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THE THREAT POSED BY AL QA'IDA IN THE ARABIAN PENINSULA AND OTHER REGIONS

HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON TERRORISM, UNCONVENTIONAL THREATS AND CAPABILITIES

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED ELEVENTH CONGRESS

SECOND SESSION

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[There were no Documents submitted.]

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[There were no Questions submitted during the hearing.]

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[There were no Questions submitted post hearing.]

THE THREAT POSED BY AL QA'IDA IN THE ARABIAN PENINSULA AND OTHER REGIONS

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON TERRORISM, UNCONVENTIONAL THREATS AND CAPABILITIES

Washington, DC, Wednesday, January 20, 2010.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to call, at 2:00 p.m., in room 2237, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Adam Smith (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. ADAM SMITH, A REPRESENTATIVE FROM WASHINGTON, CHAIRMAN, SUBCOMMITTEE ON TERRORISM, UNCONVENTIONAL THREATS AND CAPABILITIES

Mr. SMITH. Good morning. I call the meeting of the subcommittee to order. Appreciate our witnesses being here.

I should point out that we will have votes imminently. It is my hope that we will be able to get through the opening statements at least from our three witnesses before we go to votes. And we will try to keep that as long as possible and then get back as quickly as we can.

We are joined by three witnesses this morning, Garry Reid, who is the deputy assistant secretary of defense for special operations and combating terrorism at the Department of Defense; Admiral Eric Olson, United States Navy, who is the commander of our U.S. Special Operations Command; and Ambassador Daniel Benjamin, the counterterrorism coordinator for the Department of State.

And the purpose of this hearing is to offer the committee members a brief background on our ongoing fight against al Qa'ida [AQ] and our knowledge of their terrorist networks. Sorry about the feedback here. I will move back a little bit.

And, in particular, al Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula, in response to the recent attempted bombing of the airline flight on Christmas Day that apparently appears to have at least in part come out of Yemen.

To give us a broader understanding of the broad global fight that is going on against al Qa'ida—I have, you know, been on the Armed Services Committee for 13 years now and chaired this committee for 3 years, and I can assure the American public that the three gentlemen in front of us—and many, many others—have been working for a long time against the threat that al Qa'ida presents and working in a comprehensive fashion.

It is not a battle that is limited to Afghanistan or Pakistan or Iraq. We understand that this is a threat that metastasizes in a

variety of different directions, and we are responding to that threat.

I and other members of this committee have been around the world to a variety of different places where this is going on. Certainly, again, we have been to Iraq and Afghanistan and Pakistan, but we have also been to the Philippines, to Indonesia, to Yemen, other parts of the Middle East, and in Africa. It is a comprehensive struggle that we are in engaged in, and we are engaged aggressively in protecting the United States of America from that threat.

I in particular want to point out that the Special Operations Command is the command that has primary responsibility for coordinating this response. They work very closely with the various regional combatant commanders, but they are the ones that take the lead in coordinating the fight against al Qa'ida and against other terrorist groups. And they are doing an outstanding job.

The men and women who serve in our special forces are some of the best that we have to offer in this country. They are doing a great job all across the world on our behalf to prepare for us, get us into a position to fight back against al Qa'ida.

So with that, I will yield to Mr. Miller for any opening statement that he might have, the ranking member on the committee, Mr. Miller.

STATEMENT OF HON. JEFF MILLER, A REPRESENTATIVE FROM FLORIDA, RANKING MEMBER, SUBCOMMITTEE ON TERRORISM, UNCONVENTIONAL THREATS AND CAPABILITIES

Mr. MILLER. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. We are reminded over the holidays that terrorist threat remains and that al Qa'ida and like-minded groups do not rest in their efforts to bring violence and destruction to the citizens of this country.

Since 9/11, we have sought to disrupt al Qa'ida and deny it safe haven from which they operate. We cannot constrain our efforts, however, to specific countries or regions, as our enemy is unbounded in its approach.

As al Qa'ida continues to morph and adapt, we must also be agile in our approach to countering the threat of terrorism around the globe.

And with that, I yield back. I would like to add my statement for the record.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Miller can be found in the Appendix on page 40.]

Mr. SMITH. Thank you. I, too, have a statement for the record that I will submit.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Smith can be found in the Appendix on page 39.]

Mr. SMITH. The bells have gone off. We are going to press on for a little while anyway, get as much testimony as we can. So we will start with Assistant Secretary Reid.

Mr. Reid, please.

