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Testimony before the

Senate Committee on Foreign Relations

The Future of Counter-Terrorism Strategy

December 1, 2016

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Chairman Corker, Ranking Member Cardin, and distinguished members of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, I am honored to be with you today to discuss the future of counter-terrorism strategy.

This is an important moment to reflect on the state of the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) and the lessons terrorist organizations have learned from it. More than fifteen years after 9/11, we face a more diverse and complicated global terrorism threat, with continued and quickening adaptations from groups like ISIS and al Qaida. With a new administration and Congress a few weeks away, this is also a critical moment to reflect on our own lessons learned and how the United States should shape its counter-terrorism strategy to defeat the persistent threat of violent Islamic extremism.

Introduction

The nature of the global terrorist threat today is more geographically dispersed, adaptive, and strategically relevant than ever before. Terrorist attacks appear to be quickening and intensifying around the globe, and the perception of a worldwide metastasizing threat is increasing.

Terrorist groups continue to learn from each other – with demonstration effects of attacks, methodologies, and messaging echoing instantaneously around the world. These groups and their adherents adapt quickly to pressure and opportunity, leveraging elements of globalization and modern communication while exploiting seams in security along with weaknesses in governance to their full advantage.

These groups also take advantage of and exacerbate dislocation, conflict, and sectarianism to fuel their agendas, fill their coffers, and gain footholds and adherents. In the context of broader dislocations and national anxieties, terrorist attacks and messaging take on more strategic relevance. Even a series of smaller-scale attacks could have broad social effects and political impact that affect the trajectory of nations and societies.

The rise and reach of ISIS has driven much of the adaptation we have witnessed in the global terrorist landscape over the past few years. The emergence of ISIS outpaced expectations and surprised most authorities and terrorism analysts. With the announcement of the caliphate in Iraq and Syria and the taking of Mosul and other major cities, ISIS sought to redraw the map of the Middle East, threaten the West, establish provinces ("wilayats") and terrorist alliances, and inspire attacks well beyond the Middle East. ISIS has perpetrated serious attacks in Europe, Beirut, Istanbul, Egypt, Bangladesh, and the Gulf countries, and its affiliates and aspirant supporters have attacked far afield in Nigeria, Afghanistan, Indonesia, San Bernardino, and Orlando.

Likewise, al Qaida affiliates have continued to perpetrate terrorist attacks from West Africa to Yemen, with members perpetrating the 2015 Charlie Hebdo attack in Paris. Al Qaida is now smartly rebranding itself in key conflicts and war zones, such as in Syria, Yemen, and Libya, and attempting to reemerge again as part of the legitimate local landscape.

Though ISIS and al Qaida have been in strategic competition and in direct conflict in certain arenas like Syria, they form part of a broader violent Islamic extremist movement that can find common cause, leverage each others' networks, and reflag quickly to adapt to opportunities in the environment. We have seen this in the shift in allegiances declared from al Qaida to ISIS by Boko Haram in West Africa, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan in Central Asia, and Taleban and al Qaida members in Afghanistan. Though competition still exists, cooperation could accelerate in certain contexts, especially in the face of increasing Shia and Iranian pressure and proxy battles.

All the while, these violent Islamic extremist organizations have occupied territory – creating a terrorist archipelago encompassing not just the deserts, jungles, and mountains of past safe havens but urban and resource-rich environments. This has allowed both ISIS and al Qaida to exploit civilian populations and to develop local and regional war economies. It has allowed ISIS in particular to leverage the establishment of the caliphate as its demonstration that it can govern an Islamic state and to animate the global terrorist movement in support of its cause. This has revived and connected pre-existing jihadi networks from Southeast Asia to the streets of Europe.

Dangerously, failing to understand and anticipate ISIS' intent and capabilities – and the shifting terrorist landscape -- has led to some misguided assumptions that have now been shattered in the wake of a series of serious attacks, particularly following the Paris and Brussels attacks. As part of its broader strategy of establishing the caliphate, ISIS is purposefully confronting the West. While creating its caliphate and expanding its provinces to places like Libya and Yemen, ISIS has been planning to strike the West, using Western operatives flowing into the conflict zone by the thousands, and is openly attempting to inspire singular attacks by sympathetic radicals in Western societies. It has built these capabilities over time and taken advantage of intelligence and security gaps to implant operatives in Europe. This is a strategy not triggered by provocation or weakness, but rather is a deliberate part of ISIS' planning.

European authorities have come to grips with the realization that ISIS is targeting the heart of Europe with dozens of operatives. Ongoing raids, arrests, and disruption of plots continue throughout the continent.

This should not have come as a surprise to those watching ISIS erase the border between Iraq and Syria, occupy major cities in the Middle East, and take advantage of the safe haven it has established and of the foreign fighters flowing in and out of the region.

Indeed, with the thousands of foreign fighters traveling to terrorist-controlled territory and others animated by the allure and narrative of a historic and heroic caliphate battling infidel forces, ISIS and al Qaida can more easily mobilize attacks against the West. France and Belgium have been particularly vulnerable given the role and importance of Francophone terrorist networks embedded in pockets of radicalization like Molenbeek in Brussels. But they are not alone. The rest of Europe is vulnerable, and the United States is at risk for acts of terror resembling what occurred in San Bernardino, Orlando, or from more organized attacks by foreign fighters or sympathizers.

