

**THE SPREAD OF ISIS AND  
TRANSNATIONAL TERRORISM**

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**HEARING**

BEFORE THE

**COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS  
UNITED STATES SENATE**

ONE HUNDRED FOURTEENTH CONGRESS

SECOND SESSION

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## **THE SPREAD OF ISIS AND TRANSNATIONAL TERRORISM**

**TUESDAY, APRIL 12, 2016**

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

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:00 a.m. in Room SD-419, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Bob Corker, chairman of the committee, presiding.

Present: Senators Corker [presiding], Rubio, Johnson, Flake, Gardner, Barrasso, Cardin, Menendez, Shaheen, Udall, Murphy, Kaine, and Markey.

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

The CHAIRMAN. The Foreign Relations Committee will come to order.

We have some important business to do, but I think our most important business is to wish Bertie a happy 85th birthday today. So thank you so much for what you do here. [Applause.]

The CHAIRMAN. You know, the State Department is an institution, no doubt, but Bertie is more of an institution. So we thank you very much for what you do here.

I also want to thank our witnesses for being here to testify. We have got a good mix of experts and practitioners.

Today we look forward to hearing your thoughts on the spread of ISIS and transnational terrorism. Tragically, last year saw attacks that were supported or inspired by ISIS in Paris, Turkey, Beirut, Egypt, San Bernardino, and Brussels and even in my hometown of Chattanooga.

Simultaneously dozens of groups around the world have claimed some affiliation with ISIS. I hope our witnesses can comment on how many of these organizations have real ties to ISIS headquarters in Raqqa and how many are simply attracted to the brand.

I also think this hearing will be a good opportunity to explore the goals of ISIS as an organization. Are they more focused on establishing a physical caliphate, or are their goals shifting to coordinating attacks abroad, a shift that few people predicted in the beginning? Do they have long-term goals and concrete ideology, or are they more opportunistic?

I know we will all have questions specific to recent attacks in Europe, and I hope our witnesses can shed some light on the unique

threat facing Europe and what steps we can take to encourage intelligence sharing and better border controls.

It seems that our partners often depend upon American intelligence but argue against its collection because of privacy concerns. Obviously, there is a rub there.

I would also appreciate your views on the use of end-to-end encryption in some of these attacks and how much of a threat that technology poses.

Finally, it appears that ISIS has created a new model of terrorism, one less structured and more violent than Al Qaeda. I hope our witnesses can comment on what this new model means for the future. Can we expect other groups to imitate the ISIS model, and will ISIS continue to spread? And more importantly, what steps can we take to ensure that this model is unsuccessful?

With that, again I want to thank you. We have some outstanding witnesses today, and we appreciate you being here.

With that, I will turn to our distinguished ranking member and my friend, Ben Cardin.

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

Senator CARDIN. Well, Chairman Corker, thank you for calling this hearing, first and foremost, to wish Bertie a happy birthday. I think it was well timed for that purpose. You know, members of this committee come and go, but Bertie stays. And we want to know his secret because each of us have aged a great deal on this committee, more than the number of years we have been on the committee, where he seems to get younger. So, Bertie, thank you very much for your service to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

And, Mr. Chairman, I thank you for convening this hearing. This is an opportunity for this committee to really step back and look at trends in terrorism broadly. It is my hope today that our witnesses can help us understand what lessons we have learned from our country's long history in countering terrorism and how we can apply these lessons to meet the new challenges posed by ISIL.

While ISIL is the single greatest terrorist threat to our homeland security and the security of our allies worldwide, let us remember that terrorism as a global phenomenon is not new. It is a tactic tied to no specific religion, nation, or ethnicity. The goals of its perpetrators are varied. Decades ago, European Marxist groups in Germany and the Red Brigade in Italy engaged in terrorist activities against police, judges, and jurors. In Sri Lanka, the Tamil Tigers turned to suicide bombing in their insurgency against the government. I vividly remember how, in order to despicably draw attention to their cause, the Palestinian terrorist group, Black September, murdered 11 Israeli Olympic team members in 1972. In the 21st century, Al Qaeda and the attacks of 9/11 ushered in a new era of transnational jihad terrorism aimed at drawing the United States into a generational conflict. Just like ISIL today, Al Qaeda directed, financed, and inspired attacks in Madrid in 2004, London in 2005, and among many other bombings.

But Al Qaeda, though it is scattered across the Middle East, has not broken us. We have adjusted, adapted, and are winning that

fight. As we turn to meet the challenges of new threats such as ISIL, I believe there are vulnerable lessons that can be learned.

For example, I believe that by leaving in place the 2001 AUMF, Congress could be authorizing a state of perpetual war. I know, Mr. Chairman, we have tried to deal with how we deal with an AUMF to meet the current needs, but the 2001 left without challenge—I have introduced legislation. I put a sunset on it—to me removes the Congress from being engaged when we should be authorizing specific force.

Moreover, I am concerned that drone strikes, regardless of whether the next President is a Democrat or Republican—I want to see transparent, strong oversight of the drone program by Congress. I applaud this administration's recent announcement that it intends to release information about casualties from drone strikes outside of war zones. But still more work needs to be done.

Another lesson we have learned from our experience against Al Qaeda is to remain resolute and clear-eyed. In recent months and weeks, tragic attacks in Brussels and Pakistan have once again thrust the issue of terrorism to the headlines. And our election year politics have only magnified the problem. But if we are once again going to defeat our enemies, in this case ISIL, we must remain as vigilant, resist complacency, but not overreact to terrorism. Factually speaking, when the number of terrorist incidents worldwide has jumped alarmingly in recent years overall, most terrorist attacks occur primarily in just five countries: Iraq, Nigeria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Syria. Fear is a powerful weapon and we cannot let the tragic December 2015 attacks in San Bernardino scare us into walling ourselves off from the rest of the world or from each other.

Today we will hear from some of our witnesses about how ISIL is a new manifestation of the global terrorist threat. In my mind, there is no question that ISIL is a barbaric terrorist organization. It is an extremist threat to the United States, our interests, and our allies in the region. Its ambitions to create a state may be new. Its online tactics to recruit and indoctrinate may be aggressive, and its organization may be disciplined. But our resolve is unwavering, and our strategy to contain, diminish, and eliminate ISIL around the globe is working. Yet, much more needs to be done.

I strongly support President Obama's goal of degrading and destroying ISIL, a strategy that seems to be succeeding in Iraq and Syria, though there is still a long way to go. Our recent successes include ISIL's loss of 40 percent of its populated territory it used to control in Iraq, the elimination of high-value ISIL operatives by coalition airstrikes, including ISIL's finance minister and minister of war, and the training of nearly 20,000 Iraqi security forces, many of which have already participated in the fight such as the successful liberation of Ramadi. These military gains are critical, but I also urge our officials to prioritize our diplomatic power as much as our military might. For only if we work to foster politically inclusive governments in the Middle East, that the threat of all citizens with dignity and respect under the law, we will be able to counteract the societal conditions that assist radicalization and extremism.

Mr. Chairman, you and I met with the foreign minister from Saudi Arabia. I was in Saudi Arabia 2 weeks ago and asked the direct question. Could you support a leader in Syria that was not Sunni? The answer was yes. We want it to be nonsectarian. They want an all-inclusive government because they have recognized an all-inclusive government in Syria brings stability to Syria, which helps the stability concerns in the entire region.

So what we are looking for is diplomatically to be able to have governments in that region that represent all the communities and have the confidence of all the communities. And if we do not achieve that, there is a gap that feeds into the recruitment by extremist groups.

And while ISIL has expanded across the Middle East and beyond, its core remains in Syria and Iraq, and only by resolving the political conflicts there can we hope to remove ISIL from the picture permanently.

This is not less true than other places. ISIL's barbarity has found fertile ground. Because of what ISIL does, how it breeds and expands, it is exploiting political vacuums. It fills them with its hatred, its lies, and misdirection. Its warped view of Islam and its promises of meting vengeance, profit, power and deliverance to the naive and the criminal. This is true in Syria and Iraq and Libya and Yemen, and its recruitment of foreign supporters often see themselves in a political vacuum of exclusion, discrimination, and alienation within their own societies.

We got to do better. In Syria, we must continue to work with the international community and Syrians towards a negotiated settlement that is sustainable, inclusive, and reflective of the legitimate desires of all Syrians. In Iraq, we must encourage all leaders across ethnic and sectarian divides to commit to governing in an inclusive, representative, and non-corrupt manner. This is the only way to ensure long-term stability and begin the critical work of reconstructing and rebuilding Iraq.

Mr. Chairman, let me tell you. I applaud your willingness to step back and have this committee look at the big picture. I look forward to our witnesses' testimony. I have full confidence that no matter what ISIL throws at us at home or abroad, our democracy, our values, and our humanity will prevail.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Cardin.

We will now turn to our witnesses. Our first witness is Mr. Graeme Wood, an Edward R. Murrow Press Fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations. Thank you. Our second witness is Dr. Matthew Levitt, Director of the Stein Program on Counterterrorism and Intelligence at The Washington Institute. And our third witness today is the Honorable Matthew Olsen, former Director of the National Counterterrorism Center.

I think all of you understand we will enter your written testimony into the record without objection. If you would summarize in about 5 minutes, we look forward to questions. With that, let's start in the order that I introduced you. Thanks again for being here.



**STATEMENT OF GRAEME WOOD, EDWARD R. MURROW PRESS  
FELLOW, COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS, WASHINGTON,  
DC**

Mr. WOOD. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Islamic State has inspired immense fear among Americans and our allies. My main purpose is to discuss the nature of the threat that it poses and to differentiate the reasonable from the unreasonable fear.

As a journalist, what I do is I speak to people. I read the propaganda of ISIS whenever I can, and I try to find people who, in some way or another, reflect the views of the group and, if possible, find people who have direct connections to it, but who have been kind of left behind, who are still in places where I can speak to them freely and speak to them directly.

They have many things in common. Many beliefs that I think are familiar to the committee about the righteousness of the caliphate led by Abu Bakr al Baghdadi, that he is the rightful political successor to the Prophet Muhammad, et cetera.

So I will begin by talking about what I consider the reasonable fears about what ISIS/ISIL represents.

Supporters of ISIL have given me little reason to believe that their most brutal and intolerant statements are mere bravado or exaggeration for effect. It is true that they have welcomed my questions and treated me very gently in person in a very friendly way in many cases. And they actually seem to appreciate the comforts of the Western countries and tolerant societies in which they live.

Their convictions about ISIL and its righteousness, however, are real. When they talk about genocide against Shia or about reinstating slavery and other practices that are inconsistent with modern notions of human rights, they do so without apology and at times with real pleasure and gusto. Their opinions are thoroughly premeditated, and they are based in an interpretation of scripture and Islamic history, as well as practical considerations about how to implement that interpretation. I think it is folly, first of all, to discount their sincerity or to interpret their beliefs as ill-considered, as foolish, or to understand their fanaticism is anything but sincere and real and irreducible to other factors.

Second, the support that I have seen in speaking to them has been broad, as well as deep. The demographics of the supports skew toward the young and male, but there is a great diversity in national origin, age, education, class, and they are certainly not summarizable as the kind of underworld of Western European gangsters that we have seen in some of the composites that have been portrayed in the press. Those types are definitely well represented, but I have also come across doctors, engineers, autodidacts that in talking to them, you immediately recognize educated people who have gone to their chosen terrorist group with careful consideration. There are also men who are well past peak battlefield age and women of all ages in non-military roles.

Finally, the numbers are very large, tens of thousands of people versus probably hundreds in the core Al Qaeda group that we came to know in the mid-2000s.

So to speak a bit to what I think are some of the unreasonable fears or misunderstandings about the group.

First, although they speak with great grandeur in their ideological claims, they talk about genocide and so forth, and I think comparisons to Nazi ideology or other types of ideological threats that the United States and the world has faced in the past are apt. They are not apt in terms of the capacities of the group. ISIS still remains something that is a somewhat localizable phenomenon.

On the question of whether they are prioritizing the building of a caliphate or attacks on Western targets, I continue to believe that they care deeply about the preservation of their core territories and that their attacks on Western targets, especially spectacular attacks of the September 11th style, is a secondary concern for them. Their early message that supporters from the West should go to ISIS territory continues to be echoed in their propaganda today. They have, instead, essentially taken the old Al Qaeda model of conspiracy and have attached that to the mass movement of ISIS; that is, ISIS has tried to mobilize tens of thousands of people to migrate, but they also have a conspiratorial element that is Al Qaeda style and that is attempting to have attacks on the West.

We should understand that the core differentiating aspect of ISIS is the mass movement, is the fact that it has been able to mobilize a huge movement of people and tens of thousands of people. That is not something that they have, thus far, been able to, with great effect, direct toward the West in the form of terrorist attacks. Those attacks will happen, but they will not take advantage of that core strength.

Thank you.

[Mr. Wood's prepared statement follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF GRAEME WOOD, EDWARD R. MURROW PRESS  
FELLOW, COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS, WASHINGTON, DC <sup>1</sup>

The Islamic State has inspired immense fear among Americans and our allies. My main purpose today is to discuss the nature of the threat it poses, and to differentiate reasonable from unreasonable fear.

As a journalist, I have access to no information other than what is publicly available and what I can discover in my own investigation and conversations. Over the past two years, these conversations have included a small number of individuals broadly supportive of the Islamic State. None is currently in Islamic State territory, and their excuses for not having traveled there to fight range from the plausible (revoked passports, physical debility) to the unconvincing or lazy ("God has not given me the time"). They all know people who have immigrated, and in most cases, they agree openly with the Islamic State's theology and politics. They recognize Abu Bakr al Baghdadi as the political successor to the Prophet Muhammad, and they adhere to a harsh, intolerant form of Islam practiced by a small minority of Muslims worldwide. My opinions derive also from close reading of the group's official propaganda; its leaders' statements; the open-source chatter of those who support ISIL; and conversations with others who watch the group closely, including Muslim and non-Muslim opponents and analysts.

I will begin with the reasonable fear. Supporters of ISIL have given me little reason to believe that their most brutal and intolerant statements are mere bravado or exaggeration for effect. It is true that they have welcomed my questions and treated me gently in person. In most cases, they seem to appreciate the comforts of the developed, peaceful countries where they live. But their conviction is real. When they talk about putting the Shia to the sword, or reinstating slavery and other practices inconsistent with modern notions of human rights, they do so without apology, and at times with evident gusto. Their opinions are thoroughly premeditated, and they are based in an interpretation of scripture and Islamic history,

<sup>1</sup>The Council on Foreign Relations takes no institutional positions on policy issues and has no affiliation with the U.S. government. All statements of fact and expressions of opinion contained herein are the sole responsibility of the author.

as well as practical considerations. It would be folly to discount their sincerity or to interpret their beliefs as idle, ill-considered, or foolish. The fanaticism is real, and it does not reduce to other factors.

Second, the support for ISIL is broad as well as deep. The demographics of supporters skew toward the young and male, as in all wars. But the diversity of national origin, age, education, and class is staggering—and it is not reflected in the cartoon version of the ISIL recruit that one gets from some journalistic accounts. That media composite has, in recent weeks, focused on the Belgian and French criminal-underworld gangsters who appear to have perpetrated the attacks in Brussels and Paris. I have little doubt that these types are well-represented. But also present in the fraternity of ISIL fighters are doctors, engineers, and a panoply of autodidacts in whose writing and speech any educated person can recognize kindred spirits. The group includes men well past peak battlefield age, as well as women of all ages in non-military roles.

Third, the numbers are large—far greater than any Al Qaida’s during its heyday. These numbers deserve a moment’s contemplation. Whereas the forces under the command of Osama Bin Laden for the “core Al Qaida” attacks on Western targets likely numbered in the hundreds at their peak, tens of thousands of ISIL fighters have already immigrated to Syria and Iraq. The counterterrorism strategies that have kept the United States safe from Al Qaida have treated the group as a conspiracy. But ISIL is a mass movement, and it will be impossible to shut down plots against America or its allies entirely, using the same tools. Attacks will occur, and they will terrify Americans. What will increasingly define bravery and integrity among politicians will be their ability to manage the expectations of their constituents rather than to exploit their fears, and to react to these attacks with empathy and rationality simultaneously.

I come, then, to the topic of unreasonable fear. First, we should note the mismatch between the soaring ideological claims of ISIL and its practical capability. Its mode of expansion in Syria and Iraq, through fast movement of light-armored vehicles in familiar terrain, does not readily transfer into most other places, and would certainly fail in Turkey or heavily Kurdish or Shiite areas of Iraq. It requires desperate, beleaguered local populations, with some base willingness to contemplate a harsh revivalist Islamism as an alternative to the status quo. The ideology of ISIL echoes Nazism in its genocidal ambitions and tone, but the it is not matched by an equally powerful war machine. The ISIL military is not one of the world’s most formidable, and we should not mistake the grandeur of its language for vast operational capacity.

Second, the Islamic State still prioritizes building a caliphate and protecting its diminishing core territories—not in attacking Western targets in spectacular ways, a la September 11. I make myself hostage to fortune by advancing this claim. But it remains correct, Brussels and Paris notwithstanding.

- ISIL’s propaganda has not deviated from its early message: that the primary obligation of supporters overseas is to immigrate, and only if they fail to do so should they undertake solo terrorist efforts of their own. The propaganda does not leave doubt; it is difficult to consume much of it without reaching the conclusion that attacks on America are not the primary job of American ISIL supporters still at home. They should buy a plane ticket instead.
- Spectacular attacks on the West are instead the job of dedicated cells, directed from Syria and staffed at least in part by fighters who have returned to their home countries for that purpose. These cells are a conspiracy within the mass movement, a little touch of Al Qaida within the Islamic State. Journalists who have reported on the size of this conspiracy have estimated its European members in the dozens, some of whom are already captured or dead. These estimates are conservative, and I would not be surprised at total mobilized figures in triple digits.
- ISIL brags relentlessly in its propaganda about its control of territory. Its foreign attacks are calculated for maximum effect with minimum blowback. I suspect that central planning and control allows ISIL to titrate the strength of these attacks to avoid a response that would involve loss of core territory. The attacks are nevertheless spectacular enough to allow ISIL to dominate news cycles and remain first among global jihadi equals. A spectacular mass attack on the US would, I suspect, overshoot the mark.

None of the above points implies that ISIL will not attack the US and Europe; on the contrary, I assume they will. And the group’s changing fortunes could easily alter its calculations and compel it to invest heavily in foreign operations, at the expense of local ones. However, when they do so, they will not mobilize their dif-

ferentiating strength, which is their enormous numbers. Instead, they will be revisiting an Al Qaida strategy that we have begun to learn to counter.

Finally, although the conversion into a mass movement makes ISIL less fragile and harder to counter, it carries important dangers for ISIL as well. Mass movements resist central control, and they are vulnerable to changes of style, culture, and generational preference. ISIL has thrust itself into the consciousness of many, many Muslims, and has thereby suggested itself as an outlet for existential, political, and religious desires. It has no way of ensuring that next year's seekers will direct their energies toward the same ends. A sophisticated policy response to ISIL's rise will take into account not only military and political dimensions, but also countercultural, religious, and existential ones. Unfortunately, since government is typically at its most hapless when trying to deal with these types of issues, much work remains to be done—much of it not by government but by civil society.

The CHAIRMAN. Dr. Levitt?

**STATEMENT OF DR. MATTHEW LEVITT, DIRECTOR, STEIN PROGRAM ON COUNTERTERRORISM AND INTELLIGENCE, THE WASHINGTON INSTITUTE FOR NEAR EAST POLICY, WASHINGTON, D.C.**

Dr. LEVITT. Chairman Corker, Ranking Member Cardin, distinguished members of the committee, it is an honor and a privilege to appear before you today.