STATEMENT OF GARRY REID, DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR SPECIAL OPERATIONS AND COMBATING TERRORISM, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

Mr. Reid. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And I, too, have submitted testimony and ask that it be entered into the record.

Mr. SMITH. And I apologize. Actually, I forgot one important thing. Obviously, a lot of what we are interested in with regards to the fight against al Qa'ida involves top-secret information that we don't want our enemies to know. All three of these folks here have information that is of a secret nature that they will not be revealing during this public hearing.

I think it is important, nonetheless, to have this hearing, to talk about what we can talk about, let the public know that we are responding to the threat. But I would encourage all members of this committee, if they have questions that require secret information, seek out these gentlemen, seek out their departments. They are always very open and willing to meet with members and do that.

For the purposes of this hearing, obviously, they will not be able to reveal that information, but we can get it in a different form. I apologize. Mr. Reid, please, go ahead.

Mr. REID. Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And with your permission and Congressman Miller, distinguished members, I just have brief opening remarks.

Thank you for inviting me here today to discuss the threat of al Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula and other regions of the world. The Department of Defense [DOD] appreciates the enduring efforts of this committee to provide our special operations forces with the tools they need to defeat al Qa'ida, to protect themselves from improvised explosive devices, and to operate at the leading edge of technology in today's extremely complex global security environment.

Although the attempted terrorist attack of December 25th on U.S. soil appropriately brought increased attention to the threat emanating from the Arabian Peninsula, it is vitally important—as you said, Mr. Chairman—that we view al Qa'ida in a global context.

The enemy certainly has a global agenda. Osama bin Laden, in his 1996 declaration of war on us, said it is the duty of all Muslims to fight in every part of the world. Bin Laden's exploitation of ungoverned and poorly governed regions, such as Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas, the Trans-Sahel, the Horn of Africa, and the remote islands of the South Pacific as sanctuary for his movement reflects his aspirations to establish a new caliphate that would extend from Mauritania to Indonesia.

Although Department of Defense efforts to counter al Qa'ida around the world must be tailored to each specific region, they all rely on the concurrent execution of training and equipping our partner nations' security forces, increasing intelligence collection on the enemy threat, and conducting with our partners counterterrorism operations.

And if I could just provide a brief overview of how this manifested itself in several regions, in Pakistan, the al Qa'ida core, although still a dangerous threat, has been significantly weakened by

the operations and activities of many nations against them since 2001.

Through the resources and authorities provided by the Pakistan counterinsurgency fund, the Department of Defense will continue to provide equipment, training and assistance to Pakistan's security forces to help improve their capabilities to defeat al Qa'ida and its extremist allies in their country.

In north-central Africa, al Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb, or AQIM, is currently engaged in a region-wide kidnapping campaign to terrorize U.S. and European travelers and members of the diplomatic community. In May 2009, they executed a British citizen in northern Mali. In June, a U.S. citizen was shot and killed in Nouakchott, Mauritania, in an attempted apparent kidnapping by individuals associated with AQIM. In November of last year, heavily armed AQIM terrorists attempted to kidnap a U.S. embassy employee in Niger.

The centerpiece of our efforts to counter AQIM is the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership. The Department of Defense conducts bilateral training events underneath this program with partners in the region designed to improve counterterrorism capabilities, and we provide CT [counter terrorism]-related equipment through Section 1206 authorities.

In East Africa, al Qa'ida continues to use the Somali safe haven as a training and recruitment base. AQ has provided training to al-Shabaab, which although predominantly an internal Somali movement, has shown signs of expanding its operations across Africa into Yemen and further into Europe.

Department of Defense counterterrorism engagements in the region are designed to deal with both near-term threats and long-term development challenges. We work closely with our international and interagency partners to address al Qa'ida and other terrorist threats emanating from the Horn of Africa.

Our long-term regional strategy is led by Combined Joint Task Force Horn of Africa, which employs an indirect approach to countering violent extremism, conducting operations to strengthen partner nations' security capacity, to enable long-term stability, prevent conflict, and protect U.S. and coalition interests.

In the Arabian Peninsula, AQAP, al Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula, is the AQ affiliate that poses the greatest threat currently to the United States. Al Qa'ida in Yemen was responsible for the 2008 attack on the U.S. embassy in Sana'a. And in 2009, the Saudi and Yemeni branches of al Qa'ida merged to form AQAP [al Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula].

