more than a smartphone." Would-be assassins could simply "upload their target's photo and address into the killer drone: it can then fly to the destination, identify and eliminate the person, and self-destruct to ensure that nobody knows who was responsible."

Thinking beyond trigger-pulling, artificial intelligence could boost a wide range of violent non-state actors' criminal activities, including extortion and kidnapping, through the automation of social engineering attacks.⁴⁰ The militant recruiters of the near-future may boost their on-line radicalization efforts with chatbots, which played a "small but strategic role" in shaping the Brexit vote.⁴¹

The 9/11 Commission's report famously devoted an entire section to discussing how the 9/11 attacks' success in part represented a failure in imagination by authorities.⁴² A failure in imagination as AI, and emergent technologies, become cheaper and more widely available could potentially be even costlier.

CONCLUSION

As I have explained, ISIS's territorial decline does in fact make us safer. Yet despite ISIS's decline, the global jihadist movement is not receding, but rather growing, while the states that the movement seeks to topple experience mounting challenges. As I have outlined, the continuity of ISIS's virtual planner model will be a leading-edge indicator of the threat that the organization poses in the short to medium term to the American homeland and other Western states. Meanwhile, al-Qaeda remains robust, and managed to in many ways turn ISIS's meteoric ascent into a strategic opportunity.

But as challenging as the current environment is, the rapid improvement and diffusion of a range of consumer technologies will likely allow various terrorist groups to pose a greater threat in the future. That is why I closed this testimony by emphasizing how these groups will attempt to exploit emerging technologies. Although jihadists currently seem to be getting more out of new technologies than do states, the advantages bestowed by new technologies can be understood as a pendulum, and states may be able to gain the upper hand in the future. In the interim, we should brace ourselves to deal with greater terrorist challenges related to these groups' adoption of new technologies.

Thank you again for inviting me to testify today. I look forward to answering your questions.

³⁷ "Transcript of Mark Zuckerberg's Senate Hearing," *The Washington Post*, April 10, 2018. (https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-switch/wp/2018/04/10/transcript-of-mark-zuckerbergs-senate-hearing/?utm_term=.d7f4a1d66685&noredirect=on)

³⁸ Farah Samti and Declan Walsh, "Tunisian Clash Spreads Fear that Libyan War is Spilling Over," *The New York Times*, March 7, 2016. (<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/08/world/africa/attack-tunisia-libya-border.html>)

³⁹ Max Tegmark, *Life 3.0: Being Human in the Age of Artificial Intelligence*, Kindle ed. (New York: Knopf, 2017), loc. 2142 of 6579.

⁴⁰ John Markoff, "As Artificial Intelligence Evolves, So Does Its Criminal Potential," *The New York Times*, October 23, 2016. (<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/24/technology/artificial-intelligence-evolves-with-its-criminal-potential.html>)

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, *The 9/11 Commission Report* (2004), pages 339–48.

Chairman McCAUL. Thank you, Doctor. I would like to mention, this committee will be—I will be introducing an unmanned aerial system bill that I hope to mark up out of this committee, and thank you for mentioning technology.

Dr. Geltzer is recognized.

STATEMENT OF JOSHUA A. GELTZER, FORMER SENIOR DIRECTOR FOR COUNTERTERRORISM, NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

Mr. GELTZER. Chairman McCaul, Ranking Member Thompson, distinguished Members, thank you for the opportunity to appear before this committee. It is an honor to do so, especially alongside such distinguished witnesses. ISIS's so-called caliphate in Iraq and Syria is shriveling, but it is not gone. The threat posed by ISIS persists and is evolving into new forms as ISIS adapts to the loss of its core territorial safe haven.

I want to focus for now on three particular causes for concern about the threat posed by ISIS today. Its continuing hold on territory; its persistent foothold on the internet to recruit and radicalize followers; and its potential turn to novel forms of cyberterrorism.

Regrettably, elements of the Trump administration's approach to all three aspects of today's ISIS threat appear to be aggravating that threat rather than minimizing it.

The encouraging fact that we are even considering what threat ISIS will pose post-caliphate is a testament to both the Obama and Trump administration's relentless execution of the counter-ISIS campaign in Iraq and Syria. But the last mile of defeating a terrorist group can be the hardest one. That is a lesson, as others have acknowledged already, that the United States learned all too well from the remnants of ISIS's predecessor, al-Qaeda in Iraq.

Today, thousands of ISIS fighters appear to be enjoying a worrisome opportunity to regroup, partly because the United States has been unable to keep in the fight against ISIS our key counterterrorism partner on the ground, the Syrian Kurds. That setback reflects the Trump administration's inability to manage a delicate diplomatic balance between the Kurds and the Turkish government. So long as the Kurds remain occupied with defending themselves against Turkey, rather than pursuing ISIS, the group is likely to retain territorial safe haven from which to plot against us, and will continue to lay claim to a purported caliphate, the rallying cry for ISIS's continued recruitment efforts via the internet.

That points toward the second aspect of ISIS's persistent threat: The group's use of social media, file upload sites, and other modern communications platforms to radicalize and mobilize followers world-wide. ISIS's on-line messages has multiple themes, and if battlefield losses force the group to shift away from messages emphasizing the holding of territory, the group can pivot toward its claim to victimhood.

Unfortunately, ISIS's internet-enabled message has resonated even here in the United States with individuals such as Omar Mateen in Orlando, and Sayfullo Saipov in New York. With territorial holdings dwindling, ISIS's virtual foothold may increase in importance to the group. That is particularly concerning in light of

aggravating factors for radicalization of the Trump administration's own making.

Donald Trump, as a Presidential candidate and now as President, has spoken about Islam and Muslims in ways that validate ISIS's attempt to portray the United States as waging war on a religion and its people. Moreover, President Trump has pursued policies that further alienate key communities whose cooperation is vital to identifying those who might be vulnerable to ISIS's appeal, and to intervening before such individuals turn to violence.

Those policies include imposing a travel ban that bears little relation to any real threats, but offends key communities and foreign partners alike. Those policies also include withdrawing previously awarded grants to organizations dedicated to addressing white supremacists' brand of violent extremism, giving the distinct impression that the Trump administration is interested in countering terrorism only when it is carried out by groups purporting to act in the name of Islam.

Thus far, radicalization has been ISIS's primary use of the internet. But that may change as ISIS loses physical territory and looks to new forms of cyberterrorism. Such efforts would build on earlier ISIS cyber activity, such as the fast and public release of personally identifiable information about U.S. service members. In the years since, malicious cyber activity has dramatically increased with powerful hacking tools more readily available to non-state actors such as ISIS. Here, too, there is cause for concern that the Trump administration is not appropriately tackling the challenge.

The top position overseeing cyber policy at the White House is vacant, and the next most senior cyber position was recently eliminated. If ISIS turns to new types of cyber operations to regain momentum and inflict harm, this lack of leadership to provide strategic guidance and interagency coordination may prove a serious vulnerability.

The crumbling of ISIS's caliphate in Iraq and Syria is a major positive development for U.S. National security, but it is not the end of the threat posed by ISIS. With some physical territories still under its control, a virtual foothold on the internet still in place, and the potential to turn to novel forms of cyberterrorism, ISIS represents a continuing danger to Americans at home and abroad. All of this would be challenging enough, but the challenge is compounded by aggravating factors of the Trump administration's own making.

I am grateful for the opportunity to be here, and I look forward to the committee's questions.

[The prepared statement of Dr. Geltzer follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF JOSHUA A. GELTZER

MAY 23, 2018

Chairman McCaul, Ranking Member Thompson, and Members of the committee, thank you for this opportunity to address the persistent threat posed by ISIS even as its physical safe haven in Iraq and Syria shrinks and the implications of this persistent threat for the United States and the West.

ISIS's purported caliphate in Iraq and Syria is shriveling, but it is not gone. That, in itself, poses a continuing threat to the United States, one worsened by the current administration's inability to keep our key partner in the fight against ISIS. Moreover, even as ISIS faces increasing pressure in physical space, it retains a sig-

nificant foothold in virtual space, and will utilize the global following that it has built through the internet to continue to reach into the United States to recruit and radicalize followers. That threat is, unfortunately, also aggravated by factors of our own current leadership's making, with both rhetoric and policies that are alienating key communities. Finally, ISIS could turn to new forms of attacks against American targets, including novel types of cyber operations, against which the United States appears to be lagging in its preparation.

ISIS'S CONTINUING HOLD ON TERRITORY IN SYRIA

That ISIS has been dislodged from almost all of the territory that it once held in Iraq and Syria is a tremendous accomplishment for which both the Obama and Trump administrations deserve major credit. From the work of our military on the ground and in the skies to target ISIS fighters, to the work of our diplomats to build and maintain an unprecedented coalition of partners, to the work of our intelligence community to track and locate key ISIS figures, to the work of our law enforcement and homeland security professionals to constrain the flow of Americans to the battlefield as foreign fighters, the progress achieved in the counter-ISIS campaign reflects the remarkable capability and dedication of America's National security officials.

But, as I have noted elsewhere, "the last mile of defeating a terrorist group can be the hardest one, as the United States learned all too well from the lingering remnants of ISIS's predecessor, al-Qaeda in Iraq."¹ And, with respect to ISIS today, thousands of fighters appear to be enjoying a worrisome opportunity to regroup. That is in significant part because the United States has lost its key counterterrorism partner on the ground in Syria, the Syrian Kurds, a major setback that reflects the current administration's inability to manage a delicate diplomatic balance between them and the Turkish government. Since the earliest days of the counter-ISIS campaign, Washington has had to address both Turkish fears and Syrian Kurdish ambitions so as to retain, on the one hand, a key counter-ISIS and NATO partner in Turkey and, on the other hand, a vital counterterrorism ground force in the Syrian Kurds. In recent months, this delicate but essential arrangement has fallen apart, with the Turks bombing Kurds in the northern Syrian city of Afrin and, in response, fellow Kurds turning away from their pursuit of ISIS into the Euphrates River Valley to defend their brethren against the Turks. All told, and as I have explained at greater length elsewhere, "the Trump administration's inability to continue managing the tensions between Turkey and the Syrian Kurds is providing the Islamic State with the time and space to regroup and pose a resurgent threat to the United States and the rest of the world."²

While one recent report suggests that a small number of those partner forces might be returning to the counter-ISIS fight, most appear still to have abandoned it, leaving the counter-ISIS campaign "effectively ground to a halt."³ That is a dangerous development for at least two reasons. First, it provides the remaining thousands of ISIS fighters with the type of safe haven that enables ISIS to plot attacks and rebuild networks into the West. That means ISIS can continue to use that space to hatch plots against us, as well as the safe havens outside Iraq and Syria that ISIS has built and even appears to be expanding, especially in parts of Africa and Southeast Asia.⁴ Second, it allows ISIS to continue to lay claim to a purported physical caliphate—the rallying cry for ISIS's continuing virtual presence intended to recruit and radicalize followers through the internet. That means ISIS can continue to inspire attacks wherever its message resonates with vulnerable individuals, including here in the United States—a broader challenge to which I now turn.