The committee has held numerous hearings on the so-called Islamic State and the devastating impact of its barbarism in the Middle East. But coming on the heels of the Brussels bombings and the group's demonstrated intent and capability to carry out terrorist attacks in the West, I would like to address the spread of its transnational terrorism today.

Allow me to paint a picture. The office of the mayor of Molenbeek, the municipality in Brussels, sits alongside a picturesque, typically European cobblestone courtyard. Across the square, within plain view of the municipal government building, sits the home of Salah Abdeslam, the Islamic State terrorist who was finally captured March 18th after evading authorities since the November Paris attacks. Nothing but air separates the two buildings, but they are a world apart. This is the bifurcated Brussels that I saw coincidentally when I was in Belgium a few days before the terrorist attacks that killed 31 and wounded hundreds.

And while your average citizen in Europe and in the United States might feel extra anxiety and dismay with these attacks and the sense of a metastasized danger, Western counterterrorism officials are not entitled to feel that kind of surprise because for anybody who was playing close enough attention, the Islamic State's expanded capabilities and intent have been evident for well over a year. We now know that the Islamic State was already plotting attacks in the West as early as late 2013.

But the real aha moment came not last month in Brussels but in Verviers in the eastern part of the country in January 2015, just 2 weeks after the Paris attacks on Charlie Hebdo and the kosher supermarket. It was in that attack where it became clear that the Islamic State had what Europol has described as an external operations command and that it was, quote, going global. Two things stood out from that plot that was thwarted, largely thanks to a very successful sharing of intelligence.

One, that this was not your inspired lone offender, which was the type of plot that we were most concerned about on the part of the

Islamic State until then, but that this was a foreign-directed plot, much more carefully planned, with much more capability.

And the second was the cross-jurisdictional nature of the threat and simultaneously the awareness that as the EU counterterrorism coordinator has put in his last report, information sharing within the EU does not reflect the threat. The fact that this threat was cross-jurisdictional, being overseen by a person on a cell phone in Athens with operators in Belgium and investigations going on in the Netherlands and France and in Germany meant that sharing information across these jurisdictional lines is going to be much, much more important moving forward.

The fact is that what is happening in Europe is different than what is happening in the Middle East in terms of the way people are being radicalized. And what we are seeing as some counter-radicalization officials within the municipality of Molenbeek put it to me—and I have to say the silver lining is the people I met who were working on these issues there were tremendous, really fantastic. The way they put it to me is you have here people who were going from zero to hero. You have people who are looking for purpose, and they are being provided that in the Islamic State. Recruiters offer a sense of family to people from broken homes, of belonging to people who feel disenfranchised from society, of empowerment to people who feel discriminated against, of higher calling and purpose to people who feel adrift. The recruiters pitch small groups of friends together. You do not really belong here. You are not wanted here. You cannot live here. You cannot get a job here. And only then does the religious component come in. Clearly you should not be living amongst the infidels. You mix in this gangster culture and you have a combustible combination in these ghetto-ized neighborhoods like Molenbeek where today's criminals are tomorrow's terrorists and the radicalization process literally is in hyper drive.

That, in part, is because of things that have happened in the region. We need to remember that the conflict in Syria was originally a civil war, and many Europeans who first went as foreign terrorist fighters to that conflict, before the Islamic State existed, were going not in a sense of offensive jihad, but a defensive calling because no one else was doing it to go defend women and children and fellow Sunnis. That most of those people ended up, if they stayed, fighting with more radical groups, Ahrar al-Sham, Jabhat al-Nusra, because they are the ones who had the money and the weapons, means many of them did get more radicalized, but that is not why they went in the first place.

The other thing that changed the nature of radicalization and sped it up significantly is the founding of the Islamic State. We focus on its genocide and barbarism, obviously, but for people who are looking for this purpose, to be told come in and get in at the ground level to reestablish the caliphate, just like the original followers of the Prophet Muhammad, for someone who is adrift this is an empowering message.

The fact of the matter is that as we move forward looking at what we need to do in Europe, in particular, and the West more broadly, this is something that is going to have to involve law enforcement agents and intelligence officers and greater intelligence

sharing and moving information up to the SIS, Schengen Information Sharing system, borders. Sure.

But the more important activists are going to be the social workers and the teachers and the people in these communities. In Molenbeek, for 15 months now, they have been putting this in place to their credit, but the number of countering violent extremism police officers they have, plused up after the November attacks, for a community of 100,000 people is eight. And the prevention officers who are working in that capacity in a civilian capacity, who were brilliant, three. So there is much more we need to do as we move forward.

And I thank you for the opportunity to testify this morning.  
[Dr. Levitt's prepared statement follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF DR. MATTHEW LEVITT, FROMER-WEXLER FELLOW AND DIRECTOR, STEIN PROGRAM ON COUNTERTERRORISM AND INTELLIGENCE, THE WASHINGTON INSTITUTE FOR NEAR EAST POLICY<sup>1</sup>

Chairman Corker, Ranking Member Cardin, distinguished members of the committee, it is an honor and privilege to appear before you today. This committee has held numerous hearings on the so-called Islamic State and the devastating impact of its barbarism on the Middle East. But coming on the heels of the Brussels bombings, and the group's demonstrated intent and capability to carry out terrorist attacks in the West, it is the spread of this transnational terrorism that I would like to address today.

Allow me to paint a picture: The office of the mayor of the Molenbeek municipality in Brussels sits alongside a picturesque, typically European cobblestone square. Across the square, within plain view of the municipal government, sits the family home of Salah Abdeslam, the Islamic State terrorist who was finally captured on March 18th after evading authorities since the November Paris attacks. Nothing separates the two buildings, but they are a world apart.

This is the bifurcated Brussels I saw when, coincidentally, I was in Belgium a few days before the terrorist attacks that killed 31 people and wounded hundreds. I was there to meet with senior counterterrorism, intelligence and law enforcement officials, as well as with local officials in the troubled municipality of Molenbeek, the subsection of Brussels where Abdeslam grew up and which even Molenbeek's mayor, Francois Schepmans, describes as "a breeding ground for violence."<sup>2</sup>

*Expansion of the Islamic State Terrorist Threat to the West*

The Brussels bombings have made it plain that the scale of the threat posed by the Islamic State to the West is far larger than most Westerners had previously thought. That threat is no longer limited to the radicalization of the 5,000–6,000 European citizens who left the comfort and safety of their homes to fight alongside the Islamic State in Syria, Iraq and, more recently, Libya.<sup>3</sup> Nor has it only expanded to include so-called "lone-wolf" plots—self-organized attacks carried out by home-grown radicals. The Brussels bombings have made it painfully clear that the Islamic State is determined to plan and direct attacks in the West that are far more sophisticated and lethal than such small-scale mayhem.

It would be understandable if the public expressed anxiety and dismay about this metastasized danger. But the West's counterterrorism officials are not entitled to

<sup>1</sup> Portions of this testimony first appeared as "The Islamic State's Lone Wolf Era is Over," Foreign Policy, March 24, 2016, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/03/24/the-islamic-states-lone-wolf-era-is-over/> and as "My Journey through Brussels' Terrorist Safe Haven," Politico, March 27, 2016, <http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2016/03/brussels-attacks-terrorist-safe-haven-213768>. My thanks to both publications for allowing me to work through these ideas on their pages, and for providing formal permission allowing me to use portions of that material here.

<sup>2</sup> Robert-Jan Bartunek and Alastair Macdonald, "Guns, God and grievances—Belgium's Islamist 'airbase,'" Reuters, November 16, 2015, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-france-shooting-belgium-guns-insight-idUSKCN0T504J20151116>

<sup>3</sup> "State of play on implementation of the statement of the Members of the European Council of 12 February 2015, the JHA Council Conclusions of 20 November 2015, and the Conclusions of the European Council of 18 December 2015," EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator, Council of the European Union, March 1, 2016, <http://www.statewatch.org/news/2016/mar/eu-council-ct-coordinator-report-6450-16.pdf>

feel surprise. For anyone paying close enough attention, the Islamic State's expanded capabilities have been evident for well over a year.

After the U.S.-led coalition began launching airstrikes against Islamic State targets in August 2014, the group's spokesman, Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, responded with a call for supporters to carry out lone-offender terrorist attacks targeting the West.

If you can kill a disbelieving American or European—especially the spiteful and filthy French—or an Australian, or a Canadian, or any other disbeliever from the disbelievers waging war, including the citizens of the countries that entered into a coalition against the Islamic State, then rely upon Allah, and kill him in any manner or way however it may be.<sup>4</sup>

Since then, Islamic State supporters and sympathizers have tried to answer his call. The January 2015 attacks in Paris on the offices of the satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* and a kosher grocery store caused some confusion because some operatives appeared to be tied to al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), while others were inspired by the Islamic State. Looking back, however, it appears that these terrorist “frenemies” (the groups they respectively affiliated themselves with were fighting one another in a jihadi civil war back in Syria) were still part of the lone-offender phenomenon. They may have been inspired by groups based in the Middle East, but they were not directed by them.

Lost in the shuffle after the horror of those attacks was the critical turning point in Islamic State terrorism in Europe: the plots that were averted by raids in Verviers, Belgium, a week after the *Charlie Hebdo* attack. These raids were a watershed moment for European counterterrorism officials, and Belgian authorities in particular, who were acting on information that the cell was plotting imminent and large-scale attacks in Belgium.<sup>5</sup> Police discovered automatic firearms, precursors for the explosive triacetone triperoxide (TATP), a body camera, multiple cell phones, handheld radios, police uniforms, fraudulent identification documents, and a large quantity of cash during the raid.<sup>6</sup> Information from European and Middle Eastern intelligence services indicated the raids thwarted “major terrorist attacks,” most likely in Belgium, though the investigation into the group's activities spanned several European countries, including France, Greece, Spain, and the Netherlands.<sup>7</sup> The leader of the plot, Belgian citizen Abdelhamid Abaaoud, directed the operation from a safe house in Athens, Greece, using a cell phone, while other group members operated in several other European countries, investigators determined. “Items recovered during searches of residences affiliated with the cell suggest the group's plotting may have included the use of small arms, improvised explosive devices, and the impersonation of police officers,” according to an intelligence assessment by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.<sup>8</sup>

Authorities quickly began to appreciate that the threat facing Europe was no longer limited to lone offenders inspired by the group. It now included trained and experienced foreign terrorist fighters coordinating attacks, directed by the Islamic State, across multiple jurisdictions. In the aftermath of the Verviers raid 13 arrests were made in Belgium, two in France, and one arrest was made in Greece, linked to a safe house in Athens. According to the same DHS intelligence assessment, the members of the cell were able to communicate and travel unimpeded across borders to facilitate attack planning.<sup>9</sup>

Authorities quickly honed in on the ringleader of the Belgium plots, Abaaoud, also known as Abu Umar al-Baljiki. But despite a Europe-wide manhunt, Abaaoud man-

<sup>4</sup>“The Failed Crusade,” Dabiq, Issue 4, <https://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2015/02/the-islamic-state-e2809cdc481biq-magazine-422.pdf>

<sup>5</sup>James Kanter, “2 Suspects Killed in Gun battle in Belgian Antiterror Raid,” *New York Times*, January 15, 2015, [http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/16/world/europe/police-raid-belgium.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/16/world/europe/police-raid-belgium.html?_r=1)

<sup>6</sup>“Future ISIL Operations in the West Could Resemble Disrupted Belgian Plot,” Department of Homeland Security Intelligence Assessment, May 13, 2015, <https://info.publicintelligence.net/DHS-FutureOperationsISIL.pdf>

<sup>7</sup>Paul Cruickshank, Mariano Castillo and Catherine E. Shoichet “Belgian operation thwarted ‘major terrorist attacks,’ kills 2 suspects,” January 15, 2015, <http://www.cnn.com/2015/01/15/world/belgium-anti-terror-operation/>; “Future ISIL Operations in the West Could Resemble Disrupted Belgian Plot,” Department of Homeland Security Intelligence Assessment, May 13, 2015, <https://info.publicintelligence.net/DHS-FutureOperationsISIL.pdf>

<sup>8</sup>“Future ISIL Operations in the West Could Resemble Disrupted Belgian Plot,” Department of Homeland Security Intelligence Assessment, May 13, 2015, <https://info.publicintelligence.net/DHS-FutureOperationsISIL.pdf>

<sup>9</sup>“Future ISIL Operations in the West Could Resemble Disrupted Belgian Plot,” Department of Homeland Security Intelligence Assessment, May 13, 2015, <https://info.publicintelligence.net/DHS-FutureOperationsISIL.pdf>

aged to elude authorities, escaping from Belgium to Syria, and then back. He later bragged about his escape in an interview with Dabiq, the Islamic State's propaganda magazine: "My name and picture were all over the news yet I was able to stay in their homeland, plan operations against them, and leave safely when doing so became necessary."<sup>10</sup>

The threat to Europe slowly became clearer still. In April 2015, French authorities arrested an Islamic State operative who had called for medical assistance after accidentally shooting himself. In his apartment, authorities found weapons, ammunition, and notes on potential targets, including churches, which he had been told to do by someone inside Syria, according to Paris prosecutor François Molins.<sup>11</sup> A U.S. intelligence bulletin reported the Islamic State operative had links to Abaaoud and had previously expressed interest in traveling to Syria.<sup>12</sup>

By May 2015, U.S. law enforcement concluded that a sea change had decisively occurred in the nature of the Islamic State terrorist threat. While threats remain from Islamic State-inspired lone offenders, the U.S. intelligence assessment concluded that future Islamic State operations would resemble the elaborate disrupted Verviers plot.<sup>13</sup>

The plot disrupted by Belgian authorities in January 2015 is the first instance in which a large group of terrorists possibly operating under ISIL direction has been discovered and may indicate the group has developed the capability to launch more complex operations in the West. We differentiate the complex, centrally planned plotting in Belgium from other, more-simplistic attacks by ISIL-inspired or directed individuals, which could occur with little to no warning.

The multi-jurisdictional nature of that plot cemented for European and U.S. counterterrorism officials the importance of information sharing across national agencies, but implementing the necessary reforms would be slow in coming.

The pace of the Islamic State's foreign-directed plots sped up in the summer of 2015. In mid-August, a man was arrested while attempting to carry out an attack on a concert in France. The man, who had only recently returned from a six-day trip to Syria, told police he was ordered to carry out the attack by a man fitting Abaaoud's description. Later that month, off-duty U.S. servicemen managed to subdue a gunman attempting to carry out an attack on a Thalys train traveling from Amsterdam to Paris.

Luck ran out when terrorists struck Paris on Nov. 13, 2015. These multiple coordinated attacks marked a departure from past Islamic State plots in the level of training and degree of operational security executed by the attackers. According to the U.S. intelligence bulletin, using an acronym for the Islamic State, the November Paris attacks "demonstrated a greater degree of coordination and use of multiple tactics, resulting in higher casualties than has been seen in any previous ISIL Western attack."<sup>14</sup> The tactics, techniques, and procedures used in the attacks were quickly identified by law enforcement as the type of attacks the West should be expecting from now on.

According to the latest EUROPOL counterterrorism report, the Paris attacks and subsequent investigations demonstrate a shift by the Islamic State toward "going global" in its terrorism campaign. The Islamic State has developed an "external action command," EUROPOL notes, which "trained for special forces style attacks in the international environment." The police organization's warning for Europe was stark: "There is every reason to expect that [the Islamic State], [Islamic State]-inspired terrorists or another religiously inspired terrorist group will undertake a

<sup>10</sup>"From Hypocrisy to Apostasy: The Extinction of the Grayzone," Dabiq, Issue 7, <https://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2015/02/the-islamic-state-e2809cdc481biq-magazine-722.pdf>

<sup>11</sup>"France police arrest man 'planning to attack churches'," BBC, April 22, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-32409253>; Tony Todd, "'Syrian accomplice' told Paris suspect to attack churches," France 24, April 23, 2015, <http://www.france24.com/en/20150422-paris-terror-IS-al-qaeda-church-attack-syrian-accomplice>

<sup>12</sup>"Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures Used in the 13 November 2015 Paris Attacks," DHS, FBI, NCTC Joint Intelligence Bulletin, November 23, 2015, <https://info.publicintelligence.net/DHS-FBI-NCTC-ParisAttacks.pdf>

<sup>13</sup>"Future ISIL Operations in the West Could Resemble Disrupted Belgian Plot," Department of Homeland Security Intelligence Assessment, May 13, 2015, <https://info.publicintelligence.net/DHS-FutureOperationsISIL.pdf>

<sup>14</sup>"Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures Used in the 13 November 2015 Paris Attacks," DHS, FBI, NCTC Joint Intelligence Bulletin, November 23, 2015, <https://info.publicintelligence.net/DHS-FBI-NCTC-ParisAttacks.pdf>



terrorist attack somewhere in Europe again, but particularly in France, intended to cause mass casualties amongst the civilian population.”<sup>15</sup>

If the evolution of the Islamic State threat to Europe was not yet perfectly clear after the Paris attacks, it has become so in the wake of the Brussels bombings. And yet, while Europe is now fully aware of the scope of the threat, it remains unprepared to cope with it. This includes both shortcomings in the counterterrorism capabilities of European states, as well as their efforts to integrate immigrant communities into the larger European societies in which they live.

The counterterrorism challenges were underscored by the inability of security services to find Salah Abdeslam for some four months after the November Paris attacks. More broadly, the latest report by the European Union’s counterterrorism coordinator revealed that not all member states have established electronic connections to Interpol at their border crossings.<sup>16</sup> The report was uncharacteristically blunt, finding that “information sharing still does not reflect the threat.”<sup>17</sup> In one glaring example, Europol’s Focal Point Travellers database has recorded only 2,786 verified foreign terrorist fighters despite “well-founded estimates that around 5,000 EU citizens have traveled to Syria and Iraq to join ISIL and other extremist groups,” the report said. Worse still, more than 90 percent of the reports of verified foreign terrorist fighters came from just five member states.

But the social integration challenges are more daunting still. In Belgium in particular, governance is complicated by the extremely federal system of government, divided not only across local, regional, and federal levels of government, but also by geography, language, and culture. But across Europe, solving the long ignored problem of disenfranchised immigrant communities is going to take more time and money, both of which are in short supply.

And these two sets of challenges—counterterrorism and intelligence on the one hand, and social and economic integration on the other—are intricately interconnected. The economic factors are not a primary factor of radicalization, Belgian officials told me, but they are a powerful reinforcing factor feeding an identity crisis centered on lack of opportunity, broken families, psychological fragility, and cultural and religious tension. With an unemployment rate as high as 30 percent, it should not be surprising that the vast majority of Belgian recruits to the Islamic State are small-time criminals.<sup>18</sup> One Molenbeek recruiter, who is now in jail, approached local youth in the neighborhood’s ubiquitous storefront mosques and convinced them to donate some of the proceeds of their petty crime to fund the travel of foreign fighters to Syria.<sup>19</sup>

Today’s petty criminals are now tomorrow’s potential suicide bombers. And they will not be carrying out their attacks in faraway war zones but rather in the heart of the countries in which they grew up. The U.S. intelligence assessment written after the November Paris attacks presciently warned that “the involvement of a large number of operatives and group leaders based in multiple countries in future ISIL-linked plotting could create significant obstacles in the detection and disruption of preoperational activities.”<sup>20</sup> That is certainly the case, but it is only half the problem. The still greater challenge European countries now face is contending with the European Islamic State terrorists being groomed today within their own borders.