The United States does not face the same kind of threats from ISIS and al Qaida that Europe does, but the threat remains real – for U.S. citizens and interests abroad and for the Homeland.

Recent terrorist attacks inspired by ISIS and violent Islamic extremism in Orlando; San Bernardino; Garland, Texas; Brooklyn; Chattanooga; and Philadelphia reflect an environment in which radicalized or deranged individuals are willing to attack fellow citizens on behalf of a foreign terrorist organization or its brand. The case this past week of the Somali refugee who attacked fellow students at Ohio State University by running them over and stabbing them may be another example of this kind of threat. Terrorism-related prosecutions brought by the U.S. Department of Justice over the past few years demonstrate a fairly consistent, yet small number of cases of radicalized individuals willing to support ISIS and al Qaida as well as plan attacks.

There have been small pockets of radicalization that have emerged, for example in the Somali-American community which has seen young members of its community travel to Somalia to fight with al Shabaab and more recently to fight in Iraq and Syria. ISIS and al Qaida have continued to target Americans – including young women - specifically for recruitment, including by using targeted social media and peer-to-peer communications to identify, isolate, and mobilize operatives in the United States.

The FBI Director has stated that there are open "homegrown violent extremist investigations" in all fifty states. The diversity and volume of cases fueled by the ideology of ISIS and al Qaida have challenged U.S. counter-terrorism capabilities to identify, monitor, and determine the seriousness and priority of each case.

It is important that we examine and understand the threat soberly. ISIS, al Qaida, and like-minded groups are neither omnipotent nor comprised of ten-foot giants. They have not been able to mobilize large percentages of susceptible Muslims to violence, and the communities impacted by their brutality have largely rejected their message.

But they have rallied thousands to their cause, perpetrated some of the worst brutalities of the 21st century, and caused major disruptions and dislocation in an Arc of Instability from Central Asia to West Africa. Their rapid and devious adaptations – in attack methodologies, messaging, recruitment, financing, and governance – are dangerous and cannot be ignored or discounted. ISIS' use of chemical weapons, establishment of a chemical weapons unit, and surveillance of Belgian nuclear infrastructure and personnel raise the specter of a group intent on using weapons of mass destruction.

The blind spots in our intelligence have only heightened concerns of what we are not seeing or hearing regarding terrorist plans. And these groups remain intent and capable of striking the West in strategically impactful ways.

Effective Pressure on ISIS

U.S. and coalition pressure on ISIS has been significant and important to diminishing its capabilities and affecting its strategic posture. ISIS is losing ground in Iraq, Libya, and Syria. The U.S., Iraqis, Kurds, and other allied forces have put greater pressure on ISIS physical havens and urban strongholds throughout the Middle East. Turkish-backed forces recently took back the

symbolic city of Dabiq, the battle for Mosul is well underway, and Libyan forces are cleaning up remnants of ISIS in Sirte.

Iraqi forces, supported by the Kurds, the United States, and the broader coalition, will eventually retake Mosul. The question will be when, with how much bloodshed and cost, and whether Mosul and surrounding territory can be held and rebuilt. Dislodging ISIS from its physical footprints is the most urgent and important counter-terrorism measure for the international community. Mosul and Raqqa must be taken. From Raqqa, its so-called capital in Syria, ISIS has been able to plot, plan, communicate, adapt, raise funds, and operate openly and freely.

The targeting of the organization's key leaders, especially the operational core, has proven important to affecting the ability of the group to adapt quickly to pressure. Since last year, there has been an increased pace in the targeted killing of key ISIS leadership, to include Omar al-Shishani, a top military commander in Syria; Abu Mohammed al-Adnani, ISIS's official spokesman, director of external relations, and senior leader; Wa'il Adil Hasan Salman al-Fayad, the minister of information; and Abd al-Basit al-Iraqi, emir of external networks and Western targeting.

The constriction on ISIS funding has been critical as well. The Treasury Department, the military, and the intelligence community have increased the pressure on the ISIS war chest. ISIS has run a war economy with a diversified portfolio. Its ability to control significant territory, with populations to tax and resources to exploit, has allowed the organization to govern and expand its operations. Revenue from running oil operations in Iraq and Syria has been a major source of income for the group – taking advantage of the black market in oil and old Iraqi oil smuggling routes. It has developed mobile refineries and transport to transact with brokers, including even the Assad regime in Syria.

The United States had to accelerate its understanding of how ISIS is doing business and moving money within its territory and beyond. U.S. authorities have squeezed certain key chokepoints for the ISIS economy where it touches the regional and global financial system – including by isolating the financial institutions that sit in ISIS-controlled territory and sanctioning key financiers and brokers. Ultimately though, we have had to recognize that a major enabling factor for financing is ISIS control of territory and resources – and therefore that the United States and its allies have to dislodge the group physically in order to fully cut off its financial lifeline. There is no magic button at Treasury to do this.

This is why economic disruption is a key element of the war plan against ISIS. The U.S. and coalition airstrikes – including on cash distribution centers -- and pressure on the ground have dislodged the Islamic State from some of its oil and gas supplies and infrastructure and put real pressure on its economy. The effects are real, and the ISIS budget appears to be constricting significantly. ISIS recently cut fighter salaries by 50% and suspended "death benefits" to families of ISIS fighters killed in combat.