ISIS'S PERSISTENT VIRTUAL PRESENCE

As I have described in more detail elsewhere, while ISIS's "claim to a physical caliphate helped [ISIS] to grab attention and gain adherents since its 2014 surge,

¹Joshua A. Geltzer, "The Perils of a Post-ISIS Middle East," *The Atlantic*, December 27, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/12/middle-east-isis-syria-kurds-iran-iraq-turkey-trump/549227/>.

²Joshua A. Geltzer, "When Diplomacy Disappears," *Foreign Policy*, April 18, 2018, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2018/04/18/when-diplomacy-disappears-counterterrorism-isis-syria-turkey-kurds-ypp-pkk-erdogan-trump/>.

³Eric Schmitt, "American Warplanes Shift Tactics to Target Last ISIS Pockets in Eastern Syria," *The New York Times*, April 24, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/24/world/middleeast/american-warplanes-isis-syria.html>.

⁴Yaroslav Trofimov, "Faraway ISIS Branches Grow as 'Caliphate' Fades in Syria and Iraq," *The Wall Street Journal*, May 17, 2018, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/faraway-isis-branches-grow-as-caliphate-fades-in-syria-and-iraq-1526558401>.

that message gained swift global traction because of the group's sophisticated use of social media, file-upload sites, and other modern communications platforms to radicalize and mobilize followers world-wide."⁵ The crumbling of the physical caliphate will undercut the credibility of key aspects of ISIS's on-line appeal, but it will not undermine the group's messaging entirely, nor will it dislodge the virtual foothold that ISIS has built for itself on-line, even as leading technology companies have taken some meaningful steps to address ISIS's persistent presence on their platforms.

That is because ISIS has a multi-faceted recruitment message; and, as battlefield losses force it to shift away from on-line messaging emphasizing the holding of territory and the attempt to govern such territory, ISIS can fall back on other themes to rally the faithful and appeal to those potentially vulnerable to the group's outreach. Charlie Winter has identified six such themes: Brutality, mercy, victimhood, war, belonging, and utopianism.⁶ If emphasizing the theme of war appears to ISIS less promising for a period of time, at least in relation to battlefield trends in Iraq and Syria, then the theme of, for example, victimhood remains available. In this sense, ISIS's message is essentially non-falsifiable: Victories and progress vindicate aspects of that message, but setbacks and suffering vindicate other aspects.

The most important of ISIS's themes, especially for luring new recruits, may well be that of belonging. Alongside the group's proclaiming of a purported caliphate and holding of a wide swath of territory, its most distinctive accomplishment has been cultivating a sense of belonging among audience members around the world—even many who have never joined the group on the battlefield and do not intend to do so. Through visceral appeals to a sense of community grounded in the physical caliphate but extending far beyond it, ISIS has made these followers and supporters feel part of something bigger than themselves by belonging to ISIS and its movement. This is why my former White House colleague Jen Easterly and I have objected to the use of "lone wolves" to describe those inspired by ISIS to execute attacks from Orlando to Manchester to Berlin: "The Islamic State thus offers a chance to those who feel alone—those who may lack opportunities or who may simply disagree with the politics or mores of the society around them—not to be lone actors" but to belong to something bigger instead.⁷

ISIS's internet-enabled message has, unfortunately, resonated even here in the United States. From American citizen Omar Mateen, who was responsible for the death of 50 innocent victims through his assault on Orlando's Pulse Nightclub, to lawful permanent resident Sayfullo Saipov, who has been charged with killing 8 innocent victims with a rental truck in downtown Manhattan last Halloween, some who live on U.S. soil have proven susceptible to ISIS's hateful exhortations of violence. As Peter Bergen has documented, a common link among those who attempt or succeed in terrorist activity in the United States is their consumption of terrorist recruitment materials on-line.⁸ ISIS's ability to reach across National borders and into our country to attempt to recruit and radicalize followers is simply not going to disappear even as the group's physical foothold in Iraq and Syria shrinks. If anything, ISIS's virtual foothold may increase in importance to the group, leading it to devote more energy and effort to sustaining and augmenting the sense of belonging that ISIS has been able to cultivate among supporters world-wide. Indeed, as ISIS's leadership reportedly focuses on "crafting an ideological framework that will survive the physical destruction of the caliphate in Iraq and Syria,"⁹ it seems almost certain that the group intends to communicate and propagate that framework in significant part on-line.

⁵Joshua A. Geltzer, "ISIL, al-Qaeda, and What Goes Viral Next: Why Tomorrow's Jihadist Movement Might Not Look so Different from Today's," *Texas National Security Review*, March 20, 2018, <https://tnsr.org/roundtable/policy-roundtable-future-jihadist-movement/#essay4>.

⁶Charlie Winter, "The Virtual 'Caliphate': Understanding Islamic State's Propaganda Strategy," *Quilliam*, July 2015, www.stratcomcoe.org/download/file/fid/2589.

⁷Jen Easterly & Joshua A. Geltzer, "The Islamic State and the End of Lone-Wolf Terrorism," *Foreign Policy*, May 23, 2017, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/05/23/the-islamic-state-and-the-end-of-lone-wolf-terrorism/>.

⁸Peter Bergen, "Jihadist Terrorism 15 Years After 9/11: A Threat Assessment," *New America*, September 8, 2016, <https://www.newamerica.org/international-security/policy-papers/jihadist-terrorism-15-years-after-911/>.

⁹Joby Warrick & Souad Mekhennet, "New Clues Bolster Belief that ISIS Leader Is Still Alive—and Busy with a Chilling New Mission," *The Washington Post*, May 19, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/new-clues-bolster-belief-that-isis-leader-is-still-alive-and-busy-with-a-chilling-new-mission/2018/05/19/83c2a62e-5ad2-11e8-858f-12becb4d6067_story.html?utm_term=.83a2b7b662b6.

AGGRAVATING FACTORS OF THE WHITE HOUSE'S OWN MAKING

ISIS's continuing ability to mobilize potential terrorists here in the United States would be concerning enough, but that concern is compounded by rhetoric and policies of the current administration that are making the problem worse. Donald Trump, as a Presidential candidate and now as President, has persistently spoken about Islam and Muslims in ways that validate ISIS's attempt to portray the United States as waging war on a religion and its people. As a candidate, Donald Trump said, "We have a problem in this country; it's called Muslims"; he called for "a total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States"; he characterized Muslims as "sick people"; he stated that "We're having problems with the Muslims"; and, regrettably, he has said much more along these lines as well, even as President.¹⁰ In addition to being appalling, this sort of language appears to validate ISIS's message and alienates key communities in the United States and abroad whose cooperation is vital to identifying those who might be vulnerable to ISIS's appeal and to intervening before such individuals turn to violence. Moreover, President Trump's "habit of stoking fears rather than reassuring the public in the wake of terrorist attacks"¹¹ increases the impact of those attacks precisely as terrorists desire, rather than thwarting terrorists' goal of spreading fear as good counterterrorism strategy demands by "building resilience [that] can minimize the effects of terrorism."¹²

Beyond counterproductive language, President Trump has pursued policies that further alienate those communities and make us less safe rather than more. Most notable among these is the travel ban, now in its third iteration and under review by the Supreme Court. As I wrote recently alongside former Director of National Intelligence Jim Clapper and former Director of the National Counterterrorism Center Matt Olsen, "Trump's travel ban fails to respond to threats to our country and actually undermines our security."¹³ The ban simply is not responsive to real threats: no national from any of the countries affected by the ban has caused any of the terrorism-related deaths on U.S. soil since 1975. But the ban does create threats to the effectiveness of our country's counterterrorism efforts. As we explained:

"The ban is so obviously, palpably, indeed explicitly anti-Muslim in nature that it has—understandably—offended Muslim-American communities around the world, including in the United States. Yet those are precisely the communities that can prove critical for identifying and responding to individuals becoming radicalized by groups like ISIS and al-Qaeda. Moreover, effective counterterrorism relies heavily on robust intelligence-sharing relationships with foreign governments. Banning all travelers from a foreign country seems a surefire way to offend that country's government and impede intelligence-sharing, rather than enhancing the flow of information about terrorist threats as effective counterterrorism requires."

The travel ban is, unfortunately, not alone among President Trump's policies that have been counterproductive for keeping Americans safe from terrorism. For example, the Trump administration withdrew previously awarded grants to organizations dedicated to addressing white supremacists' brand of violent extremism, a baffling decision that came to look particularly egregious after the deadly violence last August in Charlottesville, Virginia.¹⁴ These types of policies make Americans less safe not only by deliberately doing less to protect them from domestic terrorism—which can be just as deadly as terrorism associated with jihadist organizations such as

¹⁰ Jenna Johnson & Abigail Hauslohner, "I Think Islam Hates Us: A Timeline of Trump's Comments About Islam and Muslims," *The Washington Post*, May 20, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2017/05/20/i-think-islam-hates-us-a-timeline-of-trumps-comments-about-islam-and-muslims/?utm_term=.05443fad771.

¹¹ Joshua A. Geltzer & Stephen Tankel, "Whatever Happened to Trump's Counterterrorism Policy?" *The Atlantic*, March 1, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/03/trump-terrorism-iraq-syria-al-qaeda-isis/554333/>.

¹² Jennie M. Easterly & Joshua A. Geltzer, "More Die in Bathtubs than in Terrorism. It's Still Worth Spending Billions to Fight It," *CNN.com*, May 21, 2018, <https://www.cnn.com/2017/05/21/opinions/deadly-bathtub-compared-to-terrorism-opinion-geltzer-easterly/index.html>.

¹³ James R. Clapper, Jr., Joshua A. Geltzer, & Matthew G. Olsen, "We've Worked on Stopping Terrorism. Trump's Travel Ban Fuels It," *CNN.com*, April 23, 2018, <https://www.cnn.com/2018/04/23/opinions/trump-travel-ban-fuels-terrorism-clapper-geltzer-olsen/index.html>.

¹⁴ Ron Nixon & Eileen Sullivan, "Revocation of Grants to Help Fight Hate Under New Scrutiny After Charlottesville," *The New York Times*, August 15, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/15/us/politics/right-wing-extremism-charlottesville.html>.

ISIS¹⁵ and, as my Georgetown Law Center colleague Mary McCord has explained, just as morally repugnant¹⁶—but also by giving the distinct impression that the Trump administration is interested in terrorism only when it is being carried out by groups purporting to act in the name of Islam.

All told, President Trump's anti-Muslim rhetoric and policies play into ISIS's hands as the group seeks to mobilize followers in the United States and around the world. The President's language and policies serve as aggravating factors in the already-difficult challenge associated with addressing ISIS's ability to radicalize followers through the internet.

NEW FORMS OF CYBER TERRORISM

Thus far, radicalization has been ISIS's primary utilization of the internet: As noted, the group has made novel use of social media, file-upload sites, and other modern communication platforms to inspire attacks world-wide. As ISIS loses its hold on physical territory in Syria, one concerning possibility is that the group will look to new forms of cyber terrorism to cause harm here in the United States.