<sup>15</sup>“Changes in modus operandi of Islamic State terrorist attacks,” Europol, January 18, 2016, <https://www.europol.europa.eu/sites/default/files/publications/changes—in—modus—operandi—of—is—in—terrorist—attacks.pdf>

<sup>16</sup>“State of play on implementation of the statement of the Members of the European Council of 12 February 2015, the JHA Council Conclusions of 20 November 2015, and the Conclusions of the European Council of 18 December 2015,” EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator, Council of the European Union, March 1, 2016, <http://www.statewatch.org/news/2016/mar/eu-council-c-t-coordinator-report-6450-16.pdf>

<sup>17</sup>“State of play on implementation of the statement of the Members of the European Council of 12 February 2015, the JHA Council Conclusions of 20 November 2015, and the Conclusions of the European Council of 18 December 2015,” EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator, Council of the European Union, March 1, 2016, <http://www.statewatch.org/news/2016/mar/eu-council-c-t-coordinator-report-6450-16.pdf>

<sup>18</sup>Valentina Pop, “Islamic State Terror Cell Found Refuge in Brussels District,” Wall Street Journal, March 23, 2016, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/islamic-state-terror-cell-found-refuge-in-brussels-district-1458694455>

<sup>19</sup>Matthew Dalton, “Attacks Highlight Belgian Failure to Roll Up Extremist Network,” Wall Street Journal, March 23, 2016, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/attacks-highlight-belgian-failure-to-roll-up-extremist-network-1458694796>

<sup>20</sup>“Future ISIL Operations in the West Could Resemble Disrupted Belgian Plot,” Department of Homeland Security Intelligence Assessment, May 13, 2015, <https://info.publicintelligence.net/DHS-FutureOperationsISIL.pdf>

*Fast Track from Zero to Hero*

The harsh fact is that communities ripe for radicalization exist across Europe—including in the heart of the capital of the European Union—and no one quite knows what to do about it. The day of my visit to Molenbeek I first rode a few quick stops on the Brussels metro from my hotel in the EU district to Molenbeek, where I met the mayor at her office together with police chiefs, members of the local police department's "counter-radicalization cell" and civilian "prevention officers" who had just concluded their weekly status-check on the local government's counter-radicalization, and social integration efforts. Their goal seems Sisyphean: reintegrating returning foreign terrorist fighters back into society and preventing still more disenfranchised Muslim youth from looking to the Islamic State for purpose and belonging.

The problem: Molenbeek is like another world, another culture, festering in the heart of the West. Only eight of 114 imams in Brussels speak any of the local languages. The majority Muslim municipality of about 100,000 people is the second poorest in the country, with the second youngest population, high unemployment and crime rates, and a nearly 10% annual population turnover that makes it a highly transient community. By some accounts, nearly a third of Molenbeek residents are unemployed.<sup>21</sup>

Unsurprisingly, Molenbeek has become an almost ideal recruiting ground for the Islamic State, and Belgium has the highest number per capita of Western foreign fighters who have traveled to join the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq (and, more recently, Libya). And the majority of these came from Brussels, and Molenbeek in particular, according to Interior Minister Jan Jambon. The local municipality has been described as one of a few Islamic State "hotbeds of recruitment" around the world.<sup>22</sup> In the words of Belgian Prime Minister Charles Michel, "Almost every time, there is a link to Molenbeek." This week's bombings were no exception.<sup>23</sup>

Recruiters offer a sense of family to people from broken homes; of belonging to people who feel disenfranchised from society; of empowerment to people who feel discriminated against; and of a higher calling and purpose to people who feel adrift. Recruiters pitch small groups of friends and family together: "You don't really belong here. You are not wanted here. You can't live here. You can't get a job here." Only then comes the religious extremist part: "Clearly, you should not be living among the infidels."

*What Islamic State offers them, in a nutshell, is a fast track from zero to hero.*

Mix in a gangster culture and you have a combustible combination. In ghettoized neighborhoods like Molenbeek, today's criminals are tomorrow's terrorists, and the radicalization process is in hyperdrive. As a result, "these guys are not stereotypical Islamists. They gamble, drink, do drugs. They are lady killers, wear Armani, fashionable haircuts. And they live off crime," according to an article published by Pro Publica.<sup>24</sup> Time and again, it turns out the local police were aware of suspects like Abdeslam, but only as small-time thieves. "We knew of several Paris-related suspects before," a police officer told me as I sat down with the mayor, "but not for terrorism reasons, just petty crime and small incidents."

The mayor quickly chimed in, determined to be clear that I understood there was no way to know these crooks had suddenly become terrorists, adding "there was no suspicion of radicalization." But there is one other common thread that runs through all these cases: "The people who leave [for Syria and Iraq] today are all attracted to violence," mayor Schepmans said. Dutch officials echo this sentiment, noting in a recent study that "everyone who has travelled since 2014 to the area under [the Islamic State's] control will have seen the propaganda images of atrocities against 'non-believers'."<sup>25</sup> They know what they are getting into.

<sup>21</sup>Valentina Pop, "Islamic State Terror Cell Found Refuge in Brussels District," Wall Street Journal, March 23, 2016, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/islamic-state-terror-cell-found-refuge-in-brussels-district-1458694455>

<sup>22</sup>"Foreign Fighters: An Updated Assessment of the Flow of Foreign Fighters into Syria and Iraq," The Soufan Group, December 2015, <http://soufangroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/TSG-ForeignFightersUpdate3.pdf>

<sup>23</sup>Robert-Jan Bartunek and Alastair Macdonald, "Guns, God and grievances—Belgium's Islamist 'airbase'," Reuters, November 16, 2015, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-france-shooting-belgium-guns-insight-idUSKCN0T504J20151116>

<sup>24</sup>Sebastian Rotella, "Belgium's Deadly Circles of Terror," ProPublica, March 22, 2016, <https://www.propublica.org/article/belgiums-deadly-circles-of-terror>

<sup>25</sup>"Life with ISIS: the Myth Unraveled," General Intelligence and Security Service, Ministry of the interior and Kingdom Relations, January 18, 2016, <https://english.aivd.nl/publications/publications/2016/01/15/publication-life-with-isis-the-myth-unravelled>

And while there is a component of religious extremism, Belgian officials stress, it is only skin deep. The suspects appear to be mainly criminals who are attracted to something that gives them identity and a sense of empowerment. They are radicalized to the idea of the Islamic state far more than to Islam. “Salafism [a radical Islamist ideology] is mainstream in Belgium,” was a refrain I heard from several of the officials I met. “Not all Salafists are terrorists,” they stressed, “but all our terrorists were targeted for recruitment by Salafists in these neighborhood extremist networks.”

*Syrian Civil War, Islamic State, and Radicalization in Hyper Drive*

It is important to consider as context how the war in Syria transformed the nature of radicalization and recruitment of foreign terrorist fighters for the Islamic State (and, indeed, for other Islamist violent extremist groups). Initially, before the Islamic State existed, foreigners traveled to fight in Syria to defend fellow Sunni civilians and defend communities against persecution by the Assad regime. That was a much easier and faster radicalization process than had been the case under al-Qaeda. A person only had to be convinced to fight a defensive battle to protect Sunni civilians from the gas attacks, barrel bombings and starvation campaigns of the Assad regime, not an al-Qaeda-style offensive Jihad against the West.

As the conflict dragged on more people began to fight with the Jabhat al-Nusra’s and Ahrar al-Sham’s of the world because these more radical groups enjoyed greater financial support and therefore had access to more money and better weapons. Over time, many people who went to fight in Syria for altruistic reasons became increasingly radicalized by exposure to these more extreme groups. Some would later join the Islamic State.

The creation of the Islamic State and its so-called caliphate further fueled the pace of radicalization. For many vulnerable, at-risk Muslim men and women in Europe, the Islamic State provided the opportunity to be a part of building something exciting and important. They were being invited to get in on the early building stages of reestablishing a caliphate, just like the early followers of the Prophet Muhammad, making them part of something historic and bigger than themselves.

The Islamic State simplifies world conflicts into black and white “which allows someone the opportunity of being the ‘hero’—an empowering narrative for a disenfranchised, disengaged individual.”<sup>26</sup> And while the Syrian civil war and then the founding of a so-called caliphate significantly sped up the pace of the radicalization process, there is today a powerful undercurrent that draws in at-risk youth having less to do with Islam or Assad but with providing “the thrill of being part of something bigger. It is a youth subculture ... and peer groups play a big role.”<sup>27</sup>

After the Paris attacks in November, Belgian Police intercepted a phone call to Brussels from Syria and overheard a Belgian militant inquiring about his friend Bilal Hadfi, who had been a suicide bomber in Paris. The militant asked what his friends were saying about Bilal back in the “sector,” a reference to Molenbeek where many of the Paris attackers grew up. “Are they talking about him? Are they praising him? Are they saying he was a lion?” the militant asked. His particular interest in his peer’s opinion of Hadfi made one thing perfectly clear: for him and others like him the Islamic State was more about personal glory than anything else.

*The Road Ahead*

When I met with the mayor of Molenbeek, she was frank about the task ahead in getting a handle on radicalization in the municipality but was equally blunt in describing the area as a victim of lack of government attention and investment. There is also confusion at the government level about how to handle the problem. Municipal authorities stressed that actual counterterrorism is the job of the Federal Police, who maintain a consolidated list of some 670 terrorist suspects, including people who have gone to fight in Syria and Iraq (and, more recently, Libya), returning foreign fighters, and individuals who seem inclined to become foreign terrorist fighters. A separate federal list focuses on priority criminal cases (due to the increasingly common links between the two, authorities plan to merge the two lists). According to local officials, the municipality has documented at least 85 cases of

<sup>26</sup>Danica Kirka, “ISIS is luring normal Western women with troubling simplicity,” *Business Insider*, May 28, 2015, <http://www.businessinsider.com/young-women-are-joining-isis-for-more-than-marriage-2015-5>

<sup>27</sup>Jason Burke, “The story of a radicalisation: I was not thinking my thoughts. I was not myself,” *The Guardian*, November 26, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/nov/26/radicalisation-islam-isis-maysa-not-thinking-my-thoughts-not-myself>

people who have been radicalized to terrorism, some of whom have left to join the Islamic State in Syria and others who have returned.<sup>28</sup>

Following the Brussels bombings, authorities are laser-focused not only on finding all the perpetrators and their accomplices, but mapping out the network of Islamic State terrorists on the ground in Belgium. That will be no small task, but even that kind of counterterrorism success will only go so far towards reestablishing a sense of security in Belgium in particular and Europe more generally. Hardening targets, implementing greater border security measures, and enhancing intelligence collection and information sharing are critical and still subpar, but these tools will only help us contend with yesterday's threat; they won't help us get ahead of tomorrow's.

The good news is that Belgian authorities have now realized the need to build a prevention program. And to be fair, that realization came not last week but 15 months ago, when Belgian authorities raided a residence in Verviers a week after the Charlie Hebdo attack. The raids thwarted "major terrorist attacks" in Belgium and led to the intensification of "Plan R"—the government's national counter-radicalization plan. The plan predated the Verviers raid, on paper, but it has now led to tangible changes. A Coordination Unit for Threat Analysis (CUTA) serves as a fusion center between federal level national security agencies and local police departments. Nearly 18,000 police officers have been trained to spot potential radicalization identifiers under the Community Policing to Prevent Radicalization (COPRA) initiative. And the Federal Police have instituted a "grasping approach" to radicalization cases in which police are instructed to "follow up and don't let go" until there is no longer any threat the person in question is being radicalized to violence.

In the months before the Brussels bombings, local officials also developed "Plan Molenbeek" to address what they described to me as "the need for proper institutions to address the unique issues facing the municipality." They remain desperately understaffed, but they have already trained 700 community field workers (including teachers and social workers) to spot signs of radicalization and partner with prevention officers to develop a customized intervention for each case. They meet with counterparts in other municipalities facing similar issues to share lessons learned. This is especially important, one official told me, since "we are all learning by doing."

Still, since the November Paris attacks, tracking cases of people on the road to radicalization has only gotten harder. "Paris was a game-changer," a local police officer in Molenbeek told me. "Since then it's been like a tsunami of information flowing in from all our partners, including concerned members of the community, federal agencies, and our own civilian prevention officers." Those prevention officers play a critical role as civilian employees of the municipality focused solely on integrating people into society, but they are severely understaffed. The local police also have a counter-radicalization cell, but they too lack resources. Even with a staffing boost after the November Paris attacks, the cell numbers only eight officers. "Most of the people we come across are youngsters, unemployed, and often involved in criminal activities," prevention officers told me. "We try to integrate people we see into society, that's the most important thing now, ideally." A police officer chimed in, "And we prosecute, as necessary."

Last month, as Belgian and French police officers prepared to raid a suspected Islamic State safe-house, I was sitting with a senior Belgian counterterrorism official at his downtown headquarters. As we discussed the Islamic State threat to Europe in general, and Belgium in particular—about five miles from the site of the raid, but a world apart—the disconnect between the scale of the threat and the preparedness of the response became starkly clear. The manhunt for Abdeslam focused the attention of Belgian counterterrorism officials. Another terrorist was killed in a shootout at the raid that day, an Algerian whose body was found next to a rifle, ammunition, a book on Salafism, and an Islamic State flag.<sup>29</sup>

But police found clues pointing to Abdeslam, including his fingerprints. Three days later, police finally captured Abdeslam, who was being sheltered by family members in Molenbeek, the Brussels municipality where he grew up, not far from the family home. But as we now know, authorities barely questioned Abdeslam between the time of his arrest and the Brussels bombings. Moreover, Turkish authorities had warned Belgian and Dutch authorities about one of the Brussels bombers,

<sup>28</sup>Valentina Pop, "Islamic State Terror Cell Found Refuge in Brussels District," Wall Street Journal, March 23, 2016, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/islamic-state-terror-cell-found-refuge-in-brussels-district-1458694455>

<sup>29</sup>Greg Botelho, "Brussels shooting: ISIS flag, ammo found in raid tied to Paris attacks," CNN March 16, 2016, <http://www.cnn.com/2016/03/16/europe/brussels-raid-paris-attack/>

who they had turned away at the border and were sending back to Europe as what they specifically described as a “foreign terrorist fighter.”

“We got him,” an official excitedly tweeted at the news of Abdeslam’s capture. In truth the job has just begun. But after meeting with officials in Molenbeek, I allowed myself to feel just a touch of optimism: the police and prevention officers I met in Molenbeek were among the most impressive I’ve met anywhere. “We are discovering on a daily basis new ways to work in the prevention space,” one of them commented as our meeting came to a close. The problem: What they need is in short supply: more resources and more time.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.  
Director Olsen?

**STATEMENT OF HON. MATTHEW G. OLSEN, FORMER DIRECTOR, NATIONAL COUNTERTERRORISM CENTER, WASHINGTON, DC**

Mr. OLSEN. Thank you very much, Chairman and Ranking Member Cardin, distinguished members of the committee. I am honored to be here this morning.

We meet this morning in the wake, as you mentioned, Chairman, of the horrific attacks in Brussels and recently in Paris and in San Bernardino. These massacres serve as a sobering reminder of the complexity of the terrorism challenges that we face.

By all measures, ISIS presents the most urgent threat to our security in the world today. The group has seized and is governing territory and, at the same time, is securing the allegiance of other terrorist groups across the Middle East and North Africa. ISIS’ sanctuary enables it to recruit, train, and execute external attacks, as we have seen now in Europe, and it enables it to incite assailants around the world. It has recruited thousands of militants to its cause, and it uses propaganda to radicalize countless others in the West. At the same time, we continue to face an enduring threat from Al Qaeda and its affiliates who maintain the intent and capability to attack us here in the West.

In my brief opening remarks, I will focus on the nature of the terrorist threats, and I will touch on some of the ways I think we need to consider enhancing our strategy to confront ISIS.

Now, I will begin with the spread of ISIS. There are really three overarching factors in my view that account for the rise and rapid success of ISIS.

First, it has exploited the civil war in Syria and lack of security in northern Iraq.

Second, it has proven to be an effective fighting force. Now, since September 2014, the U.S.-led military coalition has halted ISIS momentum, reversed some of the group’s territorial gains, but ISIS has adapted in the face of these other coalition airstrikes.

And then third, ISIS views itself as the new leader of a global jihad. It has developed an unprecedented ability to communicate and radicalize its followers around the world.

Today, in terms of its strength, ISIS has up to 25,000 fighters in Iraq and Syria. It has also branched out, taking advantage of the chaos and unrest in places like Yemen and Libya to expand to new territory and enlist new followers. ISIS can now claim formal alliances with eight groups across an arc of instability stretching from the Middle East across North Africa.

And from this position, ISIS poses a multifaceted threat to us here in the United States and, as well, to our allies in Europe. In the past 2 years, ISIS reportedly has directed or inspired more than 80 external attacks in as many as 20 nations. And then, of course, most concerning, the recent attacks in Brussels and Paris demonstrate that ISIS now has both the intent and capability to direct and execute sophisticated, coordinated attacks in Western Europe.

Here at home, the threat from ISIS is on a smaller scale, but it is still persistent. We have experienced attacks that ISIS has inspired in San Bernardino and Garland, Texas.

I think several factors are driving this trend toward the increasing pace and scale of terrorism violence.

First is the sheer number of Europeans and other Westerners who have gone to Syria to join the fight there. More than 6,000 Europeans have traveled to Syria. Among the Europeans who have left to go to Syria, hundreds have returned to their own countries, typically battle-hardened, further trained, and further radicalized.

Here, while the principal threat in the United States is from homegrown ISIS-inspired actors, the fact that many Americans have traveled to Syria and Iraq to fight, along with the thousands more who have gone from visa waiver countries in Europe, makes it clear that we need to be concerned about the possibility of a Paris or Brussels style attack here at home in the United States.

Secondly, ISIS has developed more advanced tactics in planning and executing these attacks. They stage coordinated attacks. They have effectively hampered police responses. They appear to have achieved a certain level of proficiency in bomb-making.

And third, existing networks of extremists in Europe are providing the infrastructure to support these attacks.

Looking more broadly, the rise of ISIS should be viewed as a manifestation of where we are with the global jihadist movement today. That movement has expanded and diversified after the Arab Spring. There are essentially four failed states in North Africa and the Middle East, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and Libya, that provide safe haven for these groups.

Now, looking at the strategy to defeat ISIS, the committee has held a number of hearings and is familiar with the administration's strategy, the combination of military efforts, the counterterrorism lines of effort. Let me focus on ways I think we need to consider augmenting that strategy.

One is a surge in our intelligence capabilities. A surge would enhance our technical surveillance capabilities, develop sources to penetrate ISIS and form a closer relationship with intelligence services. This would address the gaps that exist because of the use of encryption, and it would address the gap that exists because of the illegal disclosures of our intelligence surveillance capabilities, which are hampering our intelligence community today.

Second, I think we should look to work in concert with Europe to build Europe's ability to share information and to improve its watch listing capabilities. Today, European nations do not always alert each other when they encounter a terrorism suspect at a border.

And then finally, we should redouble our efforts to counter ISIS on the ideological front, beginning with the recognition that both in Europe and in the United States we need to build and maintain the trust of Muslim communities. That also means that we need to unambiguously oppose the hateful rhetoric that erodes that trust.