They are responsible for killing South Korean tourists in Yemen in March 2009, for the attempted assassination of Saudi Prince Muhammad bin Nayef in August 2009, and, of course, the attempted December 25th attack on a U.S. commercial airliner.

To defeat AQAP, the Department of Defense cooperates closely with Yemeni security forces. Since 2006, we have provided over $98 million in counterterrorism assistance to increase their capabilities to prevent cross-border arms trafficking and regional foreign fighter flows, develop competent counterterrorism forces, and mitigate the threat of improvised explosive devices.

We anticipate continuing a high level of commitment to developing Yemen's military and counterterrorism capacity in the future. Through a broad array of bilateral and multilateral initiatives, the department supports U.S. government efforts to address Yemen's political, economic and humanitarian concerns.

In Iraq, although still capable of dramatic suicide bombings, al Qa'ida has been declining since the June 2006 operation that led to the death of former leader, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. The U.S. military continues to provide training and assistance to Iraqi counterterrorism forces, and we will continue to provide this assistance until U.S. forces are withdrawn at the end of 2011.

In Southeast Asia, al Qa'ida has always been attracted to the large population of Muslims in the region. Long before the attacks of 9/11, they sought to exploit Jemaah Islamiyah, an organization led by Indonesian extremists with cells scattered across Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, and the Philippines. Their hotel bombings in Bali and Jakarta have killed hundreds. Despite these attacks, Indonesian forces have had significant success.

The U.S. military counterterrorism commitment to the region is anchored by Joint Special Operations Task Force Philippines and supported by other training and assistance engagements in Southeast Asia.

Mr. Chairman, again, I thank you for inviting me, and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Reid can be found in the Appendix on page 42.]

Mr. SMITH. Thank you. I appreciate that testimony, a very comprehensive look at what we are doing across the globe.

Admiral Olson. I believe I will try to get Admiral Olson's testimony in, and then we will leave when he is done.

STATEMENT OF ADM. ERIC T. OLSON, USN, COMMANDER, U.S. SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND

Admiral OLSON. Yes, sir. Thank you, sir. Good afternoon, Chairman Smith, Congressman Miller, and distinguished members of the committee.

I do thank you for this opportunity to appear before this committee to discuss the threat posed by al Qa'ida and its associated movements and groups. And I am very pleased to join my colleagues, Ambassador Benjamin and Mr. Reid, today. We do, in fact, meet regularly in other venues on this and similar topics.

With your permission, sir, I will submit a written statement for the record and open with a briefer oral statement.

Al Qa'ida is unlike any other terrorist group that has threatened America or our interests. It combines exploitation of religion, nationalism, and perceived exploitation with violent action and extremist rhetoric in a way that has attracted thousands of recruits and made cult heroes of its top leaders.

Al Qa'ida's goals are ambitious, employing a broad network to conduct local, regional and trans-regional operations intended to recruit, inspire and incite some, while intimidating and terrorizing others in order to dominate territory and control the population. This provides safe havens that then serve as training areas and bases of operations to launch attacks and expand influence.

Originally operating almost exclusively from within Taliban-controlled Afghanistan, al Qa'ida has expanded and become geographically dispersed over the past eight years since it was substantially pushed out of Afghanistan into western Pakistan in the opening weeks of Operation Enduring Freedom.

Al Qa'ida is now difficult to define. More than two dozen associated and adherent groups have established themselves in Iraq, the Arabian Peninsula, the Horn of Africa, the Trans-Saharan region, the Maghreb of North Africa, West Africa, and Southeast Asia. And there are several different groups now operating within and from Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Al Qa'ida's top leaders have proven elusive, and they have learned to use a variety of technical and non-technical means to communicate. And as you noted, Mr. Chairman, within the U.S. government's efforts to challenge and ultimately defeat al Qa'ida, the United States Special Operations Command has been designated as the combatant command responsible for synchronizing the Department of Defense's planning against terrorists and terrorist networks.

We do this through a continuous series of virtual meetings across many government agencies. And serving in this role as an extension of the Joint Staff, we receive and review supporting plans submitted by each of the geographic combatant commanders, we prioritize the global requirements, and then we make recommendations regarding force and resource allocation.

The United States Special Operations Command has also been designated as the Department of Defense lead for foreign terrorist financing and the DOD proponent for security force assistance. That means helping enable less capable countries to be more effective in addressing threats posed to them by al Qa'ida.

The United States Special Operations Command's main contribution, though, is in the people-based capabilities we provide to operational commanders. The special operations force, with the support and oversight provided by this committee, is well positioned to meet the nation's highest expectations. When and where elements of special operations forces are properly employed, mostly in small teams and remote places, they are making a real difference against the al Qa'ida network.