Without as much of a physical safe haven from which to plot attacks and inspire followers, ISIS may seek to wreak havoc through cyber operations that do not require large numbers of fighters or expansive territorial holdings. Such efforts would build on earlier ISIS cyber efforts, such as the collaboration between now-imprisoned Ardit Ferizi¹⁷ and the late Junaid Hussain¹⁸ to obtain and then make public the personally-identifiable information of U.S. service members. In the years since those efforts, malicious cyber activity outside the context of terrorism has dramatically increased, with powerful hacking tools no longer the exclusive province of nation-states. This would seem to make obtaining and using those tools increasingly appealing and, unfortunately, increasingly feasible for a terrorist group such as ISIS. For example, if ISIS were able to recruit and utilize the right technological expertise and acquire the increasingly available tools to do so, ISIS might exfiltrate sensitive data from computer systems or simply alter it in ways that could generate mayhem for financial markets or medical records. Alternatively, and perhaps more likely given ISIS's desire to instill fear and grab headlines through dramatic attacks, ISIS might attempt to cause tangible damage in the physical world by hacking into the systems that are used to control and operate power plants and electric grids. These sorts of cyber operations would be novel for a terrorist group; and they would not only cause real damage but also generate the type of excitement and belief among followers and supporters that ISIS surely is seeking to recapture as the physical caliphate that the group once touted shrinks.

Here, too, there is cause for concern that the Trump administration is not appropriately tackling the challenge. As of this writing, the top position overseeing cyber policy at the White House—the Assistant to the President for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism—is vacant, and the next most senior cyber position—the National Security Council staff's Special Assistant to the President and Cybersecurity Coordinator—was recently eliminated. As I have commented elsewhere, this undoing of key White House leadership on cyber-related policy matters “seems to send a strange message as to how this White House is prioritizing something most of us think the government needs to prioritize more.”¹⁹ While there are various plausible arrangements for structuring the leadership of the National Security Council staff, this seemingly deliberate diminution of leadership on cyber issues is particularly puzzling given how rapidly cyber-related threats are evolving and given how much our response requires the type of strategic leadership and interagency coordination that only the White House can provide. To the extent that ISIS turns to new types of cyber operations to regain momentum and inflict harm, this lack of leadership may prove a serious vulnerability, even as our military is taking the

¹⁵Miriam Valverde, “A Look at the Data on Domestic Terrorism and Who's Behind It,” *PolitiFact*, August 16, 2017, <http://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/article/2017/aug/16/look-data-domestic-terrorism-and-whos-behind-it/>.

¹⁶Mary B. McCord, “Criminal Law Should Treat Domestic Terrorism as the Moral Equivalent of International Terrorism,” *Lawfare*, August 21, 2017, <https://lawfareblog.com/criminal-law-should-treat-domestic-terrorism-moral-equivalent-international-terrorism>.

¹⁷Department of Justice, “ISIL-Linked Kosovo Hacker Sentenced to 20 Years in Prison,” September 23, 2016, <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/isil-linked-kosovo-hacker-sentenced-20-years-prison>.

¹⁸Nafees Hamid, “The British Hacker Who Became the Islamic State's Chief Terror Cyber-Coach: A Profile of Junaid Hussain,” *CTC Sentinel*, Volume 11, Issue 4, pages 30–37, <https://ctc.usma.edu/app/uploads/2018/04/CTC-SENTINEL-042018-2.pdf>.

¹⁹Brian Barrett, “White House Cuts Critical Cybersecurity Role as Threats Loom,” *Wired*, May 15, 2018, <https://www.wired.com/story/white-house-cybersecurity-coordinator/> (quoting Joshua A. Geltzer).

positive step of elevating Cyber Command to a unified combatant command.²⁰ Military and other key tools available to our government in the cyber arena require clear and forward-looking strategies, authorities, policies, and legal frameworks—especially given that the likely target of cyber terrorism may well be critical infrastructure controlled by private industry, which introduces distinctive complexities when it comes to formulating and implementing a governmental response.

CONCLUSION

The crumbling of ISIS's caliphate in Iraq and Syria is a major positive development for U.S. National security, for the security of our allies and partners, and for the stability of the Middle East region. But it is not the end of the threat posed by ISIS to the United States. The group retains some territory in Syria; is expanding its physical presence in other parts of the world; continues to make shrewd use of its virtual presence to recruit and radicalize followers; and could look to novel cyber operations as access to dangerous cyber tools becomes easier for non-state actors. This state of affairs would be challenging enough for the dedicated National security professionals who work to secure our homeland; but the challenge is compounded by aggravating factors of the Trump administration's own making. The failure to retain our key partner on the ground in the fight against ISIS; the relentless anti-Muslim orientation of President Trump's rhetoric and policies; and the seemingly deliberate absence of White House leadership to provide strategic vision and interagency coordination in the cyber arena all make the persistent threat posed by ISIS harder to address. That is unfortunate given the considerable scope of the challenge in the first place and given ISIS's likely evolution and adaptation to changed circumstances in ways that will pose new forms of terrorist threats to our country.

I am grateful for the opportunity to discuss these important issues and look forward to the committee's questions.

Chairman MCCAUL. Yeah, I want to thank the witnesses for your opening statements. I recognize myself for questions. Yeah, I remember 2014 to 2016, my threat briefings, the ones that this committee had, were, for lack of a better word, intense. External operations were being talked about almost on a weekly basis. We were arresting ISIS, not only abroad, but in this country on almost on a weekly basis. That has actually calmed down a little bit.

I was in Paris and Brussels before they were hit, warning them about the lack of sharing vital intelligence, lack of knowing the manifest on airplanes, and then they were hit shortly thereafter. Then a new threat emerged, and it was the internet. A man by the name of Junaid Hussain from the United Kingdom was in Syria, and I was down at CENTCOM looking at the internet cafe out of which he operated, and we finally were able to take him out, and that internet activity went down. But that became the power and the global outreach of the jihad movement through Junaid Hussain.

But then by the end of 2017, even though they had gained territory the size of the United Kingdom, by the end of 2017, they lost over 90 percent of their territory. I will tell you the threat briefings, while I am still very concerned, I do think the tempo and the pace has gone down. But I do think the threat does remain, as they have retreated into the Euphrates River Valley, they are still in the Middle East, and they are also in Northern Africa, places like Libya, Tunisia, Sinai, in Egypt, and the Sahel in the middle of Africa, and also southeast Asia.

My first question I want to direct to the Ambassador and the General, because you have been there in service for so long, and

²⁰Matthew Cox, "Cyber Command Elevated to Combatant Command," Military.com, May 4, 2018, <https://www.military.com/defensetech/2018/05/04/cyber-command-elevated-combatant-command.html>.

it is almost a foreign policy question in a way. The post-caliphate strategy. I think, you know, the previous administration—you know, we always hear the phrase, “leading from behind,” but not making a decision is a decision in and of itself. Drawing red lines and allowing them to be crossed is a decision.

Allowing countries like Russia to then come in to Syria, allowing Iraq—I am sorry, Iran, to establish a Shia crescent to Iraq and Syria and Lebanon and Yemen. So now, we have Iran in Iraq and Syria. We have the Russians back for the first time since 1979 when they were in Afghanistan. We have got the Saudis. We have Israel launching rockets into Syria. One of the biggest crises—sort of a civil war conflict refugee problems of our lifetime in some respects, not to mention Turkey, now fighting the very forces that we fought with to defeat ISIS.

This is, perhaps, the most complex and challenging foreign policy crisis I think that we have had. Can you make any sense out of this? What would be your focus and your strategy looking at the post-caliphate Iraq and Syria?

Mr. CROCKER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. You have summarized an impossibly complex situation very neatly. It is hugely complex. I spent more years of my life than I care to remember experiencing Lebanon’s civil war. In its hot phase, that lasted 15 years, and it ended in 1990, only when the Syrian Army occupied the Presidential Palace outside of Beirut, and forced Michel Aoun into sanctuary in the French Embassy. That would be the same Michel Aoun who is running the country.

In Syria, the list of players is far longer than it ever was in Lebanon. You mentioned some of them. The United States, Russia, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Israel, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, to name a few. Inside Syria, the Syrian Democratic Forces, the Syrian Free Army, the YPG, al-Qaeda, obviously, the Islamic State, Ahrar al-Sham, and again, we can go on. Why is this important? We saw why several months ago.

The Iranians, I guess, having a slow afternoon, decided they would put a drone over Israel and see what happened. Israeli shot it down and then retaliated with air strikes, but they lost the plane, the first time since 1985. Fortunately, that plane crashed in Israel, and both crew members survived. Had it been otherwise, we could now be in a massive regional conflict.

Everybody kind-of took a step back because nobody wanted that war then, but nobody wanted World War I either. So when an obscure archduke was assassinated in an even more obscure city, those were the Guns of August. I have dusted off my copy of the book by that name, Barbara Tuchman, it is worth taking a look at now in the Syria context. So this is highly dangerous. We cannot settle it militarily, but we need to be in concert with all of our friends and allies talking about a problem that can blow the lid off the region and beyond. We need to stay engaged.

Chairman McCAUL. Thank you. My time is just about expired. I want to give General Keane at least a minute to respond, because as I see it, Assad has never been more powerful now, backed by the Iranians and the Russians, and he is using chemical weapons. It is like the biblical sense of all roads lead to Damascus.

Can you make any sense of out of this and what should we doing moving forward?

General KEANE. I really think the strategic imperative for the United States dealing with the Middle East is the hegemonic objectives that Iran has in imposing their will on the Middle East, and to dominate it and influence and control it. They have had some significant success in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and now in Yemen, and they certainly just recently, as mentioned, encroaching on Israel, which has always been a strategic objective for them.

At a minimum, put enough pressure on Israel as Iran will eventually try to develop a nuclear weapon that Israel will not respond militarily, because the Iranians would have rockets and missiles fired at Israel from Lebanon, and also from bases in Syria, which they are trying do right now. I don't know how you approach that problem of a major aggressor like that who is applying resources and achieving success without doing that as a multilateral approach.

I felt, for a long time, that we need a sort of Arab NATO in the Middle East, a political and military alliance that works so well and stand it up against another ideology in the 20th Century. We need to approach this problem comprehensively in the Middle East. It is not just about using military weapons, it is the entire spectrum that a political, economic, diplomatic, and military alliance would bring to that problem.

Second, of course, is the breeding ground for radical Islam. Again, to approach that problem, we have to be organized for it, we have to undermine their ideology and propaganda, and we have to encourage our allies in that region to move in the right directions in terms of moving away from the conditions that are so paramount and set the stage for people—the ability to recruit. I am talking about what I said in my statement in terms of lack of political and social justice, lack of economic opportunity, the instability by poor governance, et cetera. This is a major problem.

The one thing I do know, Mr. Chairman, and I have had this discussion with the administration. To wash our hands of this and to walk away, because, No. 1, we have lost thousands of soldiers there; No. 2, we spent a lot of money there; and, No. 3, there may be a lack of political will in the country, it would be a huge strategic mistake. The Middle East cannot explode. If we let that explode, it will harm the United States in terms of our own security of our people, and also those of our allies and our National interests as well.

Chairman MCCAUL. Thank you. I completely agree with you. The Chair now recognizes the Ranking Member.

Mr. THOMPSON. Thank you very much. Both answers were, to the Chairman's questions, quite illuminating. The one thing that I would want a conversation with the Ambassador and General on this: To what degree will budget cuts for the State Department and others impact your response that you just made to the Chairman?