Mr. Chairman, in conclusion, we should not underestimate the capacity of ISIS and other groups to adapt and evade our defenses and to carry out acts of violence both here at home and around the world. But no terrorist group, not ISIS, is invincible. The enduring lessons of 9/11 are that we can overcome and defeat terrorism with strength, unity, and adherence to our founding values and that American leadership is indispensable to that fight.

I look forward to your questions.

[Mr. Olsen's prepared statement follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF MATTHEW G. OLSEN, FORMER  
DIRECTOR OF THE NATIONAL COUNTERTERRORISM CENTER

Thank you Chairman Corker, Ranking Member Cardin, and distinguished members of the committee. I am honored to have this opportunity to appear before you to discuss the spread of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria and the threat from transnational terrorism.

We meet this morning in the wake of the horrific attacks in Brussels last month and the recent attacks Paris and in San Bernardino late last year. These massacres serve both as a sobering reminder of the complexity of the threats we face from terrorist groups of global reach and as a call for action in the ongoing struggle against terrorism. Indeed, these attacks give this hearing added significance, as you convene to examine the threat to the United States and our interests around the world and the steps we should take to counter terrorist groups both at home and abroad.

By any measure, ISIS presents the most urgent threat to our security in the world today. The group has exploited the conflict in Syria and sectarian tensions in Iraq to entrench itself in both countries, now spanning the geographic center of the Middle East. Using both terrorist and insurgent tactics, the group has seized and is governing territory, while at the same time securing the allegiance of allied terrorist groups across the Middle East and North Africa. ISIS's sanctuary enables it to recruit, train, and execute external attacks, as we have now seen in Europe, and to incite assailants around the world. It has recruited thousands of militants to join its fight in the region and uses its propaganda campaign to radicalize countless others in the West. And at the same time, we continue to face an enduring threat from al Qaida and its affiliates, who maintain the intent and capacity to carry out attacks in the West.

In my remarks today, I will focus first on the nature of the terrorist threat from transnational terrorist groups, focusing on ISIS and al-Qaida. I then will address some of the key elements of the strategy to degrade and defeat these groups, as well as the challenges we face ahead.

*The Spread of ISIS*

Let me begin with the spread of ISIS from its roots in Iraq. ISIS traces its origin to the veteran Sunni terrorist, Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi, who founded the group in 2004 and pledged his allegiance to bin Laden. Al Qaeda in Iraq, as it was then known, targeted U.S. forces and civilians to pressure the United States and other countries to leave Iraq and gained a reputation for brutality and tyranny.

In 2007, the group's continued targeting and repression of Sunni civilians in Iraq caused a widespread backlash—often referred to as the Sunni Awakening—against the group. This coincided with a surge in U.S. and coalition forces and Iraq counterterrorism operations that ultimately denied ISIS safe haven and led to a sharp decrease in its attack tempo. Then in 2011, the group began to reconstitute itself amid growing Sunni discontent and the civil war in Syria. In 2012, ISIS conducted an average of 5-10 suicide attacks in Iraq per month, an attack tempo that grew to 30-40 attacks per month in 2013.

While gaining strength in Iraq, ISIS exploited the conflict and chaos in Syria to expand its operations across the border. The group established the al-Nusrah Front as a cover for its activities in Syria, and in April 2013, the group publicly declared its presence in Syria under the ISIS name. Al-Nusrah leaders immediately rejected

ISIS's announcement and publicly pledged allegiance to al-Qaida. And by February 2014, al-Qaida declared that ISIS was no longer a branch of the group.

At the same time, ISIS accelerated its efforts to remove Iraqi and Syrian government control of key portions of their respective territories, seizing control of Raqqa, Syria, and Fallujah, Iraq, in January 2014. The group marched from its safe haven in Syria, across the border into northern Iraq, slaughtering thousands of Iraqi Muslims, Sunni and Shia alike, on its way to seizing Mosul in June 2014. Through these battlefield victories, the group gained weapons, equipment, and territory, as well as an extensive war chest. In the summer of 2014, ISIS declared the establishment of an Islamic caliphate under the name the "Islamic State" and called for all Muslims to pledge support to the group and its leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.

Three overarching factors account for the rise and rapid success of ISIS over the past three years.

First, ISIS has exploited the civil war in Syria and the lack of security in northern Iraq to establish a safe haven. At the same time, Assad's brutal suppression of the Syrian people acted as a magnet for extremists and foreign fighters. In western Iraq, the withdrawal of security forces during the initial military engagements with ISIS left swaths of territory ungoverned. ISIS has used these areas to establish sanctuaries in Syria and Iraq from where the group could amass and coordinate fighters and resources with little interference. With virtually no security forces along the Iraq-Syria border, ISIS was able to move personnel and supplies with ease within its held territories.

Second, ISIS has proven to be an effective fighting force. Its battlefield strategy employs a mix of terrorist operations, hit-and-run tactics, and paramilitary assaults to enable the group's rapid gains. These battlefield advances, in turn, sparked other Sunni insurgents into action, and they have helped the group hold and administer territory. Disaffected Sunnis have had few alternatives in Iraq or Syria. The leadership in both countries has pushed them to the sidelines in the political process for years, failing to address their grievances. ISIS has been recruiting these young Sunnis to fight. Since September 2014, the U.S.-led military coalition has halted ISIS's momentum and reversed the group's territorial gains, but ISIS has sought to adapt its tactics in the face of coalition air strikes.

Third, ISIS views itself as the new leader of the global jihad. The group has developed an unprecedented ability to communicate with its followers worldwide. It operates the most sophisticated propaganda machine of any terrorist group. ISIS disseminates timely, high-quality media content on multiple platforms, including on social media, designed to secure a widespread following for the group. ISIS uses a range of media to tout its military capabilities, executions of captured soldiers, and battlefield victories.

ISIS's media campaign also is aimed at drawing foreign fighters to the group, including many from Western countries. The media campaign also allows ISIS to recruit new fighters to conduct independent or inspired attacks in the West. ISIS's propaganda outlets include multiple websites, active Twitter feeds, YouTube channels, and online chat rooms. ISIS uses these platforms to radicalize and mobilize potential operatives in the United States and elsewhere. The group's supporters have sustained this momentum on social media by encouraging attacks in the United States and against U.S. interests in retaliation for our airstrikes. As a result, ISIS threatens to outpace al-Qaida as the dominant voice of influence in the global extremist movement.

#### *The Threat from ISIS Today*

Today, ISIS reportedly has between 20,000 and 25,000 fighters in Iraq and Syria, an overall decrease from the number of fighters in 2014. ISIS controls much of the Tigris-Euphrates basin. Significantly, however, ISIS's frontlines in parts of northern and central Iraq and northern Syria have been pushed back, according to the Defense Department, and ISIS probably can no longer operate openly in approximately 25 to 30 percent of populated areas in Iraq and Syria that it dominated in August 2014.

ISIS also has branched out, taking advantage of the chaos and lack of security in countries like Yemen to Libya to expand to new territory and enlist new followers. ISIS can now claim formal alliances with eight affiliated groups across an arc of instability and unrest stretching from the Middle East across North Africa.

Libya is the most prominent example of the expansion of ISIS. There, ISIS's forces include as many as 6,500 fighters, who have captured the town of Sirte and 150 miles of coastline over the past year. This provides ISIS with a relatively safe base from which to attract new recruits and execute attacks elsewhere, including on Libya's oil facilities. In addition, ISIS has proven its ability to conduct operations



in western Libya, including a suicide bombing at a police training, which killed at least 60 people earlier this year.

From this position, ISIS poses a multi-faceted threat to Europe and to the United States. The strategic goal of ISIS remains to establish an Islamic caliphate through armed conflict with governments it considers apostate—including European nations and the United States. In early 2014, ISIS’s leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi warned that the United States will soon “be in direct conflict” with the group. In September 2014, the group’s spokesperson Abu Muhammad al-Adnani released a speech instructing supporters to kill disbelievers in Western countries “in any manner or way,” without traveling to Syria or waiting for direction.

ISIS has established an external operations organization under Adnani’s leadership. This unit reportedly is a distinct body inside ISIS responsible for identifying recruits, supplying training and cash, and arranging for the delivery of weapons. The unit’s main focus has been Europe, but it also has directed deadly attacks outside Europe, including in Turkey, Egypt, Tunisia and Lebanon.

A recent New York Times report attributes 1,200 deaths to ISIS outside Iraq and Syria, and about half of the dead have been local civilians in Arab countries, many killed in attacks on mosques and government offices. In the past two years ISIS reportedly has directed or inspired more than 80 external attacks in as many as 20 nations. And ISIS has carried out or inspired at least 29 deadly assaults targeting Westerners around the world, killing more than 650 people.

Most concerning, the recent attacks in Brussels and Paris demonstrate that ISIS now has both the intent and capability to direct and execute sophisticated attacks in Western Europe. These attacks reflect an alarming trend. Over the past year, ISIS has increased the complexity, severity, and pace of its external attacks. The Brussels and Paris attacks were not simply inspired by ISIS, but rather they were ISIS-planned and directed. And they were conducted as part of a coordinated effort to maximize casualties by striking some of the most vulnerable targets in the West: a train station and airport in Brussels, and a nightclub, cafe, and sporting arena in Paris. Further, recent reports that ISIS has used chemical weapons in Syria, and that it conducted surveillance of Belgium nuclear facilities, raise the specter that the group is intent on using weapons of mass destruction.

In the United States, the threat from ISIS is on a smaller scale but persistent. We have experienced attacks that ISIS has inspired—including the attacks in San Bernardino and in Garland, Texas—and there has been an overall uptick over the past year in the number of moderate-to-small scale plots. Lone actors or insular groups—often self-directed or inspired by overseas groups, like ISIS—pose the most serious threat to carry out attacks here. Homegrown violent extremists will likely continue gravitating to simpler plots that do not require advanced skills, outside training, or communication with others. The online environment serves a critical role in radicalizing and mobilizing homegrown extremists towards violence. Highlighting the challenge this presents, the FBI Director said last year that the FBI has homegrown violent extremist cases, totaling about 900, in every state. Most of these cases are connected to ISIS.

Several factors are driving this trend toward the increasing pace and scale of terrorist-related violence. First, the sheer number of number of Europeans and other Westerners who have gone to Syria to fight in the conflict and to join ISIS is supplying a steady flow of operatives to the group. Reports indicate that more than 6,000 Europeans—including many French, German, British, and Belgian nationals—have travelled to Syria to join the fight. This is part of the total of approximately 40,000 foreign fighters in the region. Among the Europeans who have left for Syria, several hundred fighters have returned to their home countries, typically battle-hardened, trained, and further radicalized. The number of Americans who have travelled to Syria or Iraq, or have tried to, exceeds 250.

As such, we should not underestimate the potential of an ISIS-directed attack in the United States. While the principal threat from ISIS in the United States is from homegrown, ISIS-inspired actors, the fact that so many Americans have travelled to Syria and Iraq to fight, along with thousands more from visa waiver countries in Europe, raises the real concern that these individuals could be deployed here to conduct attacks similar to the attacks in Paris and Brussels.

Second, ISIS has developed more advanced tactics in planning and executing these attacks. In both Brussels and Paris, the operatives staged coordinated attacks at multiple sites, effectively hampering police responses. The militants exploited weaknesses in Europe’s border controls in order to move relatively freely from Syria to France and Belgium. The group has also moved away from previous efforts to attack symbolically significant targets—such as the 2014 attack on a Jewish museum in Brussels—and appears to have adopted the guidance of a senior ISIS operative in the group’s online magazine, who directed followers “to stop looking for specific

targets” and to “hit everyone and everything.” Further, the explosives used in Paris and likely in Brussels indicate the terrorists have achieved a level of proficiency in bomb making. The use of TATP in Paris and the discovery of the material in raids in Brussels suggest that the operatives have received sophisticated explosives training, possibly in Syria.

Third, existing networks of extremists in Europe are providing the infrastructure to support the execution of attacks there. The investigations of the Paris and Belgium attacks have revealed embedded radical networks that supply foreign fighters to ISIS in Syria and operatives and logistical support for the terrorist attacks in those cities. While such entrenched and isolated networks are not present in the United States, ISIS continues to target Americans for recruitment, including through the use of focused social media, in order to identify and mobilize operatives here.

Looking more broadly, the rise of ISIS should be viewed as a manifestation of the transformation of the global jihadist movement over the past several years. We have seen this movement diversify and expand in the aftermath of the upheaval and political chaos in the Arab world since 2010. Instability and unrest in large parts of the Middle East and North Africa have led to a lack of security, border control, and effective governance. In the last few years, four states—Iraq, Syria, Libya, and Yemen—have effectively collapsed. ISIS and other terrorist groups exploit these conditions to expand their reach and establish safe havens. As a result, the threat now comes from a decentralized array of organizations and networks, with ISIS being the group that presents the most urgent threat today.

Specifically, Al-Qaida core continues to support attacking the West and is vying with ISIS to be the recognized leader of the global jihad. There is no doubt that sustained

U.S. counterterrorism pressure has led to the steady elimination of al-Qaida’s senior leaders and limited the group’s ability to operate, train, and recruit operatives. At the same time, the core leadership of al-Qaida continues to wield substantial influence over affiliated and allied groups, such as Yemen-based al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula. On three occasions over the past several years, AQAP has sought to bring down an airliner bound for the United States. And there is reason to believe it still harbors the intent and substantial capability to carry out such a plot.

In Syria, veteran al-Qaida fighters have traveled from Pakistan to take advantage of the permissive operating environment and access to foreign fighters. They are focused on plotting against the West. Al-Shabaab also maintains a safe haven in Somalia and threatens U.S. interests in the region, asserting the aim of creating a caliphate across east Africa. The group has reportedly increased its recruitment in Kenya and aims to destabilize parts of Kenya. Finally, AQIM (and its splinter groups) and Boko Haram—now an official branch of ISIS—continue to maintain their base of operations in North and West Africa and have demonstrated sustained capabilities to carry out deadly attacks against civilian targets.

#### *The Strategy To Defeat ISIS*

Against this backdrop, I will briefly address the current strategy to confront and ultimately defeat ISIS. As formidable as ISIS has become, the group is vulnerable. Indeed, the U.S.-led military campaign has killed thousands of ISIS fighters and rolled back ISIS’s territorial gains in parts of Iraq and Syria. ISIS has not had any major strategic military victories in Iraq or Syria for almost a year. As ISIS loses its hold on territory, its claim that it has established the “caliphate” will be eroded, and the group will lose its central appeal.

On the military front, a coalition of twelve nations has conducted more than 8,700 airstrikes in Syria and Iraq, according to the Defense Department. These strikes have taken out a range of targets, including ISIS vehicles, weaponry, training camps, oil infrastructure, and artillery positions. In addition, several nations have joined the United States in deploying military personal to assist the Iraqi government, training more than 17,000 Iraqi security forces.

The military effort also has included the successful targeting of ISIS leaders. United States special operations forces have gone into Syria to support the fight against ISIS, bringing a unique set of capabilities, such as intelligence gathering, enabling local forces, and targeting high-value ISIS operatives and leaders.

From a counterterrorism perspective, the United States is pursuing multiple lines of effort. First, the United States is focusing on stemming the flow of foreign fighters to Syria, and disrupting ISIS’s financial networks. The government reports that at least 50 countries plus the United Nations now contribute foreign terrorist fighter profiles to INTERPOL, and the United States has bilateral arrangements with 40 international partners for sharing terrorist travel information. In 2015, the U.S. government sanctioned more than 30 ISIS-linked senior leaders, financiers, foreign

terrorist facilitators, and organizations, helping isolate ISIS from the international financial system. In addition, since 2014, the FBI has arrested approximately 65 individuals in ISIS-related criminal matters.

Second, to counter ISIS propaganda, the United States is strengthening its efforts to prevent ISIS from radicalizing and mobilizing recruits. The White House recently announced the creation of an interagency countering violent extremism (CVE) task force under the leadership of the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of Justice, with additional staffing from the FBI and National Counterterrorism Center. The CVE task force is charged with the integrating whole-of-government programs and activities and establishing new CVE efforts. As part of this initiative, the DHS Office for Community Partnerships is developing innovative ways to support communities that seek to discourage violent extremism and to undercut terrorist narratives.

Third, and more broadly, the United States continues to lead the international diplomatic effort to resolve the underlying conflicts in the region. This includes working toward a negotiated political transition that removes Bashar al-Asad from power and ultimately leads to an inclusive government that is responsive to the needs of all Syrians. This effort also includes supporting the Iraqi government's progress toward effective and inclusive governance, stabilization efforts, and reconciliation.

To augment this strategy, there are a number of initiatives that merit consideration.

One is a surge in our intelligence capabilities. Such a surge should include enhancing our technical surveillance capabilities, providing additional resources for the development of sources to penetrate ISIS, and fostering closer relationships with intelligence services in the region. This focus on intelligence collection would help address the fact that our law enforcement and intelligence agencies have found it increasingly difficult to collect specific intelligence on terrorist intentions and plots. This intelligence gap is due in part to the widespread availability and adoption of encrypted communication technology. Indeed, ISIS has released a how-to manual to its followers on the use of encryption to avoid detection. The gap also is the result of the illegal disclosures of our intelligence collection methods and techniques. These disclosures have provided terrorists with a roadmap on how to evade our surveillance. Therefore, rebuilding our intelligence capabilities should be an imperative.

Next, the United States should continue to work in concert with European partners and support Europe's effort to break down barriers to information sharing among agencies and among nations and to strengthen border controls. Today, European nations do not always alert each other when they encounter a terrorism suspect at a border. Europe should incorporate the lessons we learned after 9/11 and adopt structural changes that enable sharing of information between law enforcement and intelligence agencies and that support watchlisting of suspected terrorists.

Finally, the United States should redouble its efforts to counter ISIS on the ideological front. This begins with a recognition that the United States, along with nations in Europe, must build and maintain trust and strong relationships with Muslim communities who are on the front lines of the fight against radicalization. This also means we must reject unambiguously the hateful rhetoric that erodes that trust. The U.S. strategy should focus on empowering Muslim American communities to confront extremist ideology, working to galvanize and amplify networks of people, both in the government and private sector, to confront ISIS's ideology of oppression and violence. While the government has made strides in this direction, the pace and scale of the effort has not matched the threat.

#### *Conclusion*

In the wake of the terrorist attacks in Europe and here in the United States, our continued focus on ISIS and transnational terrorist threats is absolutely warranted. We should not underestimate the capacity of ISIS and other groups to adapt and evade our defenses and to carry out acts of violence, both here at home and around the world.

But no terrorist group is invincible. The enduring lessons of 9/11 are that we can overcome and defeat the threat of terrorism through strength, unity, and adherence to our founding values, and that American leadership is indispensable to this fight.

I look forward to answering your questions.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

I am going to reserve my time for interjections and turn to our ranking member, Senator Cardin.

Senator CARDIN. Well, Mr. Olsen, you may have started to answer the question I was going to ask you, and that is you are the former Director of the National Counterterrorism Center. So I was curious as to whether there are lessons that we have learned, that you learned in fighting Al Qaeda and other terrorist groups that apply to ISIL, recognizing ISIL is unique in its caliphate and what it is attempting to do. But your final comment I thought was striking in that if we have unity and resolve and leadership, we can defeat ISIL. Were there other lessons learned in what we did successfully in dealing with Al Qaeda or other terrorist organizations that we can now use for ISIL?

Mr. OLSEN. I think there certainly are lessons. You know, at a very strategic level, obviously unity and leadership and resolve are crucial. But more tactically, we learned a lot over the last 15 years since 9/11.