Certainly many rising al Qa'ida leaders have been killed or captured, and in many villages our people have provided non-violent alternatives to al Qa'ida's presence, but there is much more to do.

We must learn to better address recidivism, successful messaging, financing, training, smuggling and the acts of brutality that characterized al Qa'ida. And we must do these in partnership with or in support of other nations. All of this will require a comprehensive and enduring approach.

Again, I thank you for the opportunity to appear before this committee, and I stand ready for your questions.

[The prepared statement of Admiral Olson can be found in the Appendix on page 49.]

Mr. SMITH. Thank you.

I think we are down to about two or three minutes on the vote. We are going to run and do that and then we will take Ambassador Benjamin's testimony. It is my hope that we will be able to be back

in half an hour to 40 minutes. And we will try to get back as quickly as we can.

[Recess.]

Mr. SMITH. I think out of respect for our witnesses' time, we will go ahead and get started. I know we had about 45 minutes away there. So we will get started in the Q&A. Other members who show up can follow up on issues that they are interested in.

So with that, we will turn it over to Ambassador Benjamin for his opening statement.

STATEMENT OF AMBASSADOR DANIEL BENJAMIN, COUNTERTERRORISM COORDINATOR, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Ambassador BENJAMIN. Mr. Chairman, distinguished members of the committee, thanks very much for the opportunity to appear here today. Thank you for casting light on this important set of issues. I have also already submitted a written statement and I will try to summarize that here.

The attempted bombing of Northwest Flight 253, which nearly cost several hundred people their lives, was a close call. The president has rightly demanded reviews of and corrections to the key failures that lead to the incident.

The event was a stark reminder that as the president stated recently, not withstanding our many successes against al Qa'ida, we face a nimble adversary. Moreover, the events of December 25th have shown that at least one al Qa'ida affiliate, not just the group's core leadership in Pakistan, has the potential and the interest to carry out strikes against the American homeland, yet we need to also make a sober judgment about the capabilities and status of al Qa'ida and its affiliates.

The group has been under unprecedented pressure in the—FATA, the federally administered tribal areas and continues to suffer significant setbacks and losses. Al Qa'ida and its affiliates have failed to mobilize large numbers of supporters, yet their continued ability to attract recruits and the technological savvy means that they continue to constitute a formidable foe.

Let me look at a few key theaters. Al Qa'ida and Afghanistan and Pakistan, the beating heart of the global network remains located in the Afghanistan/Pakistan border region.

The president has made clear that the mission of the United States in Afghanistan/Pakistan is to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al Qa'ida and prevent its return to both countries. Despite the setbacks al Qa'ida has suffered, the Taliban and other extremist groups continue to provide it with support and it thus remains a capable and dangerous enemy, hence the critical importance of our military and civilian efforts in Afghanistan.

A key element of these efforts against al Qa'ida will be the significant expansion of our support for Pakistan and its people. Our assistance will demonstrate the United States' commitment to addressing problems that affect both everyday lives of Pakistanis and bolster Pakistan against the threat of extremism.

Pakistan is a frontline partner in our counterterrorism efforts and we are committed to working with it to defeat and dismantle al Qa'ida and counter the violent extremism that threatens both of our countries. Both nations are heavily invested in this relation-

ship. And as General McChrystal noted earlier this month, the trust deficit between Pakistan and the U.S. Forces has been shrinking.

Al Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula, AQAP, claim credits for the Christmas day bombing attempt. AQAP officially announced itself in January 2009, but the Arabian Peninsula is not a new front in our war against al Qa'ida.

Indeed, al Qa'ida has had a presence in Yemen since well before the United States had even identified the group. In 1992, militants who claimed allegiance to Bin Laden attacked a hotel in Aden—which was then housing American military personnel who were on their way to Somalia to support the U.N. mission. In the 1990s, a series of major conspiracies were based in Yemen, most of them aimed at Saudi Arabia.

Following the attack on the USS *Cole* in 2000, the Yemeni government, with support from the United States, dealt significant blows to al Qa'ida's presence in Yemen through military operations and arrests of key leaders. During much of the subsequent period, the government of Yemen became distracted by other domestic security concerns, and our bilateral cooperation experienced setbacks.