Importantly, demonstrating that ISIS is losing in the physical space -- and losing its hold on the caliphate -- will begin to shatter the myth of ISIS victory and the allure of the caliphate to the global movement. This is essential to stunting the expansion of the movement. The Siren Song

for ISIS has been the call of a realized, functioning caliphate where true believers can unite to build and defend a "truly Islamic society." The inability to hold and defend territory along with the organization's failure to govern successfully or to capture hearts and minds of the locals will pierce some of the romantic appeal of ISIS. Dejected and disaffected recruits have amplified disillusionment with the group. This, in combination with more intense enforcement efforts and greater difficulty traveling into ISIS-controlled territory, has slowed the pace of foreign fighters significantly.

The effect of this increased pressure is good news, but ISIS has had time and space to operate, spread its reach, and demonstrate its capabilities. ISIS and al Qaida – and the violent Islamic extremist movement they represent -- will continue to take advantage of opportunities in the environment and adapt.

Adaptations on the Horizon

Even if all of ISIS' footholds in the Middle East and North Africa are retaken, ISIS will remain a threat and will adapt. ISIS will certainly remain a player in the Syrian context as long as that civil war continues and as long as it is able to hold territory or galvanize opposition to the Assad regime.

Though ISIS has attempted to create a proto-state, it remains a hierarchical terrorist organization. If ISIS is driven out of the major cities, it could continue to strike using classic terrorist tactics like vehicle-born improvised explosive devices against population centers in the Middle East. Some "retreating" ISIS leadership and personnel can blend back into the population and refugee flows, deploy to neighboring countries, or lie in wait with sympathetic Iraqi or Syrian allies. Here the experience of the conversion of a depleted al Qaida in Iraq into what eventually became ISIS is instructive. Remnants of ISIS could take advantage of weak security, worsening sectarian tension, and episodes of political crisis to reassert or rebrand itself.

ISIS has also established footholds well beyond Iraq and Syria. ISIS has various wilayats (or proclaimed provinces) in North Africa, Central Asia, and the Arabian Gulf that allow the ISIS brand to project power and threaten U.S. and allied interests. The recent uptick of ISIS-claimed attacks in Pakistan has demonstrated this reach. In addition, the ability of ISIS to embed in terrorist insurgencies like Boko Haram in West Africa and into enduring conflicts as in Libya and Yemen provides the network a platform to operate and regenerate. ISIS could certainly contemplate moving its command and control – or elements of its foreign operations – outside of danger zones into safe havens. If such provinces or platforms exist, there will be the opportunity for those platforms to support and reinforce each other – creating a network for ISIS to operate and support adherents even if it lacks a functioning "capital."

Unfortunately, ISIS has had time and space to recruit, deploy, and inspire foreign fighters and those attracted to its message. Even though many of the remaining ISIS foreign fighters will die in defense of territory in Iraq and Syria, there is a tail to the foreign fighters and cells returned to the West, Asia, and Africa. The foreign fighter diaspora is a real threat. ISIS has had over 5,000 Western foreign fighters, as well as upwards of 40,000 total foreign fighters, from which to choose to leverage for different purposes, including returning to Europe to perpetrate attacks.

ISIS organized an external operational unit, and has marked operatives for attacks in Europe, many of which have been thwarted. Francophone cells – comprised of French, Belgian, and dual nationals – have proven a lethal network for ISIS attack plotting in Europe. Some of these Western operatives have been trained to evade scrutiny, engage in operational security -- including the use of encryption technologies -- and execute strategic attacks in concert. The sheer volume of potential operatives, along with unknown actors, has overwhelmed even the best European services.

ISIS can also survive and influence through a digital diaspora. ISIS has already turned explicitly to trying to inspire any and all attacks in place – and has grown more willing to claim less sophisticated and seemingly less coordinated attacks in the United States, including the attack this week on the campus of Ohio State University. It has innovated the use of targeted messaging and social media for recruitment and inspiration.

There has also been a powerful digital afterlife for certain radical ideologues and operatives, whose effect and ability to radicalize or inspire has far outlived their natural life. The persistent appearance of Anwar al Awlaqi, the Yemeni-American cleric, in the files and motivations of radicalized individuals in the West, including the United States, is a troubling factor. In general, ISIS and its supporters could attempt to move functionally from a physical caliphate into a virtual environment. Authorities worry about what such adaptations may entail.

Importantly, al Qaida has taken advantage of the attention ISIS has drawn to reinvigorate its networks, appearing dangerously again in places like Afghanistan training operatives. In many cases, al Qaida has regenerated, embedding itself from the ground up with local populations – often renaming itself to gain legitimacy and to emphasize its local bona fides. We have seen this in places like Syria where Jabhat-al Nusrah has distanced itself from al Qaida and been renamed Jahbat Fatah al-Sham. At the start of the Arab Spring, I noted that al Qaida and associated movements would try to take full advantage of the dislocations and likely disillusionment with the Arab Spring. The battle for "reform" and control is still at play.