One is the hardest lessons perhaps to actually achieve is to deny these groups safe haven. That is one of the keys. We learned that in Afghanistan and we have learned it in terms of our efforts to mount sustained pressure on Al Qaeda wherever it exists. We see that now with what has happened with ISIS in Iraq and Syria. Wherever these groups gain a foothold, wherever they have the opportunity, a sanctuary to plot and train, inevitably they turn to carry out external attacks. So limiting and eventually destroying a safe haven is crucial.

Another point to make is the importance of information sharing, and this goes directly to the lessons that we learned since 9/11 and what we need now to work with our European partners to instill. That is the importance of sharing information across the intelligence and law enforcement divide. We certainly learned that after 9/11, breaking down barriers to that type of sharing and also vertically in the United States from the Federal to the State level—and you see that as well in Europe—to instill an incentive, really the imperative to share information at all levels.

I think those are some of the enduring lessons from 9/11.

Senator CARDIN. That is very helpful.

You mentioned that there are six other countries in which ISIL has strength. Our staff, I think, has identified 20 countries where there are groups that show support for ISIL. You indicate that we cannot have any safe havens.

Other than Iraq and Syria, what country would you next put as our greatest area of concern that a safe haven could be developing?

Mr. OLSEN. I think you would find that there is a consensus here among us that Libya is the next most concerning nation. In Libya, ISIS has as many as 6,500 fighters. They control the coastal town of Sirte and about 150 miles of coastline. They have demonstrated a capability to carry out attacks as far as in western Libya. They carried out one of the most deadly suicide bombings in western Libya, killing 60 people at a police station. And then you consider sort of the geographic location of Libya to Europe. So I think if I picked out the next most concerning country, it would clearly be Libya.

Senator CARDIN. And of course, the formula there is similar to what we see in Syria. We have conflicting political entities leaving a vacuum that ISIL can certainly go into. So thank you for that.

Dr. Levitt, I want to say something at least optimistic here for a moment, if I might, because I agree with your analysis on the causes for radicalization. There was an article in the “Washington Post” today by Joby Warrick that says that recent pollings show that we have increased from 60 to 80 percent of the young Arabs who disavow the extremist tactics being used and disavow the organization totally, even if it did not use terrorist tactics, saying, the survey suggests, that religious fervor plays a secondary role at best when young Arabs do decide to sign up with the Islamic State. Joblessness or poor economic prospects appear to be the top reason. It sort of reinforces the point that you made that we really need to deal with some of these underlying problems.

How do you deal with that? Clearly, poverty exists. It exists throughout the region. So the economic issues are always going to be there. What strategies can work in Iraq and Syria to really deal with the radicalization of the population?

Dr. LEVITT. Thank you very much for the question.

Ultimately what we are talking about is good governance. Most studies actually show that poverty is not what is driving terrorism, but poverty plays an important role in the mix of things all together. And what we are talking about is good governance, not necessarily at the federal level but at the local level. People need to be able to go about their daily lives and achieve what they need to achieve as basic human beings. And when they cannot, it creates a cognitive opening for sometimes dangerous ideas, not always dangerous, but for ideas that will help them understand what is happening to them. And sometimes these very radical ideas are the ones that have the greatest resonance, especially when things are really tough.

If I may, I would like to add one comment on the Libya question, and that is when I was just in Europe—and I am going back several more times over the next few weeks—the Europeans stressed to me that they are very concerned about Libya in part also because of the foreign terrorist fighter issue. They are beginning to make it more difficult for people to travel to Iraq and Syria. People are still going. But as they make it more complicated, they are seeing people, Europeans, travel to Libya, and that is a concern.

And let us be clear. It is not Islamic State in Libya. There are at least three distinct Islamic States, Islamic State provinces, and they are not exactly the same in Libya.

And on the issue of what we can learn, I have to say that we have often for years now talked about whole of government. But only recently—and I give credit to the administration—have we created a task force at DHS with a deputy from DOJ and interagency buy-in, something that Matt was working on a lot when he was there. And he can speak to this in spades about the importance of getting greater buy-in from other parts of the interagency.

Now we have a task force that was created top down by the President, and we really need to get in not only the FBI and NCTC side of government but the HHS and Education and other parts of government as well.

Senator CARDIN. Let me get one more question to you, Dr. Levitt. You said one of the reasons why recruitment was effective is that young believers want to get in in the beginning state of a new

state, the caliphate. So how important is it, the territorial dimensions of ISIL, in its recruitment?

Dr. LEVITT. I think the territorial piece for ISIL recruitment is huge, and I think nothing has had a bigger impact on setting them back, including setting back their recruitment campaigns than battlefield defeat. They cannot claim to be establishing this idyllic caliphate that they have tried to create online. They cannot say that they are remaining and expanding, which is their own words, their own litmus test metric for success. And if there is not an idyllic caliphate to get in and build from the ground level up and if that caliphate is exposed for not really being much of a caliphate, certainly not being like what was created with the Prophet Muhammad and his original followers, then this line of reasoning does not resonate as much as it might otherwise.

Senator CARDIN. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Johnson?

Senator JOHNSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

In January 2016, through excellent police work, the FBI foiled a plot in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. It was a plot against the Masonic Temple. The would-be terrorist's name was Samy Mohamed Hamzeh. In the complaint there is an informant that quoted him a number of times. I just want to read you excerpts from that complaint.

This is Samy Mohamed Hamzeh. I quote. "I am telling you if this hit is executed, it will be known all over the world. The people will be scared and the operations will increase. This way we will be igniting it. I mean, we are marching at the front of the war, and we will eliminate everyone.

Mr. Wood, you encapsulated in your article what ISIS really wants—the significance, as Dr. Levitt was talking about, of that territory, of that caliphate. We understand how incredibly effective ISIS is at using social media to inspire people like Samy Mohamed Hamzeh. I want to ask all the panelists, do you think ISIS can be contained if it has that caliphate, if that territory exists? Is there any way you can contain ISIS's ability to incite that type of activity? Mr. Wood, I will start with you.

Mr. WOOD. I would first echo something that Dr. Levitt said. This slogan of remaining and expanding was ubiquitous in ISIS propaganda a year ago. There is a reason that is not mentioned quite as much nowadays, namely that it is being falsified. It is not expanding.

Now, the ability actually to contain it and to suffer no attacks to be safe outside of its borders, to make sure that no planning takes place within the caliphate to attack us outside of it—that will never be possible. There will constantly be an effort to do that and especially as the caliphate ceases to be an expanding caliphate. It is so important for them to dominate the news cycle, to be able to present themselves as the A list of global jihad that I would expect them to continue and to expand their foreign attacks. So in that sense, I do not think it is possible to contain the group.

Now, is it possible to contain them within certain limits, though? That is, can we contain them and limit their ability to attack us outside of their territory to a tolerable amount? Now, what we con-

sider tolerable when we consider attacks on the homeland is perhaps up for debate. I think that we can keep them to a level that we might have to consider manageable, which would be the level that we have for the last few years.

Senator JOHNSON. Let me quickly interject. These numbers—by the way, I understand they are very imperfect, but this is from the State Department’s START report, the study of terrorism and response to terrorism, showing that prior to 9–11–2001, on average there are less than 5,000 deaths due to terrorist attack. In 2012, that grew to 15,000. In 2014, it was up to 32,700.

So, as far as a “tolerable level of terrorism,” I am not sure there is such a thing. My sense is that the problem is actually growing.

Mr. Olsen, you certainly talked about the fact that they have gained strong footholds and they have to be destroyed. Correct? Do you really think we can try to contain the ISIS caliphate and not have their message spread and grow? I would imagine you have seen the videos of them training the next generation. Every day that goes by, they are training more young people. They are starting to stream in using the migrant flow into Europe. This is a growing threat. Is it not?

Mr. OLSEN. I do think it is growing in the sense that as the numbers have increased, particularly the problem is a threat to the West, the problem of foreign fighters streaming into Syria and Iraq, 40,000 total foreign fighters from around the world, over 6,000 Europeans. You know, that is a real threat. And that was something we saw when I was in government 2 years ago. We are now seeing the sort of fruits of that movement with the attacks in Brussels and France as individuals return from having traveled to Syria. I think from that perspective it is a growing problem.

And I think I would also add a point to agree with Graeme Wood that even as we constrain and have success in limiting ISIS on the battlefield in Syria and Iraq, you may actually see more of the types of attacks like we see in Brussels and Paris. In other words, those are very hard to stop, and ISIS, in an effort to remain relevant, to dominate the news cycle, as Mr. Wood said, may actually increase its effort to carry out those type of attacks.

Senator JOHNSON. You talked about the need to surge our intelligence capabilities. We have not been capturing and detaining ISIS operatives and then interviewing them over long periods of time. When I was down in Guantanamo Bay, I talked to those interviewers. That is how you actually gain that human intelligence, by capturing these operatives and then talking to them over a long period of time—poking holes in their testimony to find the discrepancies with testimony of fellow operatives.

How harmful is the fact that we really have reduced to almost the point of eliminating our capturing, detaining, and long-term interviewing of terrorist operatives?

Mr. OLSEN. We have had some success in terms of doing exactly that, detaining and interrogating ISIS members in Iraq. So there has been some—

Senator JOHNSON. We were able to foil some potentially chemical attacks. Correct?

Mr. OLSEN. Exactly, Senator. So there has been some success. It has not occurred certainly on the scale that we saw, for example, in Afghanistan in Bagram. It is an important part of any effort.

Senator JOHNSON. Dr. Levitt, would you like to comment on my questions?

Dr. LEVITT. Just on the first one, I would say that we need to recognize there is a big piece of glory in this for wannabes. And what you read from the case in Milwaukee is not unique. Consider the case of just after the November attacks in Paris. Belgian police intercepted a phone call to Brussels from a Syrian and overheard a Belgian militant inquiring about his friend Bilal Hadfi who had been one of the suicide bombers in Paris. The militant asks what his friends were saying about Bilal back in, quote, the sector, meaning Molenbeek. The quote. He asked, are they talking about him? Are they praising him? Are they saying he was a lion? In other words, his main issue is the personal glory about all of this and this inspiring piece of it.

I do think that as we have greater success, we should expect that our adversary is going to lash out where and when it can. It wants to show relevance, and it does want to get on the news. That does not mean we should not try and succeed. It means we should anticipate that those things will happen.

Because the Islamic State controls territory and because there is nothing really good to go in behind the Islamic State, maybe not in Iraq, certainly not in Syria, it is not just so easy as how quickly can we defeat them. It is how quickly can we defeat them and have something else that will take that space and not do the same all over again. And that makes this much more difficult.

Senator JOHNSON. Listen, I understand the challenge, but the bottom line is as long as that caliphate exists, as long as they control territory, from my standpoint the risk is going to continue to grow.

Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Senator Menendez?

Senator MENENDEZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you all for your testimony. I was catching it in the midst of meetings in my office.

I listened to your testimony here, and I had the privilege before in your official role, Mr. Olsen, and Dr. Levitt, gracious enough to come by my office and talk about this subject.

I get the sense that we are in this for a very long time. Is that a pessimistic view or is it a realistic view?

Mr. OLSEN. I certainly think it is a realistic view. How long that is is hard to gauge, but it certainly is a matter of years I would say at this point.

Senator MENENDEZ. Do you agree with that, Dr. Levitt?

Dr. LEVITT. I agree with it by default. As we just discussed, this is a clear and immediate threat, but there also is the problem of not knowing what is going to come in behind it in the near term.

I can tell you, though, as I go around and I talk to counterterrorism officials and officials in the military, they are frustrated because there is not a whole lot of direction. I get asked all the time by people in government now as someone out of government what



is our strategy and what is our goal. Tell me and I will get us there. If they do not know what it is, that means it is not being communicated well enough from the top, and we need to do that. I think, therefore, we are in this for the long haul by default. There has to be a way to have a real strategy to defeat the Islamic State and plan for what can come in behind it without this necessarily being multi-generational.

Senator MENENDEZ. So your testimony, Mr. Olsen, was that this is a real threat to the United States, one that—I do not want to say that the President downplayed it in his most recent interview, but he characterized it a little different than the sense I get of the Islamic State. And I understand wanting to continue on with our lives so that terrorists do not ultimately win. But I listened to it and I get concerned about the ability of the Islamic State to have command and control centers that, at the end of the day, allow them to go far beyond all the different places in which they are presently located.

So if those, as you say, Dr. Levitt, that are in charge of defending the United States feel that there is no specific strategy to achieve the goal, what are some of the immediate things that we need to do certainly to not allow the Islamic State to have the capacity for command and control to direct attacks against the United States, one, and our allies?

And two, there is obviously a longer-term effort here because if Mr. Wood's statements about the depth of ISIL's support is the reality, we have a challenge to deal with that that is on a longer scale to defeat the ideology and to work on its role in the mediums that we have.

What are some of the things we should be doing immediately as a strategy to at least disrupt their command and control elements? And secondly, what must we commit ourselves to in order to work against their ideology? And that has a series of elements, I would assume, in addition to raising the standard of people's lives in these countries who obviously feel that they have no real hope for the future and that they are desperate economically and then they turn to a place where they in fact have their challenges converted into the belief that dying is more glorifying than living and that there is a better life beyond by virtue of martyrdom.

So can you deal with what we should be doing in the short term that we are not to disrupt command and control and their ability to have attacks against the United States and our allies? And what is the longer-range challenge that we have here? I would invite anyone to answer.

Mr. OLSEN. I will jump in on that because it is obviously a very large and well-framed question because what you have put out, Senator, is there are things that we can do immediately and in the short term that we are doing at a tactical level to disrupt their command and control. One is maintaining the military pressure, accelerating that effort in Syria and Iraq to help put pressure on their ability to plan and plot with impunity in a sanctuary they have created. That includes the use of special forces to go after their leaders and high-value operatives.

We also, as I mentioned, need to increase our intelligence capabilities. We have lost a lot of our intelligence capabilities because

essentially the game plan was given away to how we collect intelligence. And that needs to be rebuilt. So we need to improve our intelligence.

And then we need to, again in the shorter term, work with our European partners to improve their ability to share the information, often information that we collect and then share with Europe. That needs to get shared more effectively within Europe. That is the shorter term.

Longer term, in answer to your question, there is the issue of the ideology, and that is where this becomes not just a short-term problem but a very long-term problem as we go after addressing and countering the ideology that fuels the violence. That is a difficult effort. It is hard to measure success, but it is one that I think we need to step up our efforts in order to match the nature of the threat.

And then finally, the point I would make—and you touched on this. We need to address the underlying and root causes of extremism and terrorism, whether it is civil unrest, lack of border controls, lack of socioeconomic opportunity in large parts of the Middle East and North Africa.

Senator MENENDEZ. Dr. Levitt?

Dr. LEVITT. Thank you for the question. You hit the nail on the head on the biggest problem we are facing right now.

In the immediate, the first thing that had to happen and did happen was a change in the rules of engagement. And so we have seen the ability to now target oil. We have seen the ability to target where they are storing their cash, the oil tanker trucks. We are seeing a significant change since December in the battlefield approach.

We are also seeing clearly the need to not only improve our ability to collect, as you heard, but also not only our ability to share but the ability of our partners to receive and share. And the Europeans have a real problem here. I will just give you one example.

Europol's focal point traveler database has recorded only 2,786 verified foreign terrorist fighters despite the fact that we know that it is well upwards of 5,000, probably closer to 6,000 EU citizens or residents of the EU who travel to Syria and Iraq and more recently Libya to fight. But what is worse is that of those 2,786 verified cases, over 90 percent of those reports come from only five EU countries.

It used to be a point, when I was at the desk for intel at Treasury, that we would be asking the Europeans to partner with us more on the Terror Finance Tracking Program. If you look at the European Union counterterrorism coordinator's latest report, it is not us. It is him. He is calling on European member states to remove certain cutouts. For example, if you make a euro denominated payment from one person within the EU to someone else within the EU, that is not covered within the program. America is not asking for that change. The EU counterterrorism coordinator is asking for that change. There are lots of things that have to change there.

But in the long term, absolutely right. The military fight is difficult because they control territory. The ideology is something we

are going to be dealing with for a very long time. And I think it is two distinct things here.

One is in the region. You have a lost generation in the extreme. Young children today, hostage today within areas under Islamic State control, are brought up to be completely desensitized to violence. People in camps elsewhere in the Middle East do not have a regular roof over their heads, do not have regular access to education. That is going to be a generational challenge.

And then more generally, given social media and the ability to share ideas very widely, we have seen how these dangerous ideas can cross borders that do not exist on the Internet and their ability to resonate with people who are facing completely different issues in, say, Molenbeek in Brussels or elsewhere. And the fact that those ideas from the Middle East are resonating with people from Molenbeek who are third or fourth generation Belgian citizens—one of them said to me we feel more Belgian than most Belgians because most Belgians who have been here for hundreds of years think they are Walloon or Flemish. We just know Belgium. That this is what is resonating with them is a real issue we will be dealing with for a long time.

Senator MENENDEZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

As my first interjection, I hear sometimes from the foreign policy establishment, if you will, that the only thing we need to do here is develop a strategy like we did for the Soviet Union during the nuclear standoff. This strategy would go from President to President and from Congress to Congress. And I listen to these issues. We see the issues when we travel to the Middle East. I look at the challenges we face right now in the Middle East and compare them to the bipolar nuclear struggle with the Soviet Union and I see the Soviet Union issue as almost being Ned in the First Reader. I mean, it was very simple relative to the issues that we have today. So I sometimes become upset when I hear people say, well, you guys just need to develop a policy like we developed for the Soviet Union that can go from generation to generation, from decade to decade.

For instance, someone might say we need to go after an ISIS safe haven, but we have to wait until someone is there to come behind it. We also have the poverty issues. You know, Egypt has 90 million people and 2.5 million are born each year. 700,000 new jobs need to be created each year just to take care of that. They have terrorism and have seen a downturn in tourism. They have a health care system that does not work. Each of the countries has similar problems, some worse than others. Sometimes we have a leader that we can deal with and sometimes we have a terrible leader that we cannot deal with.

So if I were going to ask you to step back and lay out the components of a strategy to deal with ISIS that could go from administration to administration and from Congress to Congress, what would the elements of that be?

Mr. OLSEN. If I can begin, Chairman, by agreeing with your observation about the complexity of the current challenge compared to perhaps the Cold War. And while I do think the current challenge is more complex, obviously, I think it is important to point

out we do not face the sort of existential threat that we did during the Cold War. And I think those are ways to think about this.

The CHAIRMAN. Well, in some ways it makes it more difficult.

Mr. OLSEN. That is right.

The CHAIRMAN. Because the American people today, while they are fearful, do not feel an existential threat. There are tremendous investments that we need to make here, but when you look at the Middle East issue, you are talking about investments, are you not? I mean, you are talking about poverty and lots of other things. So, I am sorry to interject again—but go ahead and lay out the strategy that is going to carry us decade to decade.

Mr. OLSEN. Well, very broadly I would think of it in three ways. One is the denial of a safe haven to ISIS and other groups, and that means a military commitment with the Iraqis and in Syria. It means working with governments, coalition partners to build an ability to hold territory on the ground. So one big bucket of effort has to be denying safe haven, and that is, at least with respect to ISIS, a significant military effort.

The second bucket I think is defeating the infrastructure, going after the terrorist infrastructure. That means the movement of people, money, arms, and ideas. So going after ISIS—its infrastructure, which includes all of those things, people, money, weapons, and ideas, its ability to carry out its propaganda campaign.

And then the third large category is hardening our own defenses. That is intelligence sharing. It is homeland security. It is working with our allies to build up our ability to disrupt attacks, to stop the movement of people, to prosecute individuals who commit crimes by seeking to provide material support to terrorism, for example.