Mr. CROCKER. Thanks very much for that critical question, sir. The 31 percent budget cut that was proposed for the State Department, and which then-Secretary Tillerson saw fit not to oppose, would have crippled the Department and the foreign service for

years to come. Damage has been done already. We took in about 100 new officers in calendar 2017, the year before it was 370.

We need to promote about 100 officers a year into the senior foreign service. Last year, we promoted 47. So this is creating a structural problem we will wrestle with for years to come. As we face this enormously complex threat and fight, to do that with a weakened foreign service is not protecting our National security. We are the ones who are forward. We are more expeditionary than the Marines even. That is why it is called the foreign service.

We know the cultures, we know the languages. Every foreign service officer is fluent in at least one foreign language. But we have almost been decimated. I am very pleased to see that Secretary Pompeo realized, that from Day 1, and has already taken steps to undo some of the damage by the previous Secretary with his ending of the hiring freeze. There is more to be done, listening to his statements, I am confident that he will try to get that accomplished.

But this is not the time to weaken the diplomatic side of this fight. If there is anything I learned in places like Afghanistan and Iraq, there are no purely military tracks. There are no purely diplomatic tracks, they are all fused together. If you weaken the diplomatic part of the triad, you are heading for trouble, and trouble in this instance would mean a threat to our National security.

Mr. THOMPSON. General, do you have some comments?

General KEANE. Yeah, just quickly. I agree with Secretary Mattis, who believes in a strong Department of State, and we only have several thousand diplomats. It is actually a very small service that we have. We clearly have to reinforce it. The thought of reducing the State Department's budget is ludicrous. It makes no sense to me whatsoever. If anything, we should be increasing it.

You know, when the budget numbers from OMB are presented to the Department of Defense, that begins the negotiations. We never accept those numbers. We fight like daylight to make sure that the budget is what it should be inside the Executive branch. When the State Department gets the budget, I know this from having spoken to them from OMB, they just accept it.

The reality is, they are underfunded and they are on demand, and we cannot reduce this capability. They work hand-in-glove with the military. They keep us out of fighting wars, but the United States military can strengthen the diplomatic hand when we have a credible deterrence as we have seen around the world. So I totally agree with your sentiments, Ranking Member.

Mr. THOMPSON. Thank you very much. Dr. Gartenstein-Ross, you talked about, in this effort to defeat ISIS, that we are going to have to lead. The Ambassador talked a little bit about that, too. But everyone seemed to agree that the new frontier is around technology and the ability to recruit and do other things. Are there some things that you think we should be doing as Congress to fortify that new frontier?

Mr. GARTENSTEIN-ROSS. Thanks for that great question, sir. I do. I think the most important thing that Congress could do is to take a strong look at the acquisition process. You know, there are multiple areas in which the U.S. Government has been trying to make the acquisition process more efficient and faster. Efforts like DIUX

and some of the special operations branches, retooling of their budgetary processes is important, because right now, everyone who is around Government knows that often, the U.S. Government ends up not getting the product that it wants, it ends up overpaying for an inferior service. For most private-sector firms, if they were run this way, they would be out of business fairly quickly.

For technology, with things moving as quickly as they are, I think we can't afford, not just for terrorism, but also for the great power competition that we now have with both China and Russia, to be significantly behind in this race. When it comes to things ranging from surveillance, and the ability of the Chinese government, in particular, to spy on us, to artificial intelligence, which we are right now, I think, falling behind in, there is a real need for the U.S. Government to be able to acquire private-sector expertise and private-sector research in a way that is efficient, and in a way that can ensure that it gets the product and the quality that it wants.

Mr. THOMPSON. Thank you. Dr. Geltzer, can you comment on that?

Mr. GELTZER. Thank you for the opportunity, Mr. Ranking Member. I think the tech companies are, in some ways, on the front lines of this fight, but I think there is a real role for Congress in pushing them to do more. They have taken some steps for which they deserve credit. If you go back a little over a year ago, some of the major companies agreed on what they called a hash-sharing coalition. So pieces of terrorism-related content that any one company in the coalition identifies now gets shared with the other companies to see if those companies deem them to violate their own terms of service. That was a step forward.

Six months after that, the same company has agreed to share the tools that they used to find those types of content. That was a step forward. I think there are more steps forward that can and should come. For example, one might ask the tech companies, instead of just sharing the piece of the content, why not share the information associated with those pieces of content and with the accounts associated with the content?

In other words, if a piece of content has been uploaded to one platform by an account, and is deemed to have broken its terrorism-related terms of service, maybe another company has an account created by the same email address, or otherwise affiliate with it, that has uploaded terrorism-related information or messages as well. That would be a step forward.

Playing with artificial intelligence, even to try to identify, based on past terrorism-related pieces of content or accounts, future ones before they are even uploaded to see whether, in fact, they should be, or whether they violate service on terrorism-related grounds. That could be a step forward.

So I think Congress has a role to play, especially as tech companies find themselves on the Hill sometimes these days, asking those sorts of questions and asking, What comes next?

Mr. THOMPSON. Thank you. I yield back, Mr. Chair.

Chairman MCCAUL. Let me just echo the Ranking Member's sentiments and the panel on—I had dinner at the Marine barracks with Secretary Mattis, and he talks about if you cut diplomats, you

are going to have to buy more bullets. I think his job is, as he said it, is put maximum pressure so the diplomats can do their job. So I just want to reinforce that point.

The Chair now recognizes the gentleman from Alabama, Mr. Rogers.

Mr. ROGERS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you all for being here. General, you know, we have talked about—you made a statement about we regained most of the territory in Iraq and Syria that the foreign fighters had occupied. But as those foreign fighters are being pushed out, they are moving into the Africa and Asia. We have noticed that they have been pretty resourceful in moving around western Europe, and they continue to plot to get into the United States to execute attacks.

Do you perceive those foreign fighters as they move into these regions, executing attacks from there, or trying just to refocus their energies to move back into the Middle East and try to retake territory?

General KEANE. I don't see them going back into Iraq and Syria, but I do see some of those foreign fighters, 2,000 of them have returned to Europe, and certainly, their potential to conduct terrorist operations for sure. Others have moved to other affiliate organizations that are ISIS-supported organizations in Libya and Tunisia, in Sahel in the Sinai. So there is plenty of opportunity for them to—once they have committed to that ideology, usually they don't separate themselves from it. Usually death is what separates them from it.

So regaining the caliphate, or some semblance of it, would only happen if we walk away. If the political situation in Iraq does not enfranchise the Sunnis, then you have a potential rise again of a radical Islamist organization in Syria. We have just got to finish what we started and recognize that it is not over, and continue to clean the remnants of that out. If we don't, if we pull away from eastern Syria, than they will—the leadership is still there. They will certainly try to resurge and regain some small safe haven. That would draw foreign fighters if that happens. That is the only situation that I see that would bring back their return.

But they are operating in other areas supporting movements in other countries as we speak, and also, hiding in the shadows in Europe waiting for an opportunity.

Mr. ROGERS. An opportunity to do what? To bring down western civilization—

Mr. GELTZER. No, no. To conduct individual terrorist attacks, or to try to form a cell or larger network.

Mr. ROGERS. To what end?

General KEANE. Certainly, their objectives—yes, the goal of radical Islamist movement, whether it is al-Qaeda or whether it is ISIS does have a global objective to it. Replace western civilization, much more than that. To dominate world civilization, and undermine the international order as we currently know it; and that has been their aspiration, you know, from the beginning.

Mr. ROGERS. Ambassador, what are your thoughts about that? I am particularly concerned about the large number of them in western Europe, but obviously here, too. What do you think is going on?

Mr. CROCKER. Thank you, Congressman. In a sense, the most dangerous period in terms of our own National security may be approaching, and it will come with the overt military defeat of Islamic State. Their ideology, as you know, had always been that the caliphate was critical. They are now losing the last traces of that physical caliphate. So they are going to have to develop a new ideology to justify their existence.

So I would think that that is the moment when they will put all they have, wherever they are, into figuring out how they can do their version of 9/11. They couldn't hold territory in the field. I think the next step will be for them to do everything they can from wherever they can stage it, to show that they can hit back, and hit back hard within our homeland and within the European homelands.

Mr. ROGERS. Do you think we are doing enough in concert with our European allies to prepare for that or anticipate that?

Mr. CROCKER. I don't really have visibility on the specific actions. My sense is that—and, again, indeed this committee would know far more, is that the administration, as was the case with the previous administration, takes this very, very seriously. I would say, though, we like to talk about intelligence failures, and certainly, there are intelligence failures.

But the failures that hurt us the most are failures of imagination. We couldn't imagine the 9/11 attacks. We couldn't imagine the destruction of the Marine barracks in Beirut and the death of 241 Marines, beyond our imagination. So I would hope that in the skunk works of the administration, there are some really bright people doing that kind of imagining.

If we expect to get it all through intelligence, we won't, we can't. Again, the failure of the future that we may be holding endless hearings on would be just that. A failure of the imagination with respect to a committed enemy.

Mr. ROGERS. Thank you. My time is expired, I yield back.

Chairman MCCAUL. The gentleman yields. The gentleman from Rhode Island, Mr. Langevin, is recognized.

Mr. LANGEVIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I want to thank our witnesses for your testimony here today, and, in particular, Ambassador Crocker and General Keane, thank you for your service to the country.

Dr. Gartenstein-Ross, let me start with you, if I could. On the issue of drones, you described in your testimony, ISIL's extensive weaponization of commercial drone technology. I am sure you are very concerned, as the Chairman is, about the possibility of drone-based terrorism, including domestically. I worked with my colleague, Senator Whitehouse, Senator Sheldon Whitehouse from Rhode Island, legislation criminalizing the reckless operation of drones.

Are you concerned that ISIL might aid or inspire someone in the United States to use a drone to carry out a violent attack? What more can we be doing to prevent this kind of an action?

Mr. GARTENSTEIN-ROSS. Sir, that is a great question. Yes, I am definitely concerned. The major reason for my concern is that we are seeing major leaps forward in drone technology and what can be done with them. Ambassador Crocker talks about failures of

imagination. I feel like the technological sphere is one where we are seeing failures of imagination most frequently these days, when you look at the kinds of things that we can see with drones domestically.

Drone swarm is where—we have seen drone swarms recently even in cartel arrests. We have seen them increasingly used just south of the border in Mexico by cartels and organized criminal elements.

Mr. GARTENSTEIN-ROSS. The ability to do something destructive with a drone, something serious, grows constantly, as the commercialization of the drones becomes more sophisticated. We see this learning curve with all technology.

Mr. LANGEVIN. Any thoughts on what we can we do to counter the—

Mr. GARTENSTEIN-ROSS. I agree with the legislation that you spoke of, I mean, criminalizing reckless uses of drones. I think giving some thought to areas in which drones cannot be flown. As we all know, drones can't be flown in the Capitol area. I think in areas where there—thinking about airport, routes that airlines fly and the ways that drones can be used to attack airplanes. Starting to think about how do you regulate this area? We are going to see a proliferation of technologies.

One final thing is giving thought to privacy laws with respect to the drones. Because both in terms of our own personal privacy, but also the ability to surveil a target, I think there is a lot of dangers that exist there for assassinations and nefarious uses.