A danger in this environment is that the growing proxy battles between Iranian backed terrorist groups and militias on the one hand and Sunni groups, populations, and regimes on the other will animate greater support or at least tolerance for ISIS and al Qaida remnants – and any like-minded allies – in order to beat back the perceived aggression of Shia forces. This has been a problem in conflict zones like Syria where al Qaida affiliates have proven at times to be the most effective fighting forces against the Assad regime and its Iranian and Hizballah backers. Sectarian tendencies have exacerbated mistrust, as with the Iraqi government's recent decision to incorporate Shia militias into the military over the objection of Sunni lawmakers.

This proxy battle is likely to grow worse. The West seemingly underestimated how far Iran would go to prevent the fall of the Assad regime, the Iranian regime's sole Arab ally in the Middle East. Since the Syrian revolt began in 2011, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei – who controls Iran's foreign policy -- has implemented a full-throttled strategy executed by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) to prevent Assad's fall and preserve an Iranian-allied Alawite-led enclave stretching from Damascus up to the Lebanese border and the Mediterranean Sea. In order to offset the bled-out Syrian army, the IRGC has mobilized an

international Shiite expeditionary force comprised of fighters from Afghanistan, Syria, Pakistan, Iraq, Lebanon, and even as far as West Africa.

In mid-2015, when pro-Assad forces were overstretched and Assad was in danger of falling, Iran coordinated with Russia to escalate militarily and save their embattled ally – thus inviting Russia back to the Middle East after nearly four decades and positioning it near NATO's southern flank. Iranian and Russian investment appears to have paid off. They have virtually eliminated the option of Assad's overthrow by military means and are on the cusp of achieving a major victory in capturing Aleppo, Syria's largest city prior to the war. Despite costs, Syria has given the IRGC the opportunities to hone its international expeditionary model, what Guard commanders call the nucleus of a "global Basij," and gain a long-term foothold in Syria and by Israel's doorstep.

The ISIS Demonstration Effect

Other groups have learned from the ISIS experience and its innovation, especially as ISIS propaganda, videos, and messaging are tweeted and streamed globally and reported and repeated by legitimate media sources.

The United States is concerned about the demonstration effects of successful or attempted terrorist attacks, especially in the West. Radicalized individuals in the United States could always be inspired to attack – to feed off of the attention and momentum of attacks in Europe or to engage in copycat attacks. In a globalized, instantaneous, and fluid information environment, would-be terrorists can learn quickly from those who have executed successful attacks and may understand or study the security protocols employed to attempt to thwart such attacks. The more terrorist attacks are successful, the more concern there will be that radicalized individuals in the United States will be mobilized to attack.

The ISIS demonstration effect is dangerous.

Terrorist Methodologies. ISIS has certainly improved certain terrorist and insurgent methodologies, using tunnel systems in territory it holds; sequential urban terrorist attacks (reminiscent of the Mumbai attacks); experimenting with drones; and deploying chemical weapons. The organization has had time and space to adapt its tactics, and others in the jihadi environment have watched and learned.

ISIS has decided to use three forms of attacks that make overseas counterterrorism efforts even more difficult to manage. ISIS leadership has planned and orchestrated attacks, with growing sophistication and reliance on an operational lead ("directed attacks"). In a recent attack in Germany, the terrorist was communicating with a handler directing the operative from Syria during the attack. ISIS leadership is also framing the broad parameters and timing of plots and enlisting operatives to launch attacks entrepreneurially ("framed attacks"). Finally, ISIS – like al Qaida – is trying to animate radicalized individuals to kill fellow citizens in any way possible where they live ("inspired to attack in place"). ISIS – like al Qaida – has urged followers to use simple means, like vehicular attacks to run over pedestrians. These three forms of terrorist plotting create a tapestry of complicated threats for Western authorities.

Importantly, there could also be adaptations in the use of social media and communications technologies not just to radicalize and animate individuals but also to mobilize and direct them to act in concert for strategic purposes. A key influencer – in the United States or from abroad -- could use peer-to-peer technologies to choreograph disparate, radicalized individuals to attack in the Homeland. Such methodologies might allow terrorists to turn lone wolves into a coordinated pack attacking the West.

ISIS has also focused on recruiting and using women – as operatives, supporters, and cornerstones of the caliphate. Many women have been drawn to the idea of the caliphate, seeking both adventure as well as family. Women have been used to lure foreign fighters, to evade security services and scrutiny, and to create the sense of stability and family structures in the caliphate. ISIS has also enslaved, entrapped, and committed atrocities against women, which the organization attempts to justify through twisted theological interpretations. Women will grow as a part of the terrorist landscape, especially as groups like al Qaida attempt to embed themselves more neatly with local populations.

Terrorist Media. ISIS has changed the nature of the media and recruitment in the terrorist landscape. ISIS messaging has echoed in sophisticated ways via recruiters, the Internet, and targeted social media. The ISIS mythology, amplified by the establishment of the caliphate, piggybacks off the al Qaida narrative and has drawn adherents and converts from around the world.

On June 29, 2014, al-Adnani (now deceased) declared the creation of the caliphate after ISIS' June offensive in Iraq and the capture of Mosul. In July 2014, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the self-proclaimed "caliph," called on Muslims around the world to "rush" to the Islamic State. On September 21, 2014, al-Adnani encouraged followers to carry out lone wolf attacks, especially if they cannot travel to the Islamic State.