Next door, however, in Saudi Arabia, al Qa'ida attacks galvanized the government in the kingdom to dramatically improve its counterterrorism efforts. The downside of this good news story is that many of the radicals driven out of Saudi Arabia fled to Yemen, joining other fighters there. This is one of the greatest challenges of the contemporary threat: the ability al Qa'ida and its affiliates have to continually exploit poorly or ungoverned territories.

Upon entering office, the Obama administration quickly came to understand that this al Qa'ida-related activity, as well as poor and deteriorating socioeconomic conditions, demanded a reappraisal of our Yemen policy. The U.S. government review, completed in November of 2009, has led to a new, whole-of-government approach to Yemen that seeks to mobilize and coordinate with other international actors.

Our strategy aims to address the root causes of instability, encourage political reconciliation, improve governance and build the capacity of Yemen's government to exercise its authority, protect and deliver services to its people.

U.S. strategy towards Yemen is two-pronged: first, strengthen the government of Yemen's ability to promote security and minimize the threat from violent extremists within its borders; and two, mitigate Yemen's economic crisis and deficiencies in governing capacity, provision of services and transparency.

As Yemen's security challenges and its social, political and economic challenges are interrelated and mutually reinforcing, so U.S. policy must be comprehensive and flexible in order to be effective in the short and in the long term.

In the past year, the administration has maintained a vigorous tempo of senior-level visits to Yemen, most recently by General Petraeus, Deputy National Security Advisor Brennan, and Assistant Secretary Feltman, to press our concern about al Qa'ida's ability to operate from and within Yemen.

This intensified engagement has paid off. In the last month, Yemen has conducted multiple air and ground operations designed

to disrupt AQAP's operational planning and deprive its leadership of safe haven within Yemen's national territory.

Yemen has significantly increased the pressure on al Qa'ida, and the United States commends the Yemeni government on these successful operations. We are committed to continuing support for an effective counterterrorism effort that will include both security and economic development initiatives.

On the security front, we provide training and assistance to Yemen's key counterterrorism units. Through diplomatic security and antiterrorism assistance programs, we provide training to security forces in the Ministry of Interior, including the Yemeni coast guard and the central security forces' counterterrorism unit. In addition, we are working with the Defense Department, with whom we coordinate closely, to use 1206 funds for counterterrorism assistance.

The United States is determined to halt and reverse troubling socioeconomic dynamics in Yemen. Priorities for U.S. assistance include political and fiscal reforms and meaningful attention to legitimate internal grievances, better governance through decentralization, reduced corruption and civil service reform, and economic diversification to generate employment and enhance livelihood. These initiatives will contribute to the long-term health of our bilateral relationship and help allay suspicion and misunderstanding.

Al Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb. AQIM continues to menace parts of the Maghreb and the Sahel. The group conducts low-level attacks in northeastern Algeria and in the Sahel, and has killed a number of local military personnel, an American NGO [non-governmental organization] worker and a British hostage. AQIM elements have repeatedly targeted Westerners for kidnapping for ransom.

We are encouraging greater coordination among regional states and France to frustrate AQIM's desire to establish itself in Europe. And we view the near-term likelihood of such an expansion of operations as diminished in just the last few years.

Algeria's successful counterterrorism efforts have led the group to focus on the ungoverned areas of northern Mali and Mauritania. In fact, the group faces difficulties in recruiting, and in some parts of Algeria has largely worn out its welcome.

Our regional partners value U.S. and other international assistance to build their capacity to disrupt terrorist attacks, better control their sovereign territory and counter those who advocate violence.

For the foreseeable future, we view AQIM as posing a persistent threat in the Sahel, but it is less of a danger to stability than that posed by AQAP or al Qa'ida in the FATA. The group is financially strapped, and the increase in hostage taking is clearly an attempt to raise much-needed revenue.

AQIM has failed to establish a viable presence in Morocco, Tunisia or Libya, and the Muslim populations of the Sahel and the Maghreb generally reject its extremism.

East Africa. East African al Qa'ida, EAAQ, is composed of a handful of experienced operatives, who have maintained a safe haven in Somalia for years, and now have the increasingly vocal support of the foreign terrorist organization, al-Shabaab. Despite some key setbacks, most notably the death of EAAQ leader Saleh Nabhan in late 2009, the presence of these al Qa'ida operatives in

Somalia continues to pose a threat to Somali, regional and Western interests.

EAAQ maintains links to al-Shabaab, which has, in turn, publicly pledged its support for al Qa'ida, and is actively trying to overthrow the Transitional Federal Government and other moderates in Somalia.