So very broadly speaking, those three categories. The only thing I left out was in that third category I would add in the countering violent extremism effort that Dr. Levitt talked about as well.

The CHAIRMAN. So none of that addressed the underlying issues that are driving the whole desire of young people to be a part of this right? I mean, you are admitting that.

Mr. OLSEN. You are right. It is absolutely a fair point, Chairman. You know, in some ways that is such a broad effort. It is an essential part of the effort. So, yes, I should have mentioned that, but that is obviously a very difficult and broad effort to address. I mentioned earlier the underlying and root causes of terrorism. Those are political, socioeconomic, educational.

The CHAIRMAN. Do you want to add to that, or can we move to the next question?

Dr. LEVITT. If I may just in brief because almost all my points just checked off. I just checked them off. But I would add local governance. Local governance, whether it is in Iraq or it is in Brussels. If we can work with allies, target our dollars, create conditions where local governance is put in place, it goes the longest way for people being able to live their lives.

And the second thing is the one thing none of us have mentioned today—and mea culpa. I have not either—is Syria. We are not just dealing with the Islamic State. We are dealing with Syria. And I happen to believe that Assad is at least a big a problem as the Islamic State is. According to the U.N., there is a 9 to 1 ratio, the number of people the Assad regime has killed compared to the Is-

lamic State. And the Islamic State is only here today because of the vacuum that was created by Assad. And I think that we bear some responsibility for that. We were not proactive enough. We did not do what we could have when we could have, and Syria much, much worse. There are mistakes of omission that were created, and I would say looking forward across administrations, we need to be careful not only to be wary of what we do, but of what we do not do.

The CHAIRMAN. Mr. Wood, do you want to add to that?

Mr. WOOD. Yes. I would echo both comments already. I would add one more thing, which is a key portion of ISIS's strategy right now is regional instability, that is, in the Middle East, countries like Saudi Arabia, like Egypt particularly in the Sinai. And we need to keep a very close eye on these aspects. Specifically ISIS has taken the tactic of having a series of terrorist attacks in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, in Egypt and has attempted to demonstrate that the ability to maintain stability, to stave off chaos that is really the main value proposition of these governments for their people is no longer something that they can promise. These are local dynamics that need to be addressed as a key portion of an anti-ISIL strategy.

The CHAIRMAN. Well, if I could, to summarize in terms of the denial of a safe haven—you are talking about a whole different kind of effort than has been taking place. I mean, I think people acknowledge that. It is not a plus or minus—I am just saying you are talking about a whole different kind of effort.

In regards to the infrastructure piece, I do think that there are some efforts underway to deal with the nine different efforts, if you will, that are necessary there.

In terms of hardening defenses, obviously, that's a no-brainer.

But the fact is that when you start dealing with the local issues, now you are starting to deal with the core of the problem. And I just want to say again you are talking about a massive, long-term problem. You said years—I think years is a tremendous understatement. And I think that the resources and the efforts dealing with rulers that candidly sometimes are good, sometimes are bad, changes overnight sometimes. It is a pretty daunting task that we have to figure out a way to deal with.

But again, to try to cause something to occur between a Democratic administration or a Republican administration, with different parties in control in Congress, you are talking about something that deserves our effort but is very daunting, especially with players changing as rapidly as they do.

With that, Senator Gardner.

Senator GARDNER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Wood, it is good to see you again. Thanks for coming to Colorado for the counterterrorism education learning laboratory event a couple months ago. So I really appreciate your presence there. Thank you.

To the other witnesses as well, thank you all for your participation today.

I wanted to follow up on the conversation you had a little bit with Libya a couple of minutes ago. To Senator Cardin, I may ask him if I am accurately phrasing this question. Several on the com-

mittee had an opportunity to visit with leadership in Saudi Arabia. When the question of Libya was asked, I believe the response from one of the key leaders, top leaders in Saudi Arabia was that they believe Libya will make Syria look like—and I quote—a piece of cake. And I just was wondering if you would agree with that assessment or not, and if you agree, are we adequately focusing our resources, attention, and planning on Libya?

Mr. OLSEN. That is, obviously, a quite pessimistic perspective.

You know, there is an effort underway to reconstitute the political leadership in Libya. That, to our conversation just a few minutes ago with the chairman, is critical to addressing the longer-term problem in Libya, the governance issues, the lack of security. My sense is the last few years have been extremely difficult in Libya, and the rise of extremist groups—and in particular, ISIS does pose a significant threat I think second only to the threat that ISIS poses from its safe haven in Syria and Iraq. I think what we are going to need to do is be able to look toward in the near term targeted efforts in Libya to go after ISIS leaders, particularly when we have intelligence about threats emanating from its stronghold in Sirte, but also over the longer term working with whatever sort of political regime emerges from the process there.

Senator GARDNER. Dr. Levitt?

Dr. LEVITT. Yes, I would just concur and say I think the main difference—and it may be optimistic to put it this way—is that there are people who are positive about the prospects of there being something else to come in behind what was in Libya as a central government. And if there can be some type of central government, that it then could be the backbone, with international support, to take on the three distinct Islamic State elements around the country. I am not a Libya expert. I cannot tell you whether or not that is accurate or not, but that makes it very, very different than Syria where there is no prospect for that at all.

Senator GARDNER. Mr. Wood?

Mr. WOOD. One thing I would add is in some of my reporting in Nigeria, Libya has been mentioned frequently actually as a kind of hub of control, an ideological hub, a place where fighters for Boko Haram could do go for a kind of ideological training or indoctrination. So I think one of the important elements that we need to understand about the danger of the developing situation there is the connection of Libya to the so-called West African province of ISIS and the larger problem of the Maghreb, which the connections are still poorly tracked.

Senator GARDNER. Thank you.

Turning to the western hemisphere now, in the 2016 Worldwide Threat Assessment, the Director of National Intelligence stated that more than 36,500 foreign fighters—we know these numbers—including at least 6,600 from Western countries, have traveled to Syria from more than 100 countries since the conflict began. Director Comey at the FBI has said a total of over 250 Americans have traveled or attempted to travel to Syria as of September 2015, 150 being successful. We have learned also from private sources that an additional 76 fighters traveled from South America. And according to reports that we have all seen, on March 9 the man who identi-

fied himself as an ISIS follower, murdered a well known Jewish merchant in Uruguay.

Do any of you see ISIS or other Islamic terrorist networks growing in presence in our own hemisphere? Mr. Wood?

Mr. WOOD. Up till now, the ISIS supporters whose individual cases I have looked at have been clearly directing their efforts toward getting to Syria or have already got there. That certainly does not mean that there are not cells in the United States, that there is not development of plans. I would be shocked if that is not happening. But the specific traces of it are not things that have been on my radar.

Senator GARDNER. And I guess I recognize—and we have all talked about the United States and possibilities of targeting the United States and the cells and the radicalization. But what about South America? What about Central America, Mexico? What are we seeing? What do you see?

Mr. WOOD. Again, I have seen individual cases of Peruvians or Chileans who have made it to ISIS territory. And they are fascinating examples of a kind of current case of globalization. A Peruvian who decides that Syria is his destiny. But the actual development of attacks and cells I have not observed.

Senator GARDNER. Dr. Levitt?

Dr. LEVITT. It has been actually impressive how small the numbers have been so far from South America, South and Central America. I am told there are a couple of places where I do not know if you would call them hotspots yet because it is still small numbers, but more than onesies and twosies. But my understanding is people are watching this very, very closely and not just local authorities but, obviously, American authorities too for obvious reasons. So I do not want to make it sound like we are not interested, we are not concerned, but it is telling that the numbers have been as small as they have been. And I have heard of no kind of networks or cells and such that we could describe that we know about. Of course, you do not know what you do not know, but the numbers have been very small.

Senator GARDNER. Mr. Olsen, I want to follow up with you with something you said earlier. I think in November I had the opportunity to travel to Mexico to visit with the foreign minister in Mexico City, to visit with some of their defense experts. And we talked a lot about this very question and what was happening in Mexico and their neighbors to the south, and the danger that they recognize somebody coming either back to Mexico or Central America who traveled to Syria and then came back or perhaps somebody who is trying to get in through Mexico and our southern border. They understand the concern and they understand the need and the need to cooperate with the United States and the western hemisphere.

You talked about how ISIS has created this sort of external operations command. I am sorry. This was Dr. Levitt. Not you. I am sorry, Mr. Olsen. Dr. Levitt, you said this, that information sharing within the European Union does not reflect their threat. I believe that was you who said that. Do we have the kind of information and communication network that we need in the western hemisphere to deal with a possibility of a threat in the future?

Dr. LEVITT. Matt is much more capable to speak to this than I am because he helped build it, but I do not mind tooting his horn.

Nothing is perfect. But we have since 9/11 done what the Europeans have not done with joint terrorist task forces and infusion centers and very close and intimate outreach to our neighbors and people who do not just border on our country to build the kind of network that shares information up and down pipelines and avoids stovepiping. You will never have complete elimination of stovepiping, but this is something that we have invested a tremendous amount of time and effort and money, frankly, into building. And you do have much, much different sharing between local, State, even things like tribal and Federal authorities in this country and our outreach with DHS and other offices abroad than most of our partners do.

I have some very good friends who head our DHS offices in places abroad, and one of the things they do is try and build that relationship not only for our benefit but help build similar type of connective tissue within our allies' countries. That is to their benefit, and by extension to ours.

Senator GARDNER. Thank you.

And Mr. Olsen or Mr. Wood, if you would like to add to that. Otherwise I have run out of time.

Mr. OLSEN. I would just very much agree with Dr. Levitt in terms of the efforts in the United States in terms of both changing laws, changing policies, and the level of resources put into the overall enterprise of sharing intelligence, sharing law enforcement information, both horizontally among Federal agencies but also vertically between Federal and State and local agencies.

Senator GARDNER. Mr. Chairman, thanks.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Senator Shaheen?

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And thank you all very much for being here.

I want to follow up on the information sharing, but before I do, I want to just pick up on the line of discussion that Senator Corker raised because it struck me, Mr. Olsen, as you were talking about what is in a strategy to fight ISIS, that there were military components of virtually everything you suggested. And yet, as we have talked about how do we get to the core of this problem, it is governance, it is economic and social concerns. And we have been much more successful in America when we have been dealing with the military aspects than we have been with nation building. And so it seems to me this is going to continue to be an impediment, as we think about how to deal with this, to actually get at the root causes.

And also, it is going to be harder to get public support to deal with the economic, social, governance concerns, the nation building aspects of what we need to do than it is to get support for the military concerns. So it kind of puts us in a Catch 22 situation in terms of how to get at the fundamental issues that you are raising about ISIS. I do not know that I need anybody to respond to that unless someone would like to and you think there is a hole in my reasoning there.



Mr. OLSEN. If I could just say almost as a point of clarification, first of all, I agree with you wholeheartedly, Senator. In my response I think back to Chairman Corker's point, I had in mind sort of the strategy with regard to ISIS in terms of my focus on the military effort to deny safe haven. But when you look at other countries, obviously the denial of safe haven to terrorist groups, whether it is ISIS, Al Qaeda, or affiliated groups, that really is a political, social, diplomatic effort.

So when you look at countries across North Africa from the west in Nigeria through Libya, Tunisia, Egypt, into the Middle East, places like Yemen, each of these places we have to engage to build up the capacity of those countries to support political transitions that are appropriate for the countries, that would create allies for us. That is a much harder, as you pointed out in your question, and longer-term effort, but one that is certainly at least as indispensable as any military effort, which just happens to be where we find ourselves with respect to ISIS in Iraq and Syria.

Senator SHAHEEN. So let me follow up on the question about information sharing because one of the points you made, Mr. Olsen—and I think both of the others of you have made it as well—is that one of the challenges in Europe is the information sharing and getting up to speed today in Europe to where we were back after September 11.

So what are the impediments to doing that and what more should we be doing in the United States to support the European efforts? For whoever would like to answer that.

Dr. LEVITT. Thank you for both your questions.

If I could just quickly tag onto the first one, I do not think we should be doing the nation building thing. We do not do it well. You are absolutely right. But we need to spend a lot more time and effort with our diplomacy to convince governments, allies, that it is not just as a favor to us but it is in their interests to put in place good governance. That is very, very hard for some countries where me remaining in power as an individual is more important than anything else, but that is to be a huge priority in a way that it is not yet.

With our European allies, there are several legitimate issues. They have a different sense of privacy than we do. I do not minimize it, or make light of it at all. But it all comes down to balance. People have a right to privacy. People have a right to get on the metro going to work in downtown Brussels and not be blown up. And staging at each metro stop soldiers in camo with automatic weapons across their chests, as they did—I was at that metro stop six times the week before—is not going to stop someone from getting on with a suicide bomb.

The other thing is they have concerns from World War II and elsewhere of a history of the overstep of intelligence. So, again, what kind of assurances and checks and balances do you need to put in place to make people feel comfortable?

And finally, the European Union is more European than a union in many ways. It is primarily an economic union, and in that it has been very successful. But the very things that make it a successful economic union create vulnerabilities from a security standpoint, and there is not as much of an interest, because of privacy issues

and tensions between some governments and because of business issues, legitimate economic issues, to put things in place.

So I think this will be, I believe, a wakeup call, at least for some. The fact that Turkey had informed not just the Netherlands but Belgium as well of one of the people who was later an attacker and this information was not shared. The fact that there is the SS system at the borders, but it turns out that a whole host of EU countries are not connected to it or do not input any information into it. I think we are going to see some changes there.

Senator SHAHEEN. You have described the problem very well. It is still not clear to me exactly what we need to do.

But I want to go on to another question because one of the things that we are currently doing in the State Department is setting up a new global engagement center to counter violent extremism. And I was in Brussels for the Brussels Forum and heard a variety of experts talking about countering violent extremism and what we need to do to address ISIL. And they were, I think, pretty united in suggesting that that was a wasted effort, that what we need to do is not something that we can do through our State Department or really effectively in terms of social media and how we deal with that aspect of countering violent extremism through a bureaucratic agency. And I wanted to get the thoughts of each of you on that issue. Dr. Levitt, you are obviously wanting to respond to that because you reacted there.

Dr. LEVITT. I just realized that my button was still on. But I do want to answer, and I thank you for the question.

At The Washington Institute, we are doing a very large study on all things CVE right now, and this is one of them.

There are a lot of jokes that have been made about the global engagement center, including its name. Others in the State Department say this is not what all of us do. But the fact is I do think there is good reason to have moved from where they were at the CSCC to this new idea. The idea, whether it will work or not, I think is premature to say. And they are being quite quiet I think until they get some wins under the belt, and that is maybe not a bad idea.

But the whole idea, if it will work, is for government to figure out how it can partner in this space with others. We are not a good voice on this at all. Who can we partner with? In what ways can we support them? It is not an American government response, but with others in the region, Arab voices, Muslim voices, on issues that we as governments should not be commenting on, certainly are not very good on, religious narratives, for example, and not just counter narratives, which is countering a narrative that they are providing but providing our own narratives. So who can we partner with? Who are the others? And I think that is the main thing they are going to have to be judged on, what partners do they partner with, how successful are they, what kind of metrics do they have in place. I do not think they have the answers to that yet because this is also new. But to their credit, these are the things they are talking about.

Senator SHAHEEN. And can I ask if either Mr. Wood or Mr. Olsen would like to respond to that as well?

Mr. WOOD. I would agree that a large portion of the CVE effort has been wasted. And it is very, very easy to see why that might be the case. Any conversation with someone who is at all ISIL inclined will demonstrate the speed with which they have been taught to destroy the credibility of anyone who is associated with not just the United States but any number of other enemies of the group, including clerical enemies of the group, including other governments. As a part of their indoctrination, they are taught how to find out the ways to exploit weaknesses, to observe them, and to convince others of the same.

So what I think we need to understand from that is, first of all, that there is this kiss of death problem. Anything that we touch does have a tendency to be discredited by our very presence in the room. But that is not entirely something that means that the CVE efforts in general should be pushed aside.

The efforts of non-affiliated, non-U.S. Government affiliates, non-clergy affiliated people to ridicule ISIS, to change its perception as a glorious movement to join to a ridiculous one or to one that is essentially throwing one's life away rather than achieving glory—that kind of effort is being done without our help. And we need to make sure that if we try to help it, that we do not destroy it.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you.

Thank you. My time is out.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Flake?

Senator FLAKE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I apologize if I am plowing old ground here.

Let me talk about Somalia for a minute. The “Wall Street Journal” had a piece a while ago talking about terror financing and the rules that we have which have caused a lot of banks to just simply pull out of certain markets and not engage in money transfers.

The Somali diaspora sends back about \$1.3 billion. It is between 25 and 45 percent of the entire economy there.

Has that been a net plus, this concern about terror financing, or has it simply driven terror financing underground in ways that are harder to track and more difficult to combat? Mr. Wood, do you want to address that at all?

Mr. WOOD. I cannot speak to the success of any particular efforts, certainly not in the case of Somalia.

I will say that with ISIL, one of the great developments of ISIL is a kind of self-financing model that they have had, that is, the ability to ensure revenue through taxation, theft, confiscation within its own territory. So the efforts to dry up financing certainly should be pursued, but they are not going to get us to the finish line.

Senator FLAKE. Any other thoughts?

Dr. LEVITT. Yes, about Somalia. I will leave the Islamic State issue aside.

I would just argue there that it is a different toolkit. We actually have had great success especially recently with the changed rules of engagement on the Islamic State. We can have more success. It is just going to be a different toolkit than we saw with yesterday's Al Qaeda.

The issue with Somalia is a really important one. It is not in our interest to deny the average person the ability to send money home

to their families. To the contrary. When you think about the larger radicalization issues, that can be a contributor.

On the flip side, we do have to be very, very careful about preventing different types of financial instruments from being vulnerable to abuse, certainly large-scale abuse. And that was the case with the remittances going back to Somalia. And what then happened was a dynamic within the private sector where it simply was not worth the risk to western banks to take on that type of business.

It comes down to the questions we have already about privacy Europe. How do we balance the risk? We have two competing sets of interests here. They are both legitimate. We have to stop terror financing going to Somalia. It was happening. It is a real issue. How do we also enable these remittances to go? Well, how can you change the risk calculus? How do you overlay more risk analysis into this? This is something that the terror finance community is looking into very, very closely.

The bigger issue is this humanitarian one. It is not that the terror finance activity is then being driven underground simply because in a place like Somalia, there is not much farther underground it can go. They cannot use banks. If they cannot use remittances, they cannot send the money, but neither can good people who are just trying to send money home. My concern is from a no less legitimate humanitarian one, and we need to be able to balance these concerns. There are efforts trying to do that right now.

Senator FLAKE. Thank you.

Turn to Libya for a minute. President Obama in an interview last week identified probably the biggest regret he has had of his presidency was not to adequately plan for the aftermath in Libya. We are seeing, obviously, links to al Shabaab and to Boko Haram. To what extent is our focus on trying to lessen the appeal with those groups simply overwhelmed by what is going on in Libya now? There are 6,000 fighters we believe now. Where should our focus in Africa be? Is the focus in sub-Saharan Africa? And for these countries misplaced as long as we let Libya fester as it is, where should our focus be?

Anybody want to take that? Mr. Wood, go ahead. I know we have to focus everywhere, but I mean, is it futile to look at these movements in sub-Saharan Africa without addressing Libya?

Mr. WOOD. I think it is very important to start with Libya. So the efforts against Boko Haram, undertaken by the Nigerian Government, have shown some positive results so far.