ISIS has standardized high-quality videos and productions – from short form to longer documentary reports – across its affiliates. Many of its videos have been brutally graphic, intended to stoke fear, cow opponents, and excite followers. Even so, most of their videos have been focused on ISIS's ability to govern and the nature of the caliphate. The organization publishes high quality magazines, Dabiq and now Rumiyah, intended to capture Western and other audiences with the idea of the caliphate.

The ISIS "fan boys" have used thousands of Twitter accounts to echo such messages and send videos around the world. ISIS has also created a system of using social media for targeted recruitment and social isolation of radicalized individuals. These messages have resonated with specific individuals who have been willing to mobilize on behalf of ISIS. This new media and recruitment model will be replicated by other terrorist groups.

Allure of Ideology & Reality of Governance. In its media campaign, ISIS has also demonstrated that the ideology and narrative of the caliphate holds purchase with some individuals and can be alluring to a global audience. Data from ISIS recruitment records analyzed by the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point demonstrates the diversity of the foreign fighter recruits,

including through their nationalities, education levels, and backgrounds. ISIS also demonstrated that the caliphate can be a physical reality imagined today, as opposed to waiting for a mystical future, and that individuals have agency in its creation.

With its cruel designs, ISIS was able to alter the map, erasing the border between Iraq and Syria, displacing unwanted populations, and exacerbating the weak seams in the countries in which it operates. By destroying and desecrating historical and sacred sites, it demonstrated how to erase evidence of a history that does not comport with its version of reality – while also profiting from the sale of antiquities.

ISIS has also attempted to organize and govern in replacing authority. It has often filled governance gaps, taking full advantage of embedded grievances and mistrust, often stoked by sectarian tension, injustice, and corruption. Though not successful, the organization developed governing structures, schools, and courts that allowed it to experiment with controlling populations, imposing its rule, and embedding itself ideologically with other generations.

ISIS has operated war economies that allowed it to run all aspects of the oil sector, food distribution, and exploit local businesses, banks, and money service businesses. ISIS leaders also administered tax and extortion systems in major cities and learned how to use the local economy and infrastructure as an economic shield. Even if ISIS physical footholds were to be taken back tomorrow, it will have demonstrated to those drawn to this ideology that some form of the caliphate is a real possibility. It will also have demonstrated ways to manage governance and economies of major population centers.

Cautionary Tale. The problems that ISIS has encountered – and its eventual demise as a so-called caliphate – will serve as a cautionary tale to other groups. Other groups will note the disillusionment of those who joined ISIS, the inability to keep populations satisfied or at bay, and the failure of ISIS ultimately to consolidate its territory and rule. Indeed, al Qaida may begin to message again more clearly that the premature announcement of the caliphate – without proper grounding and support – was doomed to fail. Al Qaida might also be reminded that there are dangers with open and direct confrontation with the West, a lesson it learned the hard way after the aggressive U.S. response after the 9/11 attacks.

The ISIS experiment has also demonstrated that it is very hard to govern large swaths of territory and vast populations for a long time. Good governance takes management of resources, attention to detail and mundane tasks, and the ability to compromise. Terrorist groups may not be constituted by the nature of their organizations to run governments on their own – but instead may want to embed in existing structures or political parties. This however dilutes the message and mission of a committed terrorist group. The ability to govern is made even more difficult if beliefs and order are being imposed harshly and alienate influential local leaders and large parts of a local population. Terrorist groups that hope to operate as insurgencies or proto-states will again take note that establishing harsh regimes without grassroots support is difficult to sustain.

The harshness and exclusiveness of the ISIS agenda has also alienated potential allies, creating fissures in the global violent Islamic extremist movement. These fissures are not permanent, but they have pitted like-minded groups such as al Qaida and ISIS against each other. These are the

kinds of fissures that need to be exploited to avoid the consolidation of terrorism movements across the Arc of Instability.

Key Principles and U.S. Counter-Terrorism Strategy

There are certain reinforced lessons for the United States and her partners that are critical for the counter-terrorism mission. The United States should keep these squarely in mind as the new administration constructs the strategy and focus necessary to constrain the growth, reach, and impact of the violent Islamic extremist movement – and ultimately defeat it. This will be a generational challenge, and the U.S. government and its allies need to treat it as such.

The Underlying Ideology Animates the Terrorist Movement

The underlying ideology and appeal of these violent Islamic extremist organizations animates the terrorist movements – be it al Qaida, ISIS, or whatever manifestation emerges next. We cannot ignore that ideology is a driver for this broader global movement, and we must work to prevent the perpetuation and embedding of this ideology. This matters operationally. This ideology drives a violently exclusionary narrative that focuses on the United States and other "far enemies" as principal targets and has become a fundamental part of the jihadi DNA, regardless of local focus or origins of the group. More broadly, we run the risk of losing the broader "battle of ideas" against a violent extremist ideology that is infecting a whole new generation of Muslim youth and defining what it means to be Muslim in the 21st century.

This is not just about one group or terrorist actor, and it's not a short-term problem. This is a long-term battle, and we have assets, allies, and ideas on our side. The vast majority of Muslims are not drawn to the ideology, and Muslim voices and activists are speaking against extremism. This is precisely why ISIS has targeted some of them openly and why voices of moderation have come under direct attack in places like Bangladesh.