Mr. LANGEVIN. Thank you. To the panel, I know that in response to the Ranking Member's question on the messaging and such, many of you had mentioned ISIL's successful and continued use of social media to recruit individuals to inflict violence. What more do you feel that tech companies in the administration should be doing to counter these efforts of radicalization, especially inside the United States?

Mr. GELTZER. I am happy to start. I am sure others will have thoughts as well. I mentioned before a couple of opportunities that I see for the companies to experiment with sharing more information with each other when it comes to terrorism-related content and the accounts associated with that. Maybe I will mention now, also, I think opportunities to share between Government and the tech companies. I am no longer privy to where those conversations stand, but it seems to me, much as the Government provides in the cyber arena threat information to companies, or when it comes to critical infrastructure threat information, there is an opportunity both for the Government to ensure that new trends, new trajectories and how terrorists are utilizing social media platforms and other communications technologies, new techniques, especially those that cross platforms which any one company is less likely to see but the Government may well see.

My hope is that that is a more robust exchange, and it has been in the past, and a two-way exchange, in which the companies are sharing what they see, because they too, they are in their own pikes. They have unique insight into what is happening, and how users may be changing, how they regenerate accounts, for example, or how they link from their various pages or various accounts. For

that dialog to be in real time, I think, would enhance both parties' ability to respond, the tech companies and the Government's.

Mr. LANGEVIN. Thank you. Anyone else on the panel care to comment?

General KEANE. Well, I just think we have to continue what we have started, and that is closer cooperation between the U.S. Government and our social media companies. There has been some success, as was already mentioned in my testimony, you know, with Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, particularly Twitter, who has taken down over 1 million platforms as a result of that cooperation. We just need to continue that. I think there should be continuous dialog among other intelligence services, National Security Agency, Central Intelligence Agency and our social media companies to get the kind of cooperation that is necessary, because as everybody here sitting on this panel knows, radical Islamist organizations are certainly going to continue to use these outlets given the extraordinary achievement that the ISIS leaders were able to accomplish in very short order in building an organization and sustaining it, largely riding on the waves of technology.

Mr. LANGEVIN. Thank you all. I yield back.

Chairman MCCAUL. The gentleman yields. The Chair recognizes General Bacon.

Mr. BACON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thanks to all four of you for being here today. I have just got to recognize Ambassador Crocker, my professor at National War College in our interagency class, if I remember that right. I also served with him in Iraq, so I know all the folks who served with you, see you as a hero. It is good to see you here, sir. He served in the worst spots, and the hardest spots in the world at our Nation's calling.

As you all pointed out, ISIS has been attrited to the point where they have no real estate that they control in Iraq, two little portions of real estate in Syria. We are we going to continue attriting them, and I think of the Secretary of Defense's strategy of not one to try to retreat to the best of our ability and annihilating in place is the right strategy there.

So we saw some kinetic operations that we have to do. But even if we take down these two pieces of real estate, there is still a threat. I think you pointed that out. There will be a terrorist threat that could reassert themselves at any point. So we had the military option, but we have to go after their finances. I think you have all done a lot of discussing here about going after their cyber recruiting capability and how they do that.

But the one thing I have not heard, and I really think, getting to my National War College teachings, I don't think we have gone to the real center of gravity of ISIS and al-Qaeda and other Sunni extremists, it is the ideology. How do we counter this ideology? Because in the end, it is the—cyber's a tool, an avenue to transmit that ideology, finance is a tool. Until we figure out a way to counter this ideology, I don't know that we can really in the end, declare victory. I would welcome any of y'all's thoughts on that.

Mr. CROCKER. Well, thank you for an excellent question, Congressman. I have to say that had you been posing questions like that when you were at National War College, you would have been a distinguished graduate.

Mr. BACON. I was close, that close.

Mr. CROCKER. It is a key question. I come at this perhaps from a slightly different optic, it is—when I look at 100 years of the modern Middle East, I see a successive failure of “isms,” colonialism, imperialism, Monarchism, Arab nationalism, Ba’athism, Arab socialism, communism in south Yemen. They all have one thing in common: They failed to produce good governance and economic opportunity. Again, Mr. Chairman, the two points you made in your opening statement I think are just key.

So they were overcome by the next ism. Now we have Islamism, they are also failing to show that they can govern properly. I see from some press reports that they seem to understand that going in, that a lot of the captured documents we have had access to shows that they were trying to get Government moving again; they just ran out of time, money, and luck and became victim to their own hateful ideology. They will yield to something else. Maybe it will be another run at Islamism. I don’t know. But unless that core problem of governance in the region is tackled and improved, you will just see this over and over and over again. I would cite one example from my own experience, I was, as you noted, Mr. Chairman, an ambassador six times.

In three of those countries, a predecessor of mine as the American ambassador was assassinated. Ours is inherently a dangerous profession. One of those was in Lebanon, Frank Malloy, the Ambassador. He was kidnapped and then executed by the popular front, Liberation of Palestine. Was that an early Islamist terror group? No. Their ideology was the antithesis of Islam, or Judaism, or Christianity. They were Communists. Was their leader a closet Islamic radical? Their leader, George Habash, was a Palestinian Christian. So the ideologies may shift and the motivations may shift. We need not to be overly distracted by that, but more focused on what gives them purchase. What we have seen consistently is a failure of governance, and that is a big problem to fix. But as General Keane said, if we don’t stay engaged, it is only going to get worse.

General KEANE. You know, I think that is a profound question if I can comment on it. I ended my written statement—my oral statement and written statement on that very question. You know, we dealt with two major ideologies in the 21st Century. One was Nazism, fascism which we destroyed by brute force, and the other was communism, which, I think, when you look at it, oversimplistically maybe, we beat it with better ideas, and those ideas was democracy and capitalism. I think that serves as an illustration on how to deal with this.

We have to hold this horrific behavior that they demonstrate in their barbarism and killing people. We have to hold them accountable for that. That means that we have to use the tools of war to punish that behavior and stop it.

But we also have to have better ideas. It gets back to what the Ambassador is talking about and that deals with the issues where—becomes the breeding ground for that. We have to stay engaged with our allies to help them, and help them shape. Make certain that they understand, even as Mohammed bin Salman is making transformational changes in Saudi Arabia, we have to stay in

that dialog so they understand how important it is to get this right, to move these societies in the proper direction and move away from political and social injustice, and the lack of economic opportunities, and, also, to achieve stable governance in these countries. Until you do that and provide an alternative, these ideologies will continue to fester and grow.

Mr. BACON. Mr. Chairman, thank you for your time. I yield back. Unless you have—want to build on anything that was just said? OK, thank you.

Mr. Chairman, I yield.

Chairman MCCAUL. The gentleman yields. The Chair recognizes Mrs. Watson Coleman.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for having this hearing and thank you to the witnesses for being here.

I guess I have a couple of questions, one concern I have is about the fire—the foreign fighters dispersing into other areas. I am particularly interested in the Sahel area of Africa, because I have been in other briefings where it has been brought to my attention that the lack of our presence, the lack of any diplomatic presence, the lack of any sort of relationship-building presence is very dangerous in this area because it is one in which governance is very weak, opportunities are very fruitful, and we are not making the kinds of connections that we should be making to sort-of counteract some of this.

So I would just like to get your thoughts on it, particularly as it relates to stripping our Department of State from the resources it needs to have a diplomatic presence. I will start with you, if you don't mind, Ambassador.

Mr. CROCKER. Thank you, ma'am. We are diplomatically represented in all of the countries of the Sahel. We have some assistance programs, but that budget has been under pressure for quite some time, as you know. There I would just make a short pitch for the third D: Defense, diplomacy, and development. USAID can be a very effective agency when it has the resources to do their work. I—we are doing great on defense; diplomacy and development have been seriously underfunded, and that does not make anybody's life any easier.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. Can I just add on to that, or carry on on that area? So it is not so much guns anymore and blowing up people, it has lots to do with a new way in which ISIS can be a threat to us, whether or not it is cybersecurity, internet or whatever, but it is also about relationships, or what we can do in regions that help people from their economic perspective not to be so vulnerable to these terrorist groups as well.

I don't get the sense that this administration gets that piece substantively about being on the ground, developing the better way of life for those individuals, creating those relationships and understanding those cultural issues. So, I would appreciate it if you would just give me your thoughts on that? Any of you, any, all. We can start with you, Ambassador.

Mr. CROCKER. Just two quick points. USAID, of course, has an administrator now, Mike Green, not someone I know personally, but I know his background, and I have colleagues still serving in

USAID. He is quite highly regarded in the agency. We have a Secretary of State, as I just said, who starts with an enormous advantage in that building, simply because he is not Rex Tillerson. He does say, and he has done some of the right things there to reassure the institution that he has—that he will support them. So I think we have got some things in place that should yield good results.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. One of the insecurities of the institution didn't just come from Tillerson, because I don't believe that Tillerson just decided all on his own that he wasn't going to staff the Department of State. I think that he was in align with whatever the President at that time thought was the best thing to do for whatever reason he thinks things are the best thing to do. But perhaps, he changed his position now that Pompeo is the Secretary of State.

Is there anyone else who would want to comment on any of this? Thank you.

General KEANE. I would just say that certainly I agree with the Ambassador about our diplomatic commitment. The military command that deals with Africa, as you know, is AFRICOM, and our policy is to assist our partner countries in helping to build their military capability. That is a significant commitment we have made, and it is growing. When we are doing that, so you should be aware of it, we just don't teach them military skills. As part of that partnership that we have—and it doesn't make any difference where we are doing this in the world—we teach them how important it is for the military to submit to civilian control, and also to—while we are using weapons of war on a battlefield, we do that in concert with the values of our country.

So those are some of things that are important to us as we are partnering with them. In terms of United States taking a direct hand, the only time that we will do that in Africa is when we are dealing with a terrorist organization that we believe could be a threat to the United States outside the region, then we would attack that ourselves. Otherwise, we want to partner with the host country and bring their military up to a capability where they can deal with the problem.

Mr. GARTENSTEIN-ROSS. One thing I would add to General Keane's comments when it comes to counterterrorism capacity building is that I think this is an interesting area that Congress could look into with respect to the overall strategy of CT capacity building, which is very important. But when you look at the range of the countries involved, like not just the United States, but you have multiple western European countries who are doing this, there is an overarching lack of strategy, and sometimes even internal lack of coordination, where different countries often don't have visibility into what their allies are doing. Sometimes there is not visibility even within the U.S. Government. Sometimes there is a lack of coordinated strategy, and there is definitely a lack of consistent monitoring and evaluation metrics being used. So it is an area that is both very important, and where I feel that a wise look into how well the system is working, could, I think, help to improve it.

Mr. GELTZER. If I may, just a brief point, drawing from experience at the Justice Department and the national security division there, and it is really just to accentuate some of the points others have made about how critical it is to have a robust State Department and State Department presence. Not only did the State Department do its own important diplomatic work, not only is it hand-in-glove ideally with the military, but law enforcement assistance and Homeland Security assistance, that often is facilitated by the State Department. So when you get a DOJ and FBI training investigators and prosecutors on how to handle terrorism cases, which are distinct and often difficult, when you have DHS reps working with countries on how to monitor their borders better, how to maintain their databases better, how to make those databases exportable to countries like us when we want to see who is traveling here from there. It is often the State Department that makes that collaboration possible, which is, again, another reason that you want that to be a robust presence.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for your indulgence and thank you for your answers. I yield back.