Al-Shabaab leaders have publicly threatened to target U.S. and Western interests throughout East Africa. Its forces have killed scores of civilians, including TFG [transitional federal government] ministers and foreign and Somali aid workers. They have stolen aid and greatly exacerbated Somalia's already dire humanitarian situation, even driving the United Nations World Food Program to cease operations in parts of Somalia earlier this month.

Al-Shabaab has also managed to recruit an unknown number of foreign fighters, including some Americans.

Our governance and counterterrorism goals in Somalia are clear, and they are mutually reinforcing: achieve a stable national government to help ensure that Somalia will no longer be exploited as a base of operations by foreign terrorists. And Somalia will not be stable as long as terrorist groups are active there.

In addition to humanitarian assistance, the United States has been providing support—primarily through equipment, logistical support and training—to the African Union Mission in Somalia, AMISOM, and the TFG.

The president has underscored that we must continue to take the fight to al Qa'ida and its allies wherever they plot and train. Doing that will require the military, diplomatic, intelligence and law enforcement resources of the U.S. and our allies.

We must also look to what Deputy National Security Advisor John Brennan has called the "upstream factors." We need to confront the political, social and economic conditions that our enemies exploit to win over new recruits, funders and those whose tacit support enables the militants to carry forward their plans.

We know that violent extremism flourishes where there is marginalization and perceived or real relative deprivation. In recognition of this, my office has set up a unit focusing on countering violent extremism, which will target local communities most prone to radicalization.

We must do more to address the underlying conditions for at-risk populations and improve the ability of moderates to voice their views and strengthen opposition to violence.

In closing, Mr. Chairman, let me just say that the contemporary terrorist threat was decades in the making, and it will take many more years to unmake it. There is still much we need to learn, especially about how to prevent individuals from choosing the path of violence. But I believe we now have the right framework for policies that will strengthen security for our nation and the global community.

Thank you very much for the invitation to speak here today, and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Ambassador Benjamin can be found in the Appendix on page 57.]

Mr. SMITH. Thank you.

We will do the questions under the five-minute rule, just to keep it structured. And I guess the machine is here, so there we go.

I guess my first question is following up on what you talked about at the end there, Ambassador Benjamin, because I believe that we have done a fairly effective job of targeting al Qa'ida's networks—the leadership of SOCOM [Special Operations Command], and cooperation of a lot of different agencies, you know, coming out of what JSOC [Joint Special Operations Command] did, starting in Iraq and more broadly.

I think there is an excellent interagency process going on right now that has cooperation, that has targeted all of those different groups that you all mentioned, and I think really disrupted their leadership in an aggressive way, and also changed the way that they have to try to plan and coordinate their attacks. They are not too anxious to be talking on cell phones or working on the Internet now, or to even move around. And I think that is a very effective, disruptive tactic.

The thing that sort of gives me the most concern is what you talked about at the end there, which is the radicalization issue. And this is something that, you know, we know that al Qa'ida is trying to—they try to find recruits that we don't know about, because that makes it easier to move forward. And they have had some success in that.

And I think it is fair to say that, right now, throughout the Muslim world, they are having greater success with their message than we would like. Now, I think it is true that some of this has sort of backlashed on them. Some of the more violent acts have undermined support for al Qa'ida, you know, in Pakistan, Jordan, a variety of different places.

But it is still true that, by and large, a disquieting number of Muslims, particularly the youth, you know, do have hostile attitudes towards the West and do agree with some of the, you know, central messages of al Qa'ida, that the West is at war with Islam. And they very aggressively propagate that message. We had an excellent hearing in this committee about how they use the Internet to spread that message.

So, how we do the counter-radicalization, stop the radicalization, is very important. Two questions about that—one, the interagency cooperation piece.

As I mentioned, I think it works fairly well on targeting the top folks. I don't think we have gotten there on the counter-radicalization. You got a piece. I know SOCOM is doing some stuff. DOD is doing some stuff. A bunch of different sort of layers to this. The NSC [National Security Council] is looking at it in terms of their strategic communications message.

Can you talk to us a little bit about how all those different pieces are going to come together better and have better interagency coordination?

And then, what is the core message? What do you think the message is that is working right now, that is enabling al Qa'ida to recruit people like Abdulmutallab? And what is our best counter to that?

So, it is sort of a three-part question there.

Ambassador BENJAMIN. I will try not to go as long as my statement.

Mr. SMITH. Yes.