The world must confront directly the outbreaks and manifestations of this ideology – like it does a pandemic. This requires empowering a new type of coalition – a "network of networks" of non-state and state actors – that not only counters the extremists' narrative and seeks to intervene and replace it, but also gets ahead of it through inoculation.

Mothers and victims of terrorists have organized chapters and spoken out against radicalizers. Former extremists have organized to counter recruitment and the ideology on the streets, on campuses, and online. Muslim youth, imams, and entrepreneurs have developed online platforms to organize against extremism.

Attempts to amplify these and other credible voices and create new platforms for expression and a sense of modern identity not dictated by terrorists have worked on a small scale. All of these efforts must be scaled up dramatically. Networking, empowering, funding, and enlisting credible voices are critical, and this has to be done not just by governments but also by civil society, NGOs, and philanthropists.

Governments need to provide consistent strategic focus, funding, and a willingness to let a thousand flowers bloom. This includes seeding investments in this space — like a "CVE In-Q-Tel" — to allow for investment in innovation to counter the messaging and manifestations of extremism. And then we need to scale those projects and networks that have proven successful with real effects.

I was honored to serve recently on the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) Commission on Countering Violent Extremism (CVE), co-chaired by former Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta and former British Prime Minister Tony Blair. It is worth noting some of the findings from its report, "Turning Point: A New Comprehensive Strategy for Countering Violent Extremism," published in November 2016:

> Diminishing the appeal of extremist ideologies will require a long-term, generational struggle. The United States and its allies must combat extremists' hostile and apocalyptic world view with the same level of commitment that it applies to dealing with its violent manifestations. We urgently need a new comprehensive strategy for countering violent extremism—one that is resolute, rests in soft and hard power, and galvanizes key allies and partners from government, civil society, and the private sector.
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> It time for the U.S. government and its allies to go all in to prevent the radicalization and recruitment of a whole new generation. This is a problem that affects everyone. All segments of society must pull together to defeat this global scourge. Yet, they should not have to do so alone. The U.S. government, its allies, especially from Muslim-majority countries, and the private sector have an essential role to play—providing leadership, political support, funding, and expertise.
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> The Commission's goal was to clearly articulate what the next U.S. administration, in close collaboration with governmental and nongovernmental partners, must do to diminish the appeal of extremist ideologies and narratives. The plan has eight major components:
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> 1) Strengthening resistance to extremist ideologies: The international community must forge a new global partnership around education reform to stop the teaching of extremist ideologies in schools. At the same time, we must redouble efforts to enhance respect for religious diversity, stem the spread of intolerance, and reinforce community resilience to extremist narratives.
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> 2) Investing in community-led prevention: Governments should enable civil society efforts to detect and disrupt radicalization and recruitment, and rehabilitate and reintegrate those who have succumbed to extremist ideologies and narratives. Community and civic leaders are at the forefront of challenging violent extremism but they require much greater funding, support, and encouragement.
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> 3) Saturating the global marketplace of ideas: Technology companies, the entertainment industry, community leaders, religious voices, and others must be enlisted more systematically to compete with and overtake extremists' narratives in virtual and real

spaces. It is the responsibility of all citizens to rebut extremists' ideas, wherever they are gaining traction.

4) Aligning policies and values: The United States should put human rights at the center of CVE, ensuring that its engagement with domestic and foreign actors advances the rule of law, dignity, and accountability. In particular, the U.S. government should review its security assistance to foreign partners to certify that it is being used in just and sustainable ways.

5) Deploying military and law enforcement tools: The international community needs to build a new force capability and coalition to quickly dislodge terrorist groups that control territory, avert and respond to immediate threats, weaken violent extremists' projection of strength, and protect our security and the security of our allies and partners.

6) Exerting White House leadership: The next administration should establish a new institutional structure, headed by a White House assistant to the president, to oversee all CVE efforts and provide clear direction and accountability for results. The Commission finds that strong and steady executive leadership is essential to elevating and harmonizing domestic and international CVE efforts.

7) Expanding CVE models: The United States and its allies and partners urgently need to enlarge the CVE ecosystem, creating flexible platforms for funding, implementing, and replicating proven efforts to address the ideologies, narratives, and manifestations of violent extremism.

8) Surging funding: The U.S. government should demonstrate its commitment to tackling violent extremism by pledging $1 billion annually to CVE efforts, domestically and internationally. These resources are meant to catalyze a surge in investment from other governments, the private sector, and philanthropic community.

We can change the course of this threat. Doing so will require aligning all of these pieces into a comprehensive strategy and investing in CVE programs, partnerships, and policies at scale and over the next decade or more.

The report lays out in more detail sets of recommendations in line with these strategic goals. Without question, there needs to be much more emphasis on the CVE mission. This ideological fight is ultimately not just about terrorism. These are enemies of humanity – attempting to spread their ideology like a virus while reshaping borders, history, and identity. This demands stopping the manifestations of the ideology itself.