Chairman McCAUL. The gentlelady yields back. The gentleman from Texas, Mr. Ratcliffe is recognized.

Mr. RATCLIFFE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank all the panelists for being here today. I was struck by the remarkable consistency between your comments, and about ISIS and the ISIS caliphate being badly damaged, but not defeated.

General Keane, we will start with you, because you twice made the comment about what it comes to defeating ISIS, you have talked about the need to drive ISIS out of the footholds that they have in Syria. I assume those footholds are being fueled by the desperation of the Syrian people with Assad in power, power that he has been able to maintain by using Iran, Hezbollah, and the IRGC and Russia.

So I guess my question is, when we talk about the Salafi Jihadi movement and radical Islamist groups like ISIS and al-Qaeda, do you agree that at least with respect to Syria, the greatest factor into whether or not it continues to exist or expand and contract is whether or not Assad is in charge in Syria?

General KEANE. Well, first of all, the—ISIS and al-Qaeda, which is a thriving organization in Syria, they are only there because there is a civil war there, and they were drawn to an area, and they were able to establish safe zones and take advantage of the circumstances that are there. So they are absolutely feeding on that.

Certainly, Assad, a brutal dictator to be sure, you know, the so-called Arab Spring arose and the people wanted to turn him out. They were on their way to actually doing that when the Iranians and the Russians successfully intervened and stalemated the situation, and then the Russian military intervention, and the Iranian plus-up really changed the entire momentum. Assad is not going anywhere now. I mean, we have got to be honest about it. They have successfully propped up this dictator. What is going on in Geneva is a fantasy. I mean, the Russians and the Iranians may change Assad out because they want another Alawite dictator, but

their military intervention has succeeded in indefinitely keeping Assad or somebody like him in power. We have long since squandered the opportunities to do something about that.

Mr. RATCLIFFE. So do you think it is an overstatement, then, to say that the Jihadi movement there through groups like ISIS, or al-Qaeda, or whatever else may come, will continue as long as Assad reigns over Syria or someone just like Assad?

General KEANE. Yes, the opposition to Assad is not going to go away either because they are very committed. They want a secular, most of them are democratic states, some of them, an Islamic state. So as long that continues, that will give radical Islam an opportunity. In that organization, we didn't talk about it here, but the al-Qaeda organization, the son of al-Nusra that operates in Idlib Province, is a very dangerous organization, which clearly has objectives to operate outside the region in Europe and against the United States. So yes, this is a breeding ground for radical Islam.

Mr. RATCLIFFE. So I guess that leads to what is an unpopular topic for a lot of my colleagues on both sides of the aisle when we talk about regime change. But it seems to me that our best option for addressing the threat of ISIS and al-Qaeda, and, frankly, the threat of, as you call it, a hegemonic threat from Iran, and its ability to propagate Hezbollah and groups like that, is a Syria without Assad. You intimated a little bit about how we would accomplish that. I know, the Free Syrian Army, and arming those. I have heard the arguments about, well, you are just arming terrorists.

You made reference, though, to an Arab NATO earlier. I am wondering—I heard John Bolton recently talk about a regional Arab force in the area, and so my first question is, are you talking about the same thing there?

General KEANE. Yeah. Well, first of all, let me say that I don't believe this administration has a coherent strategy to deal with this problem. I know for a fact the previous administration certainly did not, actually I think enabled the problem to get worse. It is a complex problem, as Ambassador Crocker so accurately pointed out. You can be on either side of this issue and be making what seems to be a very plausible argument, to be frank about it, because it is such a disturbing situation.

But in my view, the—Syria is a strategic anchor for the Iranian hegemonic movement and their ability to encroach on Israel and move out of Syria. It is also a melting pot for radical Islamists. I think we should take an interest in what is happening there and try to push back on it.

Yes, what I would do is try to control the eastern part of Syria of the Euphrates River Valley, and I would bring some regional Arab nations in to help do some of that. That gets us back at the bargaining table. In other words, it gives us some political leverage. We are not going to go to Damascus with military force, we are not going to go into Syria with tens of thousands of U.S. forces. There is no political will to do anything quite like that. But there are ways that we can get into a negotiated—have some negotiating leverage, if we have some skin in the game, as opposed to just walking away from it.

Mr. RATCLIFFE. So you talk about political will, and my time is expired, but this is an important question. I want your perspective,

I really would like it from all of you and hopefully some other panelists can follow up on it, but when you look at it from the other side of the ledger and political will, when we talk about this issue, do you think that Russia has enough invested that they would ever go to war over Syria?

General KEANE. Russia doesn't want to go to war over Syria. Russia certainly doesn't want to go to war with the United States over Syria. We don't need to be intimidated by Russia and Syria. We long since permitted them to take advantage of us. We—Secretary Kerry told the Russians, because they were rolling into Syria, do not, do not, under any circumstance, bomb the Syrian moderates who we were providing aid to by the Central Intelligence Agency. They had antitank missiles, and they were a formidable force as a result of that capability. The first people the Russians bombed were the Syrian monarchs with the antitank weapons. What did we do about that? Nothing. We should have told them right then and there, you do it that again, we are going to take down your airfield and we are going to go after your proxy force on the ground, the Syrian regime.

In my judgment, that would not have led to World War III, it would not have led to a war with the Russians. They have a limited capability, have never been outside their region in 35 years, they had 30 to 40 airplanes. We dominate that area in terms of military power. They would have backed up, but we had no will, we lacked will.

Mr. RATCLIFFE. I appreciate your insights, and I appreciate the Chairman's indulgence.

Chairman MCCAUL. The gentleman yields. The gentlelady from Florida, Ms. Demings, is recognized.

Ms. DEMINGS. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman. Thank you to all of our witnesses for being here with us today.

If we could just go back for just a moment, I know we have talked quite a bit about tech companies and the role that they play. I certainly, as all of you know, that without the social media platforms, ISIS and other groups like them would not have had the opportunity to recruit, train, communicate as well as they have. I know you have talked about, you know, better sharing of information. I know they have taken some of the ISIS-related content down. Also you talked about international cooperation.

If we just could go into some additional steps that tech companies could play to be held more accountable, or what could Congress do to assist in holding them more accountable? That is to all or any of the witnesses who would like to answer. Thank you.

Mr. GELTZER. If you give me enough opportunities, I will keep adding to my list of things that I think are worth pressing on here.

As I mentioned before, I do think while the companies have taken some steps in terms of hash-sharing and tool-sharing. It has been overwhelming focused on ISIS material. Congresswoman, you mentioned ISIS and other groups like it. That is a point worth pressing on, I think, as well. Because ISIS did, in a sense, revolutionize terrorist radicalization and recruitment on-line. They weren't the first. Al-Shabaab, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, had used the internet in ways that were novel at the time, but ISIS really took that to another level. But others have learned of course,

terrorist groups are learning, adaptive organizations. In particular, al-Qaeda and Syria, and General Keane mentioned them before, I agree with every word of his assessment of them as a real and possibly growing threat, they have changed how they use social media and websites and other platforms on-line to reach out, and recruit, and radicalize. But the company's tools, their focus thus far have really been on ISIS, and perhaps that's for good reason. ISIS was inspiring attacks world-wide, but the content from some of those other groups tends to remain up longer than the content from ISIS and that content is getting more and more worrisome, in my view. It is getting slicker, more sophisticated. It has always, of course, had a call for violence in it. So, to press the companies on taking the steps they have even made already and rapidly doing what they need to do internally, if that is resourcing, if that is staffing, to apply it to not just al-Qaeda in Syria whose names changes periodically, but they are fundamentally al-Qaeda in Syria, but also AQAP, and also al-Shabaab and also the groups probably yet to come, I think that is an important point, too.

Ms. DEMINGS. Thank you. Dr. Gartenstein-Ross?

Mr. GARTENSTEIN-ROSS. Yes. Thank you for that great question, Representative. The first thing I would like to point to is that I agree with Dr. Geltzer's remarks about al-Qaeda playing the game quite a bit better, and allowing the material to stay up longer. I would like to point to you, though, that when the big companies focus on taking down material from a group, they are extraordinarily effective. If you look at the percentage of Facebook accounts, Jihadist Facebook accounts that are taken down before they put up a single post, it is massive. We know what the companies are using, it is artificial intelligence, it is tracking IP addresses, it is tracking associations, but they are very effective.

Now in addition to that, the Chairman mentioned my past association with Google, I was a fellow at its think-tank, Jigsaw. They had a number of different very innovative initiatives, one thing they did was called the redirect method which took people who were looking for ISIS propaganda materials, and had a very ISIS-looking ad that then redirected them to a playlist with very neutral-looking, but anti-ISIS materials, that is a project I worked on with them. I think that talking to organizations like Jigsaw about the really interesting initiatives they have would be both helpful and enlightening for Members of Congress and the administration.

So this brings me to kind-of the key point that I would have, which is when you look at well-resourced organizations like Facebook, or Google, or Twitter, they are able to do this well, and they have a fair—at least when their eye is focused on the ball, they have a fair sense of what their obligations are. But smaller tech companies are constantly arising, they are players in the space, and they don't necessarily have either of the capabilities or the will to do what they need to remove this material. So I think a dialog about what Congress' role with respect to smaller companies, and also what larger companies like Facebook, like Google, like Twitter, what their role should be in helping to enhance the capabilities and the set of standards for smaller companies would be very helpful. In my time in Silicon Valley, I have had dialogs

with people who worked for some of the larger companies, and they feel that this exact initiative is needed.

Mrs. DEMINGS. Thank you. Ambassador or General.

General KEANE. I don't have anything to add. Those are excellent comments.

Mrs. DEMINGS. All right. Thank you. Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Chairman MCCAUL. The gentlelady yields. The gentleman from Wisconsin, Mr. Gallagher, is recognized.

Mr. GALLAGHER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Dr. Geltzer, in your testimony, you talked about the fact that we have lost our key counterterrorism part on the ground in Syria, the Kurds. Now, we do still have 60,000 strong Syrian democratic force which our special operators are working with, many of which are Kurds. But I think your broader point is well-taken, which is to say, it is hard to support those forces when they are under assault from the Turks. At a time when our interests seem to be converging with Israelis in the Sunni or Gulf States, Turkey is an outlier. It is hard for me to make sense of Syria without somehow getting the Turks to play a more productive role.

So I would be interested in your assessment and the assessment of the panel, what do we do with respect to Turkey? What are our leverage points, and how can we, as you rightly lay out, protect our Kurdish partners on the ground at the same time?

Mr. GELTZER. Thank you, Congressman Gallagher. I am grateful for the question. It is a hard balance. Partly, we marvel in the coalition that the United States has largely put together to execute this campaign; and partly the breadth of that coalition creates exactly the sort of problems that you identify. Those problems will only get exacerbated as the conflict evolves from the original one that brought together that coalition.