Ambassador BENJAMIN. Well, you have asked, really, the core question about the future in the long term. And when I appeared before you some years ago, I probably, when I was out of government, probably said, we are terrific at the tactical part, at identifying terrorists and their facilitators, and taking them off the street. And we are having a harder time with really getting the strategic view and articulating a plan that will deal with the long term, because, as virtually everyone who has looked at this knows well, we are not going to shoot our way out of this problem.

I think that one of the hallmarks of the Obama administration approach has been that we put radicalization at the core of our concerns. And we are thinking very hard about how we proceed in a way that, if we take one terrorist off the street, does not result in 10 more appearing in his place.

And I do think it is true that al Qa'ida as a movement has failed to mobilize on a grand scale. And that is certainly a good news story. At the same time, are having not—they are not having problems in finding the recruits they need. And that, from a counterterrorism perspective, is a bad news story.

You asked about the interagency. I think that, first of all, whenever we have looked at this as a government, what we do well and what we don't, I think that actually, the official version tracks very well with what some of us who were outside the government previously thought, which is that we didn't have the right approach on what is known as countering violent extremism, or perhaps on the even softer global engagement side.

I think that there is a clear understanding across the interagency now that this is a very high priority, and that we need to coordinate better, and we need to make this a higher priority, and we need to put the resources against it to carry through.

As I said at the end, there is still a lot we don't know about why people turn to violence. And we need more research on this. And there is a thriving, you know, research—there is thriving research going on within the academic community that we are studying. And there is also a great deal of research going on within the government.

Public diplomacy and strategic communications clearly play a vital part in this in terms of reaching out to the large mainstream of the Muslim world that does not want to see violence at the heart of their faith. And I think that we are making a lot of progress there.

Certainly, having President Obama's deep engagement on this issue has made a difference in terms of global engagement. And his trip to Turkey, his Nowruz message, his speech in Cairo—all of these have made an important difference. And I think that they can make a lasting difference, if we follow them up expeditiously.

What I would point out is that, countering radicalization specifically, it is in some ways a taller order, because we are not a trusted interlocutor for people who are on the verge of taking the path of violence. And that is why we have set up this CVE [countering violent extremism] shop within my office, to figure out what the

interventions are that might be needed to deal with those at-risk communities.

Specifically, what should we be doing in these microclimates, in a sense, to address the socioeconomic drivers? Because even though poverty doesn't cause terrorism, it certainly can be the case that——

Mr. SMITH. It provides recruits.

Ambassador BENJAMIN. Well, it is certainly useful. It provides recruits, and it is useful as an instrument to others, who want to point to the deprivation as an indication of the truth of the al Qa'ida narrative. So we are looking at that.

We are looking at other ways of enhancing the ability of moderate voices to be heard. There is a lot of collaborative work going on. We are working collaboratively with the NCTC [National Counterterrorism Center] and we will be innovating a number of new programs in the very near future that I would be happy to tell you about more once they have lifted off.

Mr. SMITH. Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Miller.

Mr. MILLER. Admiral, you said in your opening comments that increasing recidivism rates are contributing to al Qa'ida's regeneration. Former detainees are rejoining the ranks of violent extremists.

Do we know how many of these former detainees are from Gitmo, and if any? And are they currently regenerating into the terrorist networks? And if they are, are we tracking them? Do we have a way to track them?

Admiral OLSON. Yes sir, so we know there are some. I don't think we know precisely how many and different elements of the intelligence community would come up with slightly different numbers. I think the general sense is that probably on the order of a fifth are somehow re-engaging in some sort of activity that works against our interests. Our ability to track it is of course limited, but there are some efforts to do that with an element of the recidivists.

Mr. MILLER. Ambassador, you talked about the United States and I think you said we were not a trusted interlocutor. Who are the trusted interlocutors?

Ambassador BENJAMIN. Well, if you are talking about those segments of communities that are closest to radicalization it may be people who espouse some ideas that we don't exactly embrace, but who are nonetheless trusted because of some overlap in values. And what I am suggesting here is that the critical issue for us is ensuring that these people——

Mr. MILLER. If I can interrupt, you specifically said the United States was not a trusted interlocutor. Can you name somebody who is?

Ambassador BENJAMIN. Well, there are many clerics, for example, who will not be considered the United States to be a great friend of the Muslim world, but who will also be anti-violent. And those people are, as far as we are concerned, very much working in our interest if they are turning people away from al Qa'ida.

Mr. MILLER. Would you name them?