The Laws of Physics Apply

In counter-terrorism, the laws of physics matter. There needs to be constant presence and pressure to disrupt, dismantle, and deter the emergence of any serious group that has aspirations to attack U.S. interests. In the first instance, this means that we should do everything within the bounds of the law and our Constitution to collect relevant intelligence and information and to

work with allies to ensure that we understand the threat landscape as it shifts. Terrorist threats will constantly adapt, and we should not be unilaterally disarming our ability to see, hear, and understand threats as they emerge.

The United States must apply a sense of urgency and importance to countering ISIS, al Qaida, and the underlying and motivating ideology that animates the violent Islamic extremist movement.

We also need persistent pressure against the key elements necessary for terrorist groups to survive: terrorist leadership – taking key strategic and operational leaders off the battlefield in rapid succession to prevent groups from growing or proliferating; financing and funding – squeezing resources (from local illicit economies to state sponsorship) to constrain a group's reach and strategic ambitions; and safe haven – denying any space in which a group can organize, plot, and exploit the resources or population.

It is in these terrorist archipelagos now occupied and governed by terrorist groups that they are able to plot, train, interact, and adapt. With time, space, and leadership, motivated global terrorists will always innovate and surprise. These territories must be disrupted, and the links between various ISIS provinces and al Qaida affiliates must be cut.

Though ISIS is difficult to dislodge, it is hard to imagine that the international community would allow a global terrorist organization that has struck so many parts of the world -- including the heart of Europe -- and inspired attacks in the United States, to operate a capital and to occupy and govern urban environments like Mosul, the second largest city in Iraq.

This requires U.S. leadership, but it does not dictate that the U.S. be in all places all the time. The United States and her allies are facing a common terrorist enemy. The United States must therefore work closely with its trusted partners – to enable, support, and lead where necessary – to disrupt the short- and long-term threats from terrorism. Much of this work is underway, including with the U.S.-led coalition against ISIS, and the U.S. counter-terrorism community continues to focus on the emerging threats and disrupting them in concert with capable and willing partners.

Effective and Trusted Partnerships are Essential

Counter-terrorism can only work if there is close collaboration and trust with effective partners. Building capacity, reinforcing will, and enabling partners to act against emerging threats is a critical part of shaping the battle space and preventing terrorist groups from growing and the movements from metastasizing. This work must be constant to help build effective working relationships, not just in moments of crisis. As the Special Operations community likes to remind, "You cannot surge trust."

In denying safe haven, the United States must in the first instance rely on and support legitimate local and regional partners that have a vested interest in ensuring that such zones are not allowed to fester. U.S. counter-terrorism strategy for the past decade has involved relying on and working with regional partners to disrupt and dismantle terrorist networks and safe haven. In

Southeast Asia, East Africa, Central Asia, and other regions, this model has helped empower and enable U.S. allies to work together to combat terrorist groups in their midst. This model has yet to prove fully effective in all regions, and the expanding reach of ISIS and al Qaida is a challenge to the United States and the international community.

The United States should enable key partners – especially European governments -- by spurring even greater intelligence and information sharing, forcing European partners to sit together to understand the unfolding threat and determine or establish new mechanisms to increase real-time information sharing tied to terrorist suspects and plots. This will involve capacity building with European partners and increased collection and analysis to fill the gaps in knowledge around terrorist intentions and capabilities. This becomes critical as ISIS or successive groups expand beachheads and as the West defends itself against expeditionary terrorism coming from new safe havens. In concert with Europe, the United States should help enable local proxies and allies on the ground to fight ISIS and al Qaida directly. This approach has worked well in West Africa with the French taking the lead on the ground.

This also means that the United States must prove to be a loyal, reliable ally – especially with local actors like the Kurds, on whom Washington has relied to fight ISIS and save populations. Continued support to such allies is critical to our long-term ability to enlist friends to fight with or for us.

In the United States and with key allies, partnerships with the private sector are essential. The Department of Homeland Security and Department of State should move even more aggressively toward a model of layered, systemic defense and resilience for critical infrastructure and national systems. This is important as terrorist groups like ISIS begin to flirt with cyber capabilities, and other transnational actors and their state sponsors probe for weaknesses in the American system and economy.

National Security Strategies Must Drive CT Strategies and Priorities

It is self-evident that counter-terrorism strategies cannot be effective or sustainable if they are not nestled in a broader, coherent national security strategy. This is easier said than done. Administrations often say they do not want counter-terrorism to define and drive U.S. foreign or national security policy, but it is often the urgency and priority of counter-terrorism operations that begins to drive U.S. strategy in difficult regions of the world. This can make sense when there are no easy policy answers to long-term problems or crises, and the most obvious policy priority is defending the country from imminent threats.

This does become debilitating or counterproductive when there is little recognition that terrorist movements have grown more sophisticated at exploiting local grievances, vacuums of governance and order, and sectarian tension to embed in communities and countries. The rapid rise of ISIS is a testament to the importance of diplomacy, politics, and partner commitment in ensuring that terrorist groups cannot gain hold. This is a lesson that we have applied well to the case of Afghanistan, where U.S. and NATO forces will remain to support President Ghani and the Afghan government.