In terms of how to keep Turkey in the fight, which we needed to be, NATO partner, Incirlik Air Base, critical to our counter-ISIS operations, while at the same time, getting Turkey to back off the Syrian Kurds, that strikes me as an effort partly just sheer attention. The relationship that was built between a number of folks at the highest levels of our government and a number of folks at their counterparts in Ankara, was one of almost constant dialog, so that there were no surprises, there was an understanding that before, and particularly the Syrian Kurds were moving to a certain place, there was a sense of what their objectives would be there, what weapons they would have from us there, and how we would ensure that those weapons, as best we could, did not get into the hands of others associated with the Kurds, who are of concern to Ankara for good reason.

It seems, at some point, that that dialog broke down, and the type of assurance, truly daily at times, about where weapons were going and when the next operation against the next city would wrap up, and what the pause would look like, was either no longer being communicated, or, at least, no longer being believed.

I think as with a lot of diplomacy, the best solution is high-level attention again, probably visits from some of our most senior folks to there to get back on track, to get the assault on the Afrin Kurds, off the table, so that the Kurds can move away from Afrin and to

the Euphrates River Valley and take out the remnants of ISIS there, sir.

Mr. GALLAGHER. Dr. Gartenstein-Ross.

Mr. GARTENSTEIN-ROSS. Yeah, Representative Gallagher, I think that Turkey is a big concern, right. In addition to their military assault into Afrin, you have a slide toward authoritarianism within the country that we can all see. You have the scaling back of Ataturk's legacy, and the scaling back of secularism in the country, and you have something which has been well-reported, including in *The Washington Post*, which is support for some of the nastier and more radical elements of the Syrian fighters, including the ability of some known al-Qaeda operatives to pass through Turkey's border and to operate within Turkey.

I think all of this is a concern. I agree with Dr. Geltzler about the need for on-going dialog, and I think we need to do this with our eyes open about the fact of problems in that country are escalating from the perspective of the U.S. National interests.

Mr. GALLAGHER. Sure. General Keane.

General KEANE. Yeah. Certainly, we do have challenges here. The Turkish leadership certainly wanted Assad to go and are very frustrated with the United States because we were playing such a weak hand in Syria, largely due, I think, because we saw the Iranian intervention and what they were trying to achieve, and we didn't want to rattle them in terms of the nuclear deal that was on the table, and negotiations that were taking place.

Turkey also facilitated the growth of ISIS on their border openly. Turkey also facilitated the growth of al-Qaeda, because they strategically thought that those two radical groups would contribute to the removing Assad from power. That turned out not to be the case for ISIS, to be sure.

I also think that we made a strategic mistake in the United States military when we sided with the Syrian Kurds. I think it made since tactically, they had will, they had skill, but growing that capacity when they are not interested truly in dealing with Arab lands and all the way down into southeastern part of Syria.

What they are really interested in is carving out some territory for themselves in northern Syria, much to the detriment with our relationship with Turkey over this issue. I think we should back away from them, to be frank about it. I think that the relationship with Turkey, despite the Islamic nature of the country, they are a NATO country, they do matter. They have a significant military capacity that we have to value. We are using their air base. I think we have got to get back in the game with Turkey with some reasonable geopolitical expectations of what we want to achieve in Syria, which does not include a large dependency on the Syrian Kurds.

Mr. GALLAGHER. I have run out of time. So I apologize, Ambassador Crocker. So maybe—I don't know if we end up with more time afterwards I will revisit this and I also want to argue with Dr. Geltzer about one more thing.

Chairman MCCAUL. Great points. Gentelady from Texas, Ms. Jackson Lee is recognized.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Let me thank the Chairman and Ranking Member, particularly for insightful comments that have been

made, and thank the witnesses. Each of you are serving your Nation in a very important time. I, too, have known General Keane, first of all, in the series of work that he has done, and note that he was at the Pentagon on 9/11. That it must have been an experience that he will never want to repeat, never forget. We thank you for your service on that very tragic, heinous day.

Ambassador, of course, we have crossed paths so many times in Iraq, Pakistan, and I believe Afghanistan, it just looks like we have seen each other, and you are certainly well-deserved of the honor that was given to you. So let me just be very quick and say, democracy is good, but sometimes the inconsistency of our policies here in the United States can be very challenging. Elections come, and policies come and go. So in your comments, I would appreciate your thoughts about how that influences, but I would like you to comment on some holistic perspectives, and that is, the inconsistent policy, Ambassador, with Pakistan, the willingness to sanction Pakistan for what seems to be incompatibility, or lack of appreciation of any work that they are doing with the Taliban in Afghanistan, putting things on that those of us that work with Pakistan have to put out the fire.

The issue of foreign fighters who now don't have maybe a foreign fight, well, I believe terrorism is franchised. Where are these 120,000-plus or others? Obviously, some lost in the battle. Where are these foreign fighters and how do we have to look at that?

Three, this is Homeland Security, but I think we are interrelated with the State Department on the issues that we have. So if you can comment on the technology end, what policy does the Government need to have in speaking to our tech community in saying we need you to be as vigilant constantly as you have been, and maybe you need to embrace the small companies to help them out as well? Ambassador and General Keane, if you would.

Mr. CROCKER. Thank you, Congresswoman. It is a very important issue, our relationship with Pakistan, and it is worth spending a couple of minutes on. We are a great Nation, we are a great people. We do have our weaknesses. One of them is, we don't care about history, that is, history a pejorative for most Americans. History in this region, history defines today and predicts tomorrow. We are ignorant at our cost. Important here, because the Pakistanis have their own version of their history and our history with them. They will recall that after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, that we allied ourselves very closely with Pakistan. The anti-Soviet Jihad was staged out of Pakistan's northwest frontier province, organized by us with Pakistan as an absolutely critical partner.

But once the Soviets were defeated, we decided our work there was done, even though we could see the Afghan civil war coming, which it did in all its horror. So not only did we pull out, we no longer needed Pakistan anymore, so we stopped requesting waivers to the Pressler amendment, which called for the cessation of all economic or military assistance to any country pursuing a nuclear weapons program. For a decade, the administration got a waiver for that. We didn't need Pakistan anymore, no more waivers, and they were completely sanctioned as far as any assistance from us went. Then the civil war broke out on their border. When the

Taliban started to show some purchase, yep, the Pakistanis went in on that, because it looked like that might be the one group that could stop that civil war before it crossed their border.

So where have we been post-9/11? Well, we are back. The Pakistanis asked themselves, Well, that is great. When are you leaving again? Because that is what you Americans do. I spent 3 years there. It is an imperfect relationship, goodness knows, and the Pakistanis do a lot of things that are bad for us and bad for themselves. But a country of 185 million people, nuclear weapons, I think we have to be careful how we see and use that relationship. In essence what the Pakistanis are saying, or said to me was: If you think we are going to go after the Taliban in Pakistan, turn them into a mortal enemy of ours, as you get set to leave, because that is what you do, you are going to leave, and then we will have that existential threat, if you think we are going to do that, you are completely crazy.

So I would have liked to have seen the administration say, as the President did, that we are no longer driven by the calendar in Afghanistan, we are driven by conditions. We have important National security interests, we are going to be there to protect them with the force that we need at the time. To then have said to the Pakistanis, you worry about us going, we are not going this time. We have just made it clear, it is about conditions. So isn't it time to rethink your own strategic logic? Oh, by the way, while you are thinking that through again, do you remember what happened to Mohammad Akhtar Mansoor, Mullah Omar's successor, killed with a U.S. military drone strike with—inside Pakistan. That while you are working it out, any Taliban leader we can find, we are going to pop him. Maybe it will be in Balochistan, maybe it will be in Rawalpindi. So why don't you take those two elements, and see if you want to develop a different strategic logic. That is not what we did.

So once again, we are in this confrontational relationship with Pakistan over Afghanistan, largely. It is not going to take us anywhere good. But again, that failure to demonstrate strategic patience hurts us very greatly, there and really elsewhere in the region, and, indeed, in the world.

General KEANE. Yes, I certainly agree and associate myself with everything that the Ambassador said. Listen, we created so many of these problems for ourselves with 17 years, you know, involved in this war in Afghanistan. Largely due—the protraction of the war is largely due to our own policy decisions. Because very quickly, after the Taliban were deposed as we know, we made a decision to go into Iraq. That immediately made the war in Afghanistan is what we call in the military economy of force, actually they were put on a diet. That was from 2002, that is when we started taking resources away, all the way to 2008. That was the first time we put any substantive resources back into Afghanistan, and that is because the surge had succeeded in Iraq, and we were able to reduce our forces, and we finally had capacity again.

So this protraction has been due to our policy. I think President Obama had the right idea to do a surge in Afghanistan, but unfortunately, he pulled our forces out after 15 months, and that was a tragic mistake.

So that is what has given this pause to the Pakistanis who are harboring two safe havens of the Afghan Taliban inside their country. That also leads to the protraction of the war.

For the first time now, we have had a President who has said I am committed to see this thing through, but that is going to take more than rhetoric. There is going to have to be some real commitment here. We may have to adjust the force levels and other capacity levels based on the conditions that are taking place in that country and have flexibility. We also have to keep the American people engaged and explain, why is this important to us? We don't do a very good job of that. Now, President Bush didn't do a very good job of it, President Obama didn't do a very good job of it, and I am hoping this President will see the need to do that. Why Afghanistan matters, and why we don't want it to become a safe haven for terrorists again, for which to attack our allies, and also the American people.

Chairman MCCAUL. The gentlelady yields back. I believe Congressman Gallagher had a brief wrap-up question.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Thank you.

Mr. GALLAGHER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have inherited General Perry's time, so I will try and channel him with this one. So Dr. Geltzer, I think, if I understand your argument, is that the—what you call anti-Muslim and an anti-Muslim travel ban, the risk is that it would alienate key Muslim communities in the Middle East that we need to participate in the fight against ISIS, right? So my question is, is indeed that happening? How would we know? What is our metric for alienation? I mean, I perceive there to be, at least among leadership in key Sunni Muslim countries, a closer relationship between this administration and the last.

Mr. GELTZER. Thanks for the opportunity to speak to that. So I probably worry most about the communities right here, I think there are communities here that have been fairly outspoken in saying that the travel ban, among other policies, but very much at the heart of those policies, feels to them to target them. In fact, I think they have good reason to feel that way, given how it has been framed as a campaign promise, and now delivered on as a Presidential policy. Those communities strike me as the ones that have an opportunity to intervene with those who might be prone to radicalization, or even radicalizing in ways that we would all like to see, ideally before those sorts of individuals become on the law enforcement route. You know, if you talk to FBI, they take no pleasure in finding teenagers who are on the road to material support, trying sometimes to dissuade them or their parents from staying on that path, and ultimately doing what the FBI should do, which is if they committed a crime, arresting them, and charging them for it. But ideally, communities can find ways to intervene sooner than that, and a number of studies have shown what is called a bystander effect, that in something like 70 to 80 percent of cases, those who are on the radicalizing path, give some indication of that to those who know them well, their family, their teacher, their community members. But if you alienate those communities, I am not sure they feel prone to intervene in those ways, or ultimately in the way that you might need by simply calling law enforcement.