I think that the area that has the greatest potential to metastasize, though, is probably Libya, moving in a western direction from there. I tend to think that there are simply fewer people who are directing their attention toward Libya right now than there are in the cases of other areas such as Nigeria and that our attention would be well spent there.

Senator FLAKE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Kaine?

Senator KAINE. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thanks for holding this hearing. It is very important testimony. I appreciate it.

I have two thoughts as I listen to the testimony, one poetic and one prosaic. So Yates wrote a poem at the end of World War I look-

ing at post-war Europe's second coming, and he basically described the situation as the best lack all conviction while the worst are full of passionate intensity.

I think the worst are full of passionate intensity in a very sharp degree. And I think the question is whether the best have conviction. There is an unsteadiness and an uncertainty about strategy, about the message we communicate, not just the United States, but other nations too, not just the executive, but the legislative as well.

Recently on the prosaic side, a senior American military leader said to me we have OPLANs but no strategy. And you each talked about strategic points, and the chair asked questions about that. Operations plans. You know, we got a plan on the shelf if Putin goes into Latvia or if Kim Jong Un does something about South Korea. But in terms of the strategy that puts it together, it is lacking right now.

I have been pretty hard on this body, a body which I am part of, so it is a self-criticism as well, that we are 2 years into a war and we have not really had meaningful debate or vote about it. I just do not think that is the way it is supposed to be. And I think the debate that you have about an authorization for is how you just pepper an administration with questions about strategy, make them refine it and get better and better and better. Then you do the debate in front of the public so the public understands what the stakes are. But we are 2 years in with no real prospect of that happening.

But I have also been pretty hard on the administration because they were not quick to send us an authorization for a war against ISIL. They have not really insisted on it, once they sent it to us in February of 2015.

In addition, if you look more broadly about our military posture vis-a-vis non-state actors like ISIL, the President gave a speech now 3 years ago at the National Defense University saying that the 2001 authorization needed to be revised. Mr. Chair, we were part of a meeting that the White House convened I think 2 years ago that was a very productive bipartisan meeting where we talked, and we thought there was going to be some follow-up from the White House about what do we do with the sort of organic law of the country with respect to our strategy against non-state actors. And there has been zero follow-up from the White House at least that I have really participated in. And maybe others have had those conversations. And so I do think we are in a moment where we are dangerously free from any strategy.

Some of the OPLANs are good and some of the things that we are doing are good. But I agree with you. And this is a Catholic theological point. You know, sins of omission can be as bad as sins of commission. And I think while the things we are doing are often pretty precise in the way they are calibrated, I think there are a lot of things we are not doing that are really a problem.

The chair raised the question about is it fair to talk about strategy in this era when compared with the earlier era dealing with the Soviet Union Truman doctrine containment. And I think that is a fair question, and I like the Ned in the First Reader analogy.

I think by the time we got into the 1960s or 1970s, the strategy was pretty clear, but maybe when it was being formed, it seemed

as murky or challenging as it seems to us right now. Truman had to go to a Congress that he had just lost both houses in March of 1947 to ask for help to shore up the governments of Greece and Turkey from Soviet-backed communist internal parties. And he had just gotten drubbed in a congressional election, but he had to go and lay out a strategy with the risk that Congress would say we are not paying attention to you. And a bipartisan Congress heard him. They did not vote on the Truman doctrine.

But then a whole series of things happened. The vote on aid to Greece and Turkey. Months later the Marshall commencement speech at Harvard where he laid out the guts of the Marshall Plan to rebuild European economies, even the economies of our enemies. There was a strategy that had its strengths and weaknesses, but it was articulated by a President. It engendered bipartisan support. It was comprehensive, not just military, but a whole range of things like Fulbright scholarships, Peace Corps. There were a whole series of non-military aspects that developed over time, and it lasted for quite a while.

So I would encourage—and I know the chair has done this before. We have had hearings to try to flush out what a strategy might look like. I do think the world is much more complicated in the array of powers than it was, but I also think that it probably looked pretty hard at the time in the 1940s. So it is looking hard now. But I hope the administration will follow up on its pledge of May 2013 to engage us in this dialogue about how we look at the 9/11 authorization.

A question to you about countering violent extremism here in this country. So we have already had a Virginian convicted high school kid, convicted in Federal court for trying to encourage people and facilitate, take people going to be foreign fighters in Syria. We have had other people arrested at the Richmond airport on their way circuitously to Syria.

What are some strategies that we ought to use as we look to the success of CVE activities around the world or even anti-gang strategies here in this country? What are some strategies we should be focusing on to be effective on CVE activities here at home?

Mr. OLSEN. I can start and pass it on to my colleagues here.

You know, the strategy—and Dr. Levitt mentioned this. For the first time we now have a dedicated office. This is a bureaucratic answer in part but an important one, which is an office in the Department of Homeland Security, co-led by DHS and the Department of Justice, staffed by the FBI and the National Counterterrorism Center, for the first time an interagency group that is formalized, devoted to this question. So that is an important step, certainly not the fulfillment of the program.

But in terms of strategies, as others have said, it is to empower others to understand the message that ISIS and other groups put out, that Al Qaeda puts out to understand that message and to give those groups the capacity to withstand that message. So it is training. It is building trust within Muslim American communities as I talked about so that they feel comfortable coming forward to law enforcement. The reality is that Muslim American communities, families, and neighborhoods are on the front lines of this effort, and they are going to be the first individuals to see the signs

of a friend or a neighbor or a loved one becoming radicalized. And they are going to be in the first position to take steps to stop it. So to me, that is a critical part of the strategy.

Dr. LEVITT. I really appreciate the question. Thank you very much.

The task force is the right step, but let me be clear. The task force is nascent. The decision to announce the formation of the task force was apparently rushed, I understand, so that it could have possibly made it into the State of the Union, but it did not make it into the State of the Union but is now officially created but not yet funded and also does not yet have all the legal authorities. The Secretary of Homeland Security spoke at a conference last week and said there are \$10 million for those programs. It might as well be zero. \$10 million is nothing. I am told more money is coming. That should have come with the announcement of the program, and it is suggesting that the intention is not sincere. And I believe it is, but we should not be politicizing this.

I think personally the most important thing this task force can do is find partners in communities and work with them on things that are happening earlier in the process. Let us move the needle earlier in the process. By default, we have put CVE within law enforcement because we do not have, like the Brits do, a department of communities and local government. But this is not a law enforcement issue until a law has been broken. And so I started my career at FBI. It should not necessarily be FBI. It should be the local social workers or others who are doing interventions. We have to do off-ramping. It should not be the case—there will be cases where some teenager is going to end up doing something. He is going to have to be convicted and put in jail. There should be many, many more cases where we as government, we as local communities work together. We have got to work out the legal authorities, figure out how to do it, and partner with one another to walk that person off the ledge and off-ramp them.

And I will just say maybe the most important thing we will say today is to underscore what Mr. Olsen just said, and that is that Muslim American communities play a huge role in this. They are being targeted by people who are radicalizing their children. Some of the discourse in our country right now is repulsive, and I know Muslim Americans who tell me that their children are having conversations in school, who of us will have to be deported. That is a painful and un-American situation that we should not tolerate and it should not be part of our discourse not because it undermines our ability to counter violent extremism, which it does, and not because it undermines our ability to do counterterrorism, which it does, but because it is repulsive.

Senator KAINE. Can I ask, Mr. Wood, if you would just offer some thoughts?

Mr. WOOD. Sure.

Senator KAINE. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. WOOD. I would echo that the thoughts already being aired. I would just say that, yes, the communities are by far the most likely to notice that their members are being radicalized. The families are most likely to realize this.

The question I think that many of them face, though, is by turning in their kids, by turning in their friends, are they ruining their lives or are they saving their lives. And we want them to have no doubt about that. That might mean exercising some discretion in prosecution as well.

The CHAIRMAN. If I could—it is my second interjection—and I do not think I have used up my full 7 minutes yet.

We had a hearing last week just to talk about the debt issues that we have as a nation. I think that maybe this side of the aisle thought it was set up to criticize the administration, but not a word of that came out. It was really just to talk about debt and our lack of flexibility to solve our Nation's problems.

As you talked about the Truman doctrine and containment and what went with that, there were significant investments to deal with that issue decade after decade after decade, culminating in the 1980s.

The lack of process that we have here, the lack of prioritization, the fact that demographic changes are taking place and we are not dealing with those issues, the fact that our budget process is a total joke, puts us in a situation where we just respond to symptoms. There is no discussion of dealing with the root cause in a real way and what that would even mean.

I just want to say again that our debt issue—knowing where our resource levels are—the fact that we know we are going to have deficits from now on based on just the way we are set up as a Nation really inhibits our ability to have a longer-term strategy to deal with this issue in an appropriate way. That is not a Republican statement, not a Democratic statement. Unfortunately, it is just an observation of our inability to prioritize and deal with things in an appropriate way.

With that, Senator Barrasso.

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

Director Olsen, you know, after the attacks in Brussels, the State Department came out claiming that ISIS—it proved that ISIS was under pressure because of the arrests of the weekend, a couple of days before. ISIS also has been carrying out other sophisticated explosive attacks in the Sinai, threatened U.S. forces, continue to expand in Africa and a number of other locations, groups in Libya, Tunisia, Algeria. So ISIS may have been somewhat under pressure in that one area of the cell, if you will, in Brussels, but at operational strategic levels, they do not appear to be under pressure in my assessment.

Do you think it is a correct assessment that ISIS is under pressure? One, how do you view that? And then you had in your written testimony mentioned if you had kind of the power to draw up your own strategy or add things onto the current strategy, could you maybe voice a little bit more about that?

Mr. OLSEN. Sure. Thank you very much for the question.

Look, I think there was no doubt that ISIS is under some degree of pressure in its safe haven in terms of the military pressure brought to bear. Thousands of ISIS fighters have been killed by the coalition airstrikes. Some of the territory they gained in Syria and Iraq have been taken back.



I think what we are seeing now is, as I said, the sort of fruits of the foreign fighter problem in terms of what is happening in Europe. So there is not real pressure in terms of bringing the extremist networks to ground, basically understanding where they are, prosecuting them, disrupting their activities. That pressure does not exist to the extent it needs to.

I am not familiar exactly with what the State Department meant, but there has been a sense—and I mentioned this earlier—that I think they are opportunistic when they carry out attacks, and I do think there is an effort perhaps, because of the pressure in their safe haven, to maintain their relevance by provoking attacks and carrying out attacks in places like what we saw in Brussels, in Paris. But overall, because of their reach and because of the level of their propaganda, it is the case that we are going to continue to see a certain amount of directed attacks and then inspired attacks for the foreseeable future.

Senator BARRASSO. Dr. Levitt, do you have anything you want to add onto that in terms of under pressure?

Dr. LEVITT. Thank you for your question.

I agree. I think the Islamic State is under more pressure than it had been, again especially since the rules of engagement were changed and we are seeing a real difference since December with 40 percent of territory pushed back, this ability to be able to—the inability to say that they are remaining and expanding, senior leadership strikes hitting them with frequency. But that does not mean that they will not be able to do horrific things within the region and abroad, A.

B, I do not accept the argument that the reason we are seeing attacks is because they are under pressure. It is true that they appeared to have moved the plot in Brussels forward faster and in Brussels, as opposed to Paris, because the cell itself in the tactical sense was under pressure.

I think it is clear from the Islamic State—again, their foreign terrorist fighter program for foreign-directed plots we now know goes back to late 2013 before Adnani's call for carrying out attacks in the West in response to Western airstrikes. Part of their whole world view is about a fight against the West. They do not just want to create their state and leave us alone and we will leave you alone. They want a fight in Dabiq. They want to provoke attacks and provoke a fight, and I think that was part of—if we cannot provoke you here, if you will not come and fight us here, we are going to do it there too.

As we have success against them at home, yes, they will have still more reason to want to carry out attacks to show that they are not down for the count, that they are relevant, that they are on the front pages, and to provoke fear and literally terrorize. That does not mean it is the only or even the primary reason for those attacks.

Senator BARRASSO. Director Olsen, we are talking about terrorism wanting to take the attack elsewhere. With the result of this whole Iranian deal and the \$100 billion of money going there, there has been a lot of concern expressed on this committee about some that money used for terrorism. And the topic for today's discussion includes transnational terrorism. Even Secretary Kerry

said, yes, some of that money will likely be used for terrorism. Could you give us your assessment of that?

Mr. OLSEN. Absolutely. There is no doubt that Iran, in terms of sponsorship of terrorism, is the greatest state sponsor in the world. And so there is concern as we see their aggression in places like Yemen that there will be potentially an uptick in terms of terrorist attacks that are linked back to the Iranian regime. So I think speaking as a former government official, this was a concern that really anytime that we looked at the broader terrorism landscape, the concern about Iranian-sponsored terrorist groups and acts of terror was always part of the discussion.

Senator BARRASSO. Earlier one of you testified to the fact that for every one person killed by ISIS, it is nine by Assad. And I wanted to just ask you about the Iranian influence now in arming the militias, providing the Revolutionary Guard forces to assist in fighting against ISIS, but at the same time, an Iran-backed Shia militia threatened to attack U.S. troops who are deployed in northern Iraq related to our fight against ISIS.

Should we in the United States be concerned about the role, the influence the Iranian regime is having in operations specifically against ISIS, and is it just being used to help Assad even further? Whoever wants to take it.

Dr. LEVITT. I will just say when we talk about foreign terrorist fighters, we all hear Sunni foreign terrorist fighters. But there are about as many Shia foreign terrorist fighters in this fight, and they are being organized and directed by Iran. And I think it is not an exaggeration to say that Iran, de facto or de jure—it is creating the equivalent of a Shia foreign legion, which will be available to it for all kinds of nefarious activities moving forward.

At the Washington Institute, we published a study on the Shia foreign fighters just in Syria, leaving the Iraq side out of it. And there is a huge issue here. Those Shia fighters are not blowing things up in Brussels right now. And so I understand, obviously, the focus on the Sunni side, but we are going to have to walk and chew gum because there is a spectrum of radical militant activity, and part of it is on the Shia side of the equation. And that is something we are going to be dealing with over the horizon. We need to keep an eye on that too.

Senator BARRASSO. Anything else you want to add on that?

Mr. WOOD. Yes. The local narrative of ISIL is to say that, Sunnis, you cannot go back. You cannot go back to Iraq. Iraq has gone over to the Shia. It has gone over to Iran. And insofar as the free reign of Iranian militias in Iraq demonstrates that, it is a serious problem when we try to think about how to put the pieces back together again.

Senator BARRASSO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Before going to Senator Markey, Director Olsen, since you have done what you have done for our country in a great way, how would you compare the differences between the Shia and the Sunni relative to the most recent response about their engagement in the world and some of the terrorist activities? From the standpoint of our Nation's national interests, talk about the differences there, if you would.

Mr. OLSEN. Sure. It is a really important question, Chairman.

You know, I go back to something that Dr. Levitt said. Obviously, in this hearing, much of our focus is on the Sunni extremism problem. When we think of ISIS, obviously, that is rightly the focus. In terms of recent terrorist attacks, which also rightly draw our attention, those are Sunni extremism attacks, whether it is Brussels or Paris or San Bernardino.

In terms of our national interests, particularly in the Middle East, the Shia problem perhaps does not get as much attention as it should, and that is because—you put it well, Matt, that we are seeing perhaps the sort of the ability of a state, Iran, to develop a cadre of Shia extremists that can carry out Iranian aggression in the region. And we are certainly seeing that in Syria, of course, but we are also seeing it in Yemen. So it perhaps does not grab the headlines in the way attacks, obviously, that occur in western Europe do, but it is one that is of important interest to the United States.

The CHAIRMAN. Which would be of more concern to us relative to our own national interests over time?

Mr. OLSEN. I guess I would still rank Sunni extremism as more of a concern because of the threats, the urgency that the threats, whether it is Al Qaeda or ISIS, pose to the safety of Americans, whether here at home or in Europe or around the world. So I would still think—and I think this is probably reflected in my old agency, NCTC. The bulk of the effort analytically and in terms of collection is focused on the Sunni extremism problem.

The CHAIRMAN. Dr. Levitt, I know you want to say something.

Dr. LEVITT. I completely agree. I give a lot of thought to this, and the way I put it is we have an urgent, immediate threat from Sunni extremism. I think overall the more strategic threat may be on the Shia side, and we have to be able to address them both, even if the strategic one is not right now the second as urgent in the sense of who is responsible for Brussels, who is responsible for Paris. It is an urgent, immediate threat. There is a strategic threat over this horizon, and we best pay attention to it now or we will be caught off guard tomorrow.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Senator Markey?

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

Mr. Wood, I would like to ask you this question. It is about the role that the Sunnis are going to play in governing their own cities after there has been a clearing. So what happened about a couple months ago was the speaker of Iraq's parliament, Salim al-Jabouri, came in to visit us, and he said that Shia militia are still in Tikrit and that they hinder stabilization. And last week, he was quoted in the "Wall Street Journal" saying about Tikrit that displaced families have returned, but now there is a feeling that another occupation has begun. The Shia militias and armed groups are still there imposing their will. This is not what the Sunnis want.

So you look at Ramadi and you look at Mosul. So trying to build a coalition to liberate Mosul when the Sunnis back in Tikrit are emailing their cousins saying this is not working. The Shia are still around us here. They are not letting this go. And to some extent, the same thing is true over in other parts of Iraq as well.

So if you look at Ramadi and you look at Tikrit, and now you are trying to build a coalition up around Mosul to fight ISIS, what is the confidence that a Sunni should have that it is worth dying for, that they are willing to put their necks out on the line if, at the end of the day, the Shia still wind up blocking them from, in fact, having the kind of control that they have been promised in terms of their regional governments?

Mr. WOOD. I would say this is the single largest factor that will prevent this situation from being resolved anytime soon. And it is a reflection too of ISIL's awareness of this long in advance of their taking territory. They observed what happened in the 2000s. They observed the success that the United States and others had in finding Sunni allies, and they made sure that those Sunni allies are not alive. They assassinated huge numbers of possible partners in advance of taking the territory in Mosul and other areas of the Sunni-dominated portions of Iraq. And that means that there is a long road ahead of finding, first of all, Sunni Arabs in Iraq who could stand in as leaders of a post-ISIS situation. In the absence of them, then there would have to be a credible government coming out of Baghdad that does not exist.

Senator MARKEY. So how much does that complicate taking back Mosul if Sunnis do not have the confidence that the Kurds or the Shia militia or the government itself, the Iraqi government, is actually going to ultimately restore Sunni control over that city? Is there not a great deal of additional complexity, difficulty that gets added to that whole effort that can be cured by having Tikrit and Ramadi under Sunni control without interference from the Shia? And what should be done by our government and others to say to the Iraqi government, get out of Tikrit, get out of Ramadi? You know, let the Sunnis control it. Let the good people run their own institutions, and then we will have some confidence that the people in Mosul will rise up and fight. How important will that be?

Mr. WOOD. Vital. And realistically I think it postpones the liberation of Mosul certainly by months. I would say probably by years.

The government in Baghdad, of course, is aware of these problems but is tied in enough with Iran in particular to be unsure that it really wants to solve them. And I think that whatever pressure we can provide to suggest more activity on that front, then we should. Unfortunately, I do not see any quick way to do that. I do not see any pressure that we can provide with the diminished influence that we already have in Iraq. Unfortunately, I do not see a way through it.

Senator MARKEY. Do the other two of you agree with Mr. Wood?