This is also important as Iraq, Syria, Libya, and other countries work to dislodge ISIS, al Qaida, or other terrorist groups – which leave behind physical, economic, and psychological scars and destruction. This requires demining, rebuilding, and reinvestment from locals, regional actors, and the private sector – and a political commitment by local governments to ensure reintegration and rebuilding of affected towns and populations. The problem of refugee flows and displaced persons – and the potential that such refugees could become disaffected, marginalized, or even radicalized ties the broader problems of dislocation to counter-terrorism. This all begins to sound and feel like nation-building, but the reality is that political, economic, and social vacuums are susceptible to conflict and exploitation and need to be addressed. Otherwise, organized terrorist groups will fill the void, as they continue to do in conflict zones.

Counter-terrorism work is further complicated by the multiple actors and interests at play in the key conflicts like Syria, the underlying competition and currents in the region (for example, as seen between Iran and Saudi Arabia), and the need to tend constantly to the multiple political and diplomatic factors at play in the Arc of Instability. This is where a well-defined foreign policy is critical, and the trust and confidence of U.S. allies is essential – especially if we are asking them to make hard decisions or to sacrifice with us. Counter-terrorism can be an enormous enabler to our broader policies, but the United States needs to apply clear strategies and principles to our national security work for our counter-terrorism work to be effective in the long term.

Words Matter

How we talk about and classify the threat of terrorism and the enemy is critically important. It helps define the legal framework in which we operate, it explains our intentions and approach to friends and foes, and it shapes the policies and resources we apply to the problem. Our language should also reinforce our alliances, strengthen our message and ideals, and undercut the appeal of our enemies' vision of the world.

Assessing threats and classifying the risks from terrorism are a fundamental part of how we calibrate our response and ultimately make decisions about what the nation will do to defend itself. If we underestimate the threat, we run the risk of ignoring threats as they gather and reacting only when it is too late. If we overestimate the risk, we may overreact, overextend, and misallocate our resources. We also need to be precise about the threats we are facing and allow for a "taxonomy" of threats that we constantly reevaluate.

In this regard, we have heard much that ISIS and terrorism are not an "existential" risk. Recalibrating and rationalizing risk is the right instinct, but articulating this in terms of "existential risk" has a strategically dangerous effect. This has the potential to dull the sense of urgency to confront the real and quickening strategic threat from ISIS and the movement that may follow.

Repeated, targeted terrorism has strategic impact. Though the Islamic State may not be able to mount a 9/11-style attack, it has perpetrated terrorism from Brussels to Baghdad and inspired it in Orlando and San Bernardino. Al Qaida and ISIS have called on followers to attack with whatever means possible in Western countries, including driving into pedestrians. Aside from body counts, psychological impact and economic consequences, these attacks exacerbate social

cleavages and political instability. They stoke fears of immigration at the height of a global refugee crisis and animate sectarian and reactionary forces.

Viewing the threat in a binary fashion — existential or not existential — also fails to account for its dangerous and predictable adaptations over time. ISIS has adapted quickly by leveraging havens, especially in cities, and inspiring sympathetic networks throughout the world to present new threats. It reportedly downed a Russian commercial airliner, targeted the Egyptian navy and launched coordinated attacks under the noses of Western security services. It is flirting with weapons of mass destruction — using chemical weapons, operating a chemical weapons unit and accessing labs at Mosul University. It has used the cyber domain to radicalize using peer-to-peer technologies and to attack online with a new "United Cyber Caliphate."

Such a maximalist formulation does not account for the reality that ISIS, al Qaida, or any successor can adapt very quickly and may present new and more dangerous threats to U.S. and allied interests – from use of WMD to cyber attacks.

Further, articulating the threat only in "existential" terms leads to a myopic, insular foreign policy. The Islamic State poses a direct threat to U.S. allies, having a deeper impact on those societies — from genocide and displacement of millions of refugees to the radicalization of Muslim youth and the hardening of reactionary forces. The French president has declared repeatedly that Europe is at war while mourning attacks on French citizens; Kurds and Iraqis are defending their families and communities; Jordan, Turkey and Lebanon endure attacks and the massive weight of refugees. To our friends fighting for their survival with the Islamic State on their doorstep, this threat looks existential.

By seeming to care only about threats to the Homeland, we damage the perception of U.S. partnerships and weaken U.S. influence over the sacrifices our partners must make to defeat terrorism in their midst. If the threat is not "existential," we may believe we can sit behind the oceans and contain it. This attitude can dull our willingness to make hard decisions.

We must always push government agencies to imagine the unimaginable and not underestimate the will and capacity of global terrorist organizations to strike U.S. interests and allies. We must continue to invest resources and energy to prevent terrorist groups from developing, acquiring, or using weapons of mass destruction. The Nuclear Security Summits and work in both the Bush and Obama Administrations – starting with the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism -- is a great example of the United States focusing global attention on the potential of nuclear terrorism and the need to prevent it. The United States has concentrated its strategy, programs, and international engagements on preventing terrorists from acquiring or using biological, chemical, and nuclear weapons.

Conclusion

With the right strategy, focus, and resources, there is no question the United States can execute an effective counterterrorism approach. The United States has the ability, organization, strength, and allies to defeat violent Islamic extremism in any manifestation – al Qaida, ISIS, their affiliates, or whatever group may arise next. We should however take care to learn the lessons of

the last fifteen years and not underestimate the ability of such terrorist groups to innovate, adapt, and ultimately threaten the United States.

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