I do think the overseas communities are important too, it is hard to get the data on exactly how foreign communities react to U.S. domestic policies, but it would seem, at a minimum, unlikely to appeal to them to have this religion-centric approach to filtering those who come to this country, rather than the very, very careful individualized vetting of which I am fully supportive, and that I think should always be strengthened to insure that we are using all of our intelligence to stop threats from entering our borders.

Mr. GALLAGHER. I pressed my luck with time. So Mr. Chairman, thank you for your indulgence.

Chairman MCCAUL. Thank you, I want to thank the witnesses for a very enlightening discussion. Ambassador, you mentioned failures of imagination, and a good friend of mine, Admiral Inman in Austin, worked with the 9/11 Commission to coin that phrase. Not to plug my book, but I wrote a book called *Failures of Imagination* to talk about what we have to imagine, what the threats could be and what keeps us up at night. It has been a great discussion and I want to thank all of you for being here today.

Pursuant to committee rule VII(D) the hearing record will be open for 10 days. Without objection, this committee stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 12:38 p.m., the committee was adjourned.]

A P P E N D I X

QUESTION FROM RANKING MEMBER BENNIE G. THOMPSON FOR RYAN C. CROCKER

Question 1. How have the Trump administration's funding cuts to stabilization and assistance programs, particularly to countries in the Middle East, Africa, and South and Southeast Asia, including the Sahel region, hurt our ability to defend against terror threats to the homeland and to our interests abroad?

Answer. Response was not received at the time of publication.

QUESTIONS FROM HONORABLE SHELIA JACKSON LEE FOR RYAN C. CROCKER

Question 1. How have the Trump administration's funding cuts to the State Department hurt our ability to defend against terror groups that are threatening the homeland and our interests abroad?

Answer. Response was not received at the time of publication.

Question 2. What should be our policies in terms of technology companies and ensuring that technology platforms cannot be misused by terrorist groups?

Answer. Response was not received at the time of publication.

QUESTION FROM HONORABLE KATHLEEN M. RICE FOR RYAN C. CROCKER

Question. We currently do not have a Senate-confirmed Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs. The Trump administration has failed to even nominate people to the Ambassador positions for many of our key allies in the Middle East, including Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Qatar. How can the United States conduct comprehensive foreign policy, including working with our regional partners to combat ISIS, without these critical diplomatic positions?

Answer. Response was not received at the time of publication.

QUESTION FROM RANKING MEMBER BENNIE G. THOMPSON FOR JOHN M. "JACK"
KEANE

Question. How have the Trump administration's funding cuts to stabilization and assistance programs, particularly to countries in the Middle East, Africa, and South and Southeast Asia, including the Sahel region, hurt our ability to defend against terror threats to the homeland and to our interests abroad?

Answer. Response was not received at the time of publication.

QUESTIONS FROM HONORABLE SHEILA JACKSON LEE FOR JOHN M. "JACK" KEANE

Question 1. How have the Trump administration's funding cuts to the State Department hurt our ability to defend against terror groups that are threatening the homeland and our interests abroad?

Answer. Response was not received at the time of publication.

Question 2. What should be our policies in terms of technology companies and ensuring that technology platforms cannot be misused by terrorist groups?

Answer. Response was not received at the time of publication.

QUESTION FROM RANKING MEMBER BENNIE G. THOMPSON FOR DAVEED
GARTENSTEIN-ROSS

Question. How have the Trump administration's funding cuts to stabilization and assistance programs, particularly to countries in the Middle East, Africa, and South and Southeast Asia, including the Sahel region, hurt our ability to defend against terror threats to the homeland and to our interests abroad?

Answer. Response was not received at the time of publication.

QUESTIONS FROM RANKING MEMBER BENNIE G. THOMPSON FOR JOSHUA A. GELTZER

Question 1. How have the Trump administration's funding cuts to stabilization and assistance programs, particularly to countries in the Middle East, Africa, and South and Southeast Asia, including the Sahel region, hurt our ability to defend against terror threats to the homeland and to our interests abroad?

Answer. Sustainable counterterrorism requires not only addressing immediate threats to American interests but also building the foundations for undercutting the drivers of radicalization in the future. Stabilization and assistance programs can be critical to achieving that longer-term goal, and thus to ensuring that the United States and its partners do not find themselves in repeated cycles of using near-term military, law enforcement, and other tools to address immediate terrorist threats only to see similar threats reemerge because terrorists are able to capitalize on economic and political vacuums to recruit and radicalize. Cutting funding for such programs suggests a worrisomely militaristic and short-sighted approach to counterterrorism that bodes poorly for the enduring reduction of terrorist threats to Americans at home and abroad.

Question 2. What do you deem to be effective counterterrorism tactics used by the private sector—as well as tactics used by the Government, or some combination of Government and the private sector—to marginalize ISIS on-line?

Answer. Leading technology companies deserve credit for the steps that they have taken to attempt to address ISIS's on-line recruitment efforts, even if more work remains to be done. In December 2016, Facebook, Google (including YouTube), Microsoft, and Twitter announced a hash-sharing coalition through which they would share the digital signatures of terrorism-related content removed by any single company so that the other companies could consider removing and blocking such content from their own platforms. Six months later, the same companies announced that they would be forming the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism in order to cooperate more broadly to address terrorist threats on-line, such as by sharing the tools that they use to identify terrorism content in the first place. Earlier this month, the Forum announced that it would be augmenting the earlier hash-sharing database by identifying terrorism content not yet found on any single platform but identified externally so that participating companies could consider preventing that content from being uploaded in the first place. These are all worthwhile forms of cooperation undertaken by the private sector to prevent terrorism content from remaining unchallenged on major platforms. While these efforts live in the private sector, the companies undertaking them would surely benefit from being informed by the Government on an on-going basis as to what it is seeing in terms of new on-line tactics and behavior from terrorists.

The private sector has also experimented with admirable efforts to try to marginalize ISIS on-line by augmenting positive counter-messaging. Most notable is the "redirect method" pioneered by Google's Jigsaw. Under that approach, when a user searches on Google in ways that suggest a potential interest in joining ISIS, the sponsored (paid) content section of Google's search results features links to alternative messaging that might lead the user away from joining ISIS, such as links to stories about ISIS's hypocrisy or about parents who have lost their children to ISIS as foreignfighters. Similarly, Microsoft's search engine, Bing, has devoted its sponsored content section to counter-messaging in response to ISIS-related searches. These are helpful steps; and they, too, would benefit from the Government's distinctive, on-going expertise in what counter-messaging themes and tactics may be particularly effective.

Question 3. What role should the Government play in regulating content versus partnering and empowering technology companies to self-regulate?

Answer. While technology companies find themselves, in key respects, on the front lines of the terrorist challenge posed by activities on their platforms, the Government has a significant role to play in informing and thus augmenting the companies' efforts. The companies, as private-sector entities, enforce their own terms of service, but the Government has an unparalleled expertise in what new messages terrorists are promoting on-line, how terrorists are rejuvenating on-line accounts once those are suspended, how terrorist activities on-line are crossing different platforms, and more. That sort of information should, to the maximum extent possible consistent with the critical protection of sources and methods, be shared with technology companies as expeditiously as feasible so that policy officials, lawyers, and perhaps most importantly engineers at the companies can make swift, effective use of it in addressing terrorists' latest tactics on-line. Companies should, in turn, welcome and utilize that information and provide detailed feedback to the Government on what is particularly useful to the companies' efforts and what more can be provided to empower and accelerate those efforts.

Question 4. How should we be judging technology companies' work, both in terms of taking down ISIS content and implementing more holistic policies to counter violent extremism on technology companies' respective platforms? What more can be done?

Answer. Technology companies have made significant strides in recent years in contesting ISIS's virtual presence and facilitating the offering of counter-messaging. The steps noted above, from the formation of the hash-sharing coalition to the founding of the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism to the pioneering of the redirect method, deserve praise. At the same time, ISIS's on-line presence remains both significant and concerning—indeed, threatening. That, in turn, suggests that there is value in technology companies at least experimenting with additional approaches to addressing ISIS's persistent on-line recruitment efforts. For example, social media and file-upload platforms might try utilizing advances in machine learning to identify—based on similarity in content, similarity to accounts associated with related content, logo and language identification, and other factors—new pieces of terrorism content before such content has been uploaded, and then block its emergence. Reviewers employed by the companies could then assess “pre-blocked” content and permit the uploading of anything erroneously blocked, such as a legitimate news story about terrorism; the machine learning would also be improved by the feedback generated by these corrections.

Additionally, social media and file-upload platforms might share with one another the information associated with accounts suspended for disseminating terrorism content, in addition to the existing sharing of that content itself. This would allow other companies to determine whether they have any accounts on their platforms associated with the same information and scrutinize those accounts for any terrorism-related violations of their respective terms of service.

Also, search engines might expand their current offering of links to counter-messaging from the sponsored content section of search results to the primary (non-sponsored) search results themselves, sometimes called the “organic” search results. This expansion would boost the salience of that counter-messaging and thereby increase the likelihood that potential recruits to ISIS are exposed to the counter-messaging that might cause them to reconsider joining the group or at least delay their radicalization process.

QUESTIONS FROM HONORABLE KATHLEEN M. RICE FOR JOSHUA A. GELTZER

Question 1a. I have introduced two bills, including one that has passed the House with this Committee's support, to require Federal agencies to research if terrorist groups are using virtual currencies like Bitcoin to fund their illicit operations.

To the best of your knowledge, is ISIS using these virtual currencies?

Answer. Based on reports from leading sources such as the Council on Foreign Relations¹ and the RAND Corporation,² it is my understanding that ISIS has made use of virtual currencies. I do not have independent knowledge of such use, however. Research on this issue by Federal agencies would seem timely and important.

Question 1b. If so, what more should Congress and the Federal Government be doing to stop them?

Answer. Assuming that, as the credible reports noted above and others suggest, terrorist groups are in fact using virtual currencies, Congress and the Executive branch should consider how to apply to such emerging currencies an adaptation of the “know your customer” regime that, in the context of traditional banking, has proven helpful in counter-terrorist financing efforts. Adapting that regime—implemented through the Customer Identification Program put in place after 9/11—from the highly regulated context of traditional banking to the notoriously unregulated context of virtual currencies poses a significant challenge, and doing so effectively may well require transnational cooperation. But that regime has helped to crack down on (though of course not entirely eliminate) terrorists' efforts to move money

¹Ankit Panda, “Cryptocurrencies and National Security,” Council on Foreign Relations, February 28, 2018, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/cryptocurrencies-and-national-security>.

²David Manheim et al., “Are Terrorists Using Cryptocurrencies?,” RAND Corporation, April 21, 2017, <https://www.rand.org/blog/2017/04/are-terrorists-using-cryptocurrencies.html>; Antonia Ward, “Bitcoin and the Dark Web: The New Terrorist Threat?,” RAND Corporation, January 22, 2018, <https://www.rand.org/blog/2018/01/bitcoin-and-the-dark-web-the-new-terrorist-threat.html>.

through the traditional banking system by requiring banks to obtain identifying information from those seeking to transfer funds of sufficient size to trigger the requirement; and an analogous approach to virtual currencies may prove helpful in addressing new forms of terrorists' financial flows.