Dr. LEVITT. So I think that this is the single largest impediment to stability in Iraq. I think the single largest impediment to dealing with the ISIL problem in Syria remains the Assad regime. It is a separate issue.

Senator MARKEY. In Iraq? The Assad issue in Syria—

Dr. LEVITT. In Syria.

Senator MARKEY.—is the single biggest obstacle to—

Dr. LEVITT. In Syria. In Syria.

Senator MARKEY.—resolving the ISIS issue in Iraq? Is that what you said?

Dr. LEVITT. No, it is not what I said.

Senator MARKEY. So just focus on Iraq then, please.

Dr. LEVITT. So here we go. In Iraq, the biggest issue is the fact that the Sunni minority has no faith in the central government, Shia-led central government.

Senator MARKEY. Should they have faith?

Dr. LEVITT. The government is going to have to take steps to enable them to have faith, which it has not yet.

And the single biggest problem there is that after Ayatollah Sistani called for Shia to volunteer for military service, instead what happened is people volunteered for militia service, and those militias now appear to be here to stay. The Hashd al-Shaabi are meeting with the ministry of defense. They are asking for headquarters to be built. To the extent that they are formalized, that is going to make the Sunnis feel much more fear.

Senator MARKEY. So do you agree with Mr. Wood that that could push back by, in fact, years our ability to liberate Mosul? Do you agree with that conclusion?

Dr. LEVITT. I think it will push back by years the ability to have stability in Iraq. It is possible you could still go forward and try and liberate Mosul. Liberating Mosul is not the issue here. What comes after the liberation of Mosul? If we do not do things now to make sure that the Sunnis have buy-in—

Senator MARKEY. Well, no. What Mr. Wood is saying is that it does complicate taking back Mosul because you will not have the full support of the Sunnis in that region who are saying it is worth dying for to do it because the post-government structure is very dubious in terms of the respect which will be given to the indigenous Sunni population. You do agree with that.

Dr. LEVITT. I agree that it complicates it.

Senator MARKEY. You do not think it actually reduces then the likelihood that there will be a pushback in the amount of time it will take to liberate Mosul. You think that is an independent question, what happens afterwards. You do not think it actually affects the time frame it takes to actually liberate Mosul?

Dr. LEVITT. I do not think you are hearing what I am saying. So I said, yes, I think it does affect the ability to take Mosul. I think that ultimately Mosul could be militarily taken, but it will not be held long unless you have the buy-in from the Sunnis. The wrong way to do it is to have the Shia militias do it. In the last statements from the Iraqi government, we, the Shia militias intend to be at the forefront. That would be disastrous.

Senator MARKEY. Okay. That would be a disaster.

I do not have any more time. Do you agree that would be disastrous? You can just answer yes or no, Mr. Olsen. Would that be a disaster?

Mr. OLSEN. I do not know if it would be a disaster, but obviously, all this complicates the effort.

Senator MARKEY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Senator Udall?

Senator UDALL. Thank you, Chairman Corker.

And thank you all very much for being here today. It is a very important hearing.

I want to ask about the caliphate a little more specifically. I mean, some of the things that have been laid out—and disagree with me if I am wrong, but 8 million to 10 million under the control, somewhere in that range, is the numbers that I have seen. Brett McGuirk's recent numbers on fighters is 19,000 to 25,000 fighters. But they have lost, as you have indicated in your testimony, 40 percent in Iraq and 10 percent in Syria. But they are still in control.

What I am really wondering is with the way they raise the revenue—you have the taxes. You have the oil. You have the kidnaping and the ransom and all of that. Why do people with the numbers of fighters and then the large group of people that are under control—why do people under the caliphate accept it? Why do they pay taxes? Why do we not hear anything about anybody rebelling? Are there rebellions going on within these 8 million to 10 million people? Is there any effort to kind of push back after they see brutality and things in their communities? And where are we on that front with what exists there in terms of how the people feel about the governance that has been imposed on them by this caliphate?

Mr. WOOD. There is certainly evidence that people who live under ISIL are not unified in their support for it. That is, there is evidence of people fleeing it. Of course, many more fleeing Bashar al-Assad in Syria, but still evidence of people fleeing the caliphate. There is no ability to be a loyal opposition within it. So, of course, we are not going to see overt activism against them.

The reason, though, that people are willing to accept the caliphate, beyond just what they are forced to accept, is that the alternatives that they have had in recent years and that they see offered to them for the future are not much better. They are looking at the caliphate as a source of stability, a source of governance, and I think probably last as a source of validation in the religious sense that the caliphate itself prefers to headline its governance with. So if they are looking as an alternative to government by ISIL to, say, the government of Bashar al-Assad or chaos, then they might prefer for purely pragmatic reasons to have amputations and crucifixions and so forth.

Senator UDALL. Mr. Levitt, please.

Dr. LEVITT. I agree. First of all, many Sunnis do not see an alternative.

Second, many Sunnis see this as not ideal but some level of protection from the sectarian fighting from the Shia side or from the Assad regime.

Third, extreme ultra-violence and barbarism goes a long way to intimidate a population, and the average person wants to get by and have their family get by another day.

And finally, there is a cost to having an uprising that does not get outside help and then is, if not immediately, over time suppressed. And they do not see the prospects of outside help in that regard. And so there is a tremendous cost to these people who are effectively—most of them—hostages under Islamic State control.

And you hear anecdotally cases of people who have left who said, look, when they first came in, I figured, okay, they are fundamentalist extremists but they are fellow Sunnis and there will be law and order. It might not be my law, but as long as I live by it, I

will not smoke. I will get by. And then they leave because they realize it was so much worse than they thought it would be. But ultra-violence then will go a long way to subdue a population.

Senator UDALL. Mr. Olsen?

Mr. OLSEN. I generally agree with my colleagues here. I think we are seeing an erosion in terms of what is happening and how individuals who have been subjugated are viewing what it is like to live under ISIS. And I think over time, the hope is that that becomes—that sense strengthens, and overall that as ISIS loses territory, its claim to have established a caliphate will be eroded and the group will lose really is central claim.

Senator UDALL. You have talked about countries in the region in fighting this terrorist threat being participants, collaborating with them and working with them and building regional coalitions. Which are the countries that you do not think are helping our goals and our objectives over there? Who is not really stepping up to the plate? Are we really just divided along Shia and Sunni lines in terms of the countries and looking at them?

Mr. OLSEN. I am trying to think of the countries. You know, there is obviously the issue that you just mentioned of the Sunni-Shia divide. But countries in the region are helping to varying degrees. I think the one country that stands out that is helping more now than it has in the past is Turkey, and that has made a big difference. They are a vital part of the coalition effort.

Senator UDALL. The flip side of my question is who is not.

Dr. LEVITT. I am going to answer it slightly differently. I do not think the problem is who is and who is not because I really do think it is varying degrees.

I think the bigger problem is this. You can have a hard time, if you look around the region, even though this is happening in their backyard, finding a country for whom the Islamic State is the number one problem. Maybe it is the Kurds. Maybe it is Assad. Maybe it is the Shia or maybe it is the Sunnis. The Islamic State is on almost all of their lists, but for us, it is pretty much number one and for almost none of them is it number one. And that leads them to doing things differently, prioritizing things differently, and that is where the tension is, not a good list/bad list.

Senator UDALL. Mr. Wood, do you have anything to add on that?

Mr. WOOD. I would echo that last point in particular. The problem is simply that it is not in the primary interests of most of the players in the region to focus their efforts on ISIL. And there are major costs that are associated with doing that. The only way to actually get their cooperation I think would be to make sure that it was in their interest, and that is not something that we are capable of doing because the calculation is due to regional dynamics that are longstanding.

Senator UDALL. Thank you for your responses.

The CHAIRMAN. We had a similar problem, if you will remember, with Pakistan. Our interests and their interests are very, very different as it relates to Afghanistan. It is very hard to redirect that and keep them away from the duplicity that they have been carrying out.

Senator Murphy?

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

Mr. Wood, in your testimony you talked about the fact that the ISIS message played into the existential, political, and religious desires of many inhabitants of the regions in which ISIS grows. It is very, very difficult for us to talk about the role that religion plays and the perversion of religion plays in this debate. It is outside of our lane. We look really bad when we do it. In the context of this presidential campaign, none of us want to feed into the really awful and discriminatory narrative that comes out of some candidates' mouths.

But I want to read you a quote from Farah Pandith, who was our country's first U.S. Special Representative to Muslim communities, and ask, Mr. Wood, you to react to it, but others as well.

She said that she traveled to 80 countries between 2009 and 2014. She said each place that I visited, the Wahabbi influence was an insidious presence, changing the local sense of identity, displacing historic, culturally vibrant forms of Islamic practice, and pulling along individuals who were either paid to follow their rules or who became their own custodians of the Wahabbi world view. Funding all of this was Saudi money, which paid for things like textbooks, mosques, TV stations, and the training of imams.

I do not know how we do this because I think we are very course in our interventions, but should it not at least be a greater portion of our dialogue, the role that Wahabbi influence plays in the seeds of extremism, how people are primed essentially to hear the messages that are coming from ISIS in part because the moderates are increasingly losing the fight to some of the more hard-line elements that are purveying a certain form of intolerant Islam? I am not asking you for solutions here, but as we try to diagnose the problem and we try to diagnose why there is this susceptibility to ISIS messaging, should we not admit that the tension within the religion is a big part of this?

Mr. WOOD. Yes. And I appreciate the caution that you allude to that we have to have when we are dealing with this kind of issue.

But certainly if you look at the theological beliefs of ISIL fighters, of ISIL ideologues and you compare them to mainstream Wahabbi beliefs, they are different in important ways. They are similar in many ways as well. The intolerance is there. The brutality is there.

I have done some reporting on public opinion in Saudi Arabia in recent months. The level of support for Abu Bakr al Baghdadi as caliph among Sunnis is in double-digit percentages according to what I have seen. Now, the level of support for, if not him as caliph, another caliph who perhaps would differ not by much is even higher than that. So I do think that understanding the religious background of Wahabbism as my colleague, Farah Pandith, has mentioned, yes, is important.

The other important thing to see too is the ways in which that Wahabbi strain has been mobilized to oppose ISIS. The state religion of Saudi Arabia is a kind of Wahabbism that is quietist that in theory is opposed to violent action to oppose Muslim leaders in particular. So I think we need to look at it as fine-grained an analytical toolkit as we possibly can, seeing the ways in which that kind of intolerant Islam has certainly fed into and made fertile the



ground for ISIL's theology and also seeing the ways it can be mobilized probably not by us but by others to oppose it.

Senator MURPHY. Mr. Levitt, do you want to add anything?

Dr. LEVITT. I should put cards on the table. Farah is a good friend. We were Ph.D. students together. She is wonderful. I am glad you quoted her.

I would just say there is a difference maybe between how this plays out in the region in Muslim majority countries and how it does in the West. It is important in both contexts. I think Graeme presented some really important ideas on how it is facilitating itself in Muslim majority areas.

When I was in Belgium and I asked authorities about this—well, let me be clear. I did not raise it at all. Almost every Belgian authority I spoke to raised the issue of the predominance of Salafi ideology in Belgium with me, and so I would ask about it. And what they kept saying is some version of here is one person's quote. Salifism is mainstream in Belgium. Not all Salifists are terrorists, but all terrorists were targeted for recruitment by Salifists in these neighborhood extremist networks.

And what I walked away from—if you look at most of these people who are involved in crime and are still drinking and using drugs after they have sort of become Salifists or they become Islamic State, is that they are being radicalized to the idea of the Islamic State far more than any idea of Islam. To them, not knowing much about Islam, the Salifists or Salafi jihadi really ideas that they are presented with, this is Islam.

So one thing we need to do is not counter the narrative but allow mainstream Muslim organizations to present what they are.

And the other thing is, especially in the West, we should not back down or be bashful about standing up for the Western ideal of tolerance.

Senator MURPHY. Mr. Olsen, let me ask you one additional question. We are talking about how you get Muslim nations to engage in the fight against extremism when many of them on the Sunni side are much more interested in fighting Iran and vice versa.

We are talking about yet another weapons sale to Saudi Arabia to resupply their munitions that they have used inside the civil war in Yemen, which is essentially a proxy war between the Saudis and the Iranians. Would a pretty easy step not be for the United States to say that if you want a resupply for the weaponry which you are going to use in a civil war between two nation states that you, as a condition, continue to be a partner in the fight against extremism? I mean, these GCC countries in part have walked away from the bombing campaign against ISIL in order to fight in Yemen, and we are about to resupply them without, it appears, any explicit conditions that they rejoin the fight.

Mr. OLSEN. So I cannot speak directly to the particular weapons sale that you mentioned, Senator.

I would concur with Dr. Levitt's point about the concern that in Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries, ISIS is one issue but not a priority issue. And we have certainly seen that in the context of the conflict with the Houthis in Yemen.

At the same time, my own experience has been that the Saudis have been very close and reliable partners in the counterterrorism fight over the years.

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

The CHAIRMAN. Just to follow up before we close out, from your perspective, could you state the relationship between Wahabbism and ISIS today?

Mr. WOOD. I would say it is a complicated but still direct relationship. If you were to look at the texts that ISIS uses for the indoctrination of its recruits, many of them are indistinguishable but for very slight changes, slight but important changes, from Wahabbi texts that you would see in Saudi Arabia. Some of them literally are textbooks that come from Saudi Arabia.

The CHAIRMAN. So the text is similar. I'd like an answer from all of you, if you would. What about the clerics especially outside of Saudi Arabia itself? From your perspective, what has been their role?

Mr. WOOD. I think what is most important, both with the texts and the individuals and their preaching, is the normalization of a kind of view of Islam that is extremely intolerant, that is extremely anti-Shia, and that is extremely attractive as well to anyone who might be looking for a kind of violent outlet for their religious beliefs. That is something that has been happening. Salifism or Wahabbism has been around for, of course, centuries, but for a matter of decades, there has been a kind of normalization of this intolerant view of the religion. And I think that comes to fruition in just one of several violent ways in the form of ISIS.

The CHAIRMAN. Dr. Levitt?

Dr. LEVITT. I agree. The main connective tissue is making intolerance something acceptable and normative. There is ideological connective tissue. The Islamic State selectively chooses its textual basis, it uses this one and not that one, but it is not the case, by any stretch of the imagination, that every Wahabbi or even every Salifi jihadi, and certainly not every Salifi is an Islamic State supporter. But Islamic State supporters or Islamic State members who are operatives will subscribe to elements at least of that ideology, and they will often take it a step further. So there is that connective tissue. One word. It is the intolerance and the hatred of others. You subscribe to that. It is a slippery slope and it can take you to even more dangerous places.

The CHAIRMAN. Dr. Olsen?

Mr. OLSEN. I just agree with my colleagues again. I do think part of, I think, your point, Senator, we have trouble talking about this, and part of the concern, which is a real concern—I brought this with me from my time in government—is that we do not want to paint with a broad brush when we talk about the religious foundations for what we see in ISIS messaging. One and a half billion Muslims. Obviously, the vast, vast majority have nothing to do with this ideology or, in particular, with ISIS or terrorism.

At the same time, at NCTC, we spent time in terms of the analysts understanding that message, understanding both how to counter it, understanding how to get amplification and voice to the messages from both the government, but more importantly from those outside the government that can help to defeat that message.

So it is a complicated issue. I think the point about intolerance is a very good one. I guess the other thing I would say is when you look at, just in terms of the United States, homegrown violent extremists, the ones that the FBI is tracking, the 250 or so that the FBI Director has talked about either going or trying to go to Syria, it is very hard to draw any kind of general points about those individuals. This is the U.S. radicalized population. Many are converts. Many are born Muslim. They come from different walks of life. I think it is much more difficult to draw some of those same conclusions about the U.S. population as you can when you look perhaps at populations inside Syria and Iraq who have joined ISIS. Just a word of caution there.

The CHAIRMAN. To get back to where Senator Murphy was going, at least partially with his questioning: you have the issues of poverty and certainly politics in the region which exclude and do not take into account the needs of Sunnis, and it creates an environment for ISIS to flourish? Would that be fair? When you have clerics who are out there speaking of intolerance? Am I missing something here?

Mr. OLSEN. As far as that goes, I think that is accurate.

The CHAIRMAN. So Western forces, not military forces, trying to counter that would make it even worse in all likelihood. So if we know that, what is the best way for us to counter what the Wahhabis are doing around the world in helping create this environment that is ISIS-rich? How do we counter that?

Dr. LEVITT. In a nutshell, I will just say you do not cede them the playing field. If there is a community that needs support, the support that should be forthcoming should not only be from the extremists. It does not have to be from the United States. Who are we partnering with? The vast majority of the Muslim world, certainly the Muslim American population, is extremely moderate. And who are we partnering with? So across this spectrum, you will have religious leaders that are part of the problem. You will have many more I believe who are part of the solution. But even in the West, we have not yet grasped this.

In Brussels, I was told when I was there that there are 114 imams, mostly brought in from the Middle East or North Africa. Of those 114, only eight speak any of the three local languages. So for those third or fourth generation Muslims who primarily do not speak Arabic, they cannot communicate with these imams. Even if they are not extreme, if they are moderate, they cannot be used as part of the solution because there is literally a language barrier. So we could work with Western governments, governments in the region to try and bridge even something as simple as that.

The CHAIRMAN. Anyone else?

Mr. WOOD. I would just add that the interpretation that Wahabbism or Salifism or Salifi jihadism puts forth is one that has been around for a long time. It is a view of a religion. It is far beyond my capacity or that of a government I think to resolve a religious schism or contending interpretation that has existed and not been resolved through hundreds of years of dispute. So all of which is simply to say that we need to moderate our expectations for what we can do even with the kinds of support that we can and should give to more moderate interpretations.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Cardin?

Senator CARDIN. Mr. Chairman, I just really wanted to compliment this panel and this hearing. I found it extremely helpful. Obviously, it is extremely frustrating when we are going after an entity that does not have one location and one particular game plan, where it pops up in different parts of the world at different times and has territorial ambitions. I just thought that you all really centered in on strategies or what needs to be part of an ongoing strategy, which includes U.S. leadership at the forefront and the ability to get coalition partners to be engaged.

I thought your point about cutting off safe havens at an early stage so that they do not become a bigger problem, as we have seen obviously with what has happened in Syria, providing a place in which ISIL could thrive—that is an important part of the equation now in Libya.

I also thought that the territorial issues are important and they continue to be able to not only retake but to maintain the territories away from ISIL, which requires good governance, which is perhaps the most challenging of all of our objectives, how we can get governance that not only has the confidence and respect of all the people of the country, particularly Syria, but also Iraq, but that it can function to protect all the population, including the Sunni tribal areas. That is not easy, but you have made that point very, very clear.

Cutting off their support, obviously, whether it is the financial supports through oil or whether it is the propaganda machines that they use, all that is critically important.

Then lastly something that America is not good at and that is patience because this is going to take a long time.

So I thank you very much. It was very helpful to me.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you. I agree. I think whenever we set these hearings up, you never know whether they are going to be helpful or not. In this case, all three of you have been outstanding. We thank you for your contributions here in helping us to understand more fully what we are dealing with and to help others who are observing.

I hope that you will answer questions that will come in a fairly timely fashion. I know each of you is busy. We would like to keep the record open through the close of business Thursday, but if you could get back on those fairly promptly, we would appreciate it.

We thank you for the role you play in helping all of us understand more fully the challenges we have and again for being here today and preparing to do so. And we look forward to seeing you again. You have been extraordinary, and we appreciate it. Thank you very much.

The meeting is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 12:20 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]