Ambassador BENJAMIN. There are quite a number of them——

Mr. MILLER. Well, you were very quick to say the United States was not a trusted interlocutor. I would hope that you would be just as quick to tell me somebody that was.

Ambassador BENJAMIN. Well, I am not sure I want to undermine them by associating us with them. I would be happy to supply you with a list of such——

Mr. MILLER. I will be glad to hear it.

Ambassador BENJAMIN [continuing]. Clerics.

Mr. MILLER. Sorry.

Mr. SMITH. Would the gentleman yield?

Mr. MILLER. Yes.

Mr. MARSHALL. I believe Ambassador Benjamin made that statement within the context of trying to reach these kids mostly who are becoming radicalized. And I think your suggestion is that if it is——

Mr. MILLER. Well, if I can reclaim——

Mr. MARSHALL. Yes.

Mr. MILLER [continuing]. My time because you mentioned the United States as a whole. Now you are talking about individual interlocutors. And that is why I am trying to figure out why—is there anybody in the United States that is trusted to talk to these people?

Ambassador BENJAMIN. Oh, I am sure that there are. For example, American Muslim spokesmen who would be—who would be trusted in this regard.

Mr. MILLER. Well, you do know the State Department pays for Muslim Imams to fly around the world and talk about what it is like to be a Muslim in the United States.

Ambassador BENJAMIN. I am fully aware of that. But I am not sure that those programs are targeted at the communities that we are discussing.

Mr. MILLER. Oh, I am sure they are not. Not especially when they go to countries like Sweden, which I think is ridiculous. But I just—I find it kind of odd that you would single out the United States and then not be willing to say a country or a person. I just—maybe I just misunderstood you——

Ambassador BENJAMIN. Well, I——

Mr. SMITH. If I could—I think you know making relatively minor and I think obvious point, and that is that the United States of America collectively is not particularly trusted in the broader non-U.S. Muslim world. So when we are thinking about ways to deliver a message——

Mr. MILLER. And my question is, name me a country that is.

Ambassador BENJAMIN. I don't think we can name a country——

Mr. MILLER. But you said the United States was not. So there must be a country that is.

Ambassador BENJAMIN. I am not sure that that logically follows, sir.

Mr. MILLER. I yield back.

Mr. SMITH. Mr. Marshall.

Mr. MARSHALL. And thank you, Mr. Chairman. That is an interesting exchange. Obviously the United States acts through individuals. The corporate United States can't do anything independently. It is just a concept.

And so I guess your point is that if an individual is seen as advancing the interest of the United States it is kind of difficult for that individual to be persuasive with somebody who is tending to get radicalized in this movement, which is wholly anti-United States. I guess that is your point.

It is pretty obvious what our strategic interest is where the Hindu Kush is concerned, the tribal areas of Afghanistan, Pakistan. It is al Qa'ida central, has been identified as al Qa'ida central for quite some time. And Pakistan has nuclear weapons, nuclear technology and a history of exploiting nuclear technology. So we have got a real strategic interest here. That is quite clear.

It becomes a little less clear what our strategic interest is as we sort of look around North Africa and elsewhere. You know, take AQIM, al Qa'ida in the Maghreb. That was a nationalist movement that was largely failing that couldn't get recruits, that couldn't get money.

And so they said, "Hey, we are al Qa'ida," and all of a sudden they can get recruits and they can get some money. And yet their behavior is largely the same. They are doing exactly the same thing that they were in essence doing beforehand, just sort of robbing people and making a living off being—of kidnapping people, things like that.

And to the extent that we think we are going to somehow void weak countries, difficult economic circumstances across the board—across the world and that is going to solve our problem, that is pretty unrealistic, particularly given trends. We are going to have more weak states and more economic problems facing global populations.

To the extent that every time somebody hops up and says, "I am al Qa'ida" and we are going to run over there at a great expense to us, you know relatively, a very asymmetric relationship there, and attempt to shoot our way out of it when we all can see we can't shoot our way out of this.

I find myself—I think it would be very helpful—oh, and also as we—as we jump to respond to each one of these little groups that says "we are al Qa'ida," we sort of play into this notion that this is us against Islam because they just scatter themselves across all of Islam. And then all of a sudden we are present in all of Islam with gripes about the behavior of the local populous permitting these individuals to act the way they are.

So I think it would be real helpful to hear from all three of you what you view are strategic interests with regard to you know all of these smaller areas that—that we are struggling with right now. And I would like to start with Mr. Reid.

Mr. REID. Thank you for the question. And it certainly is one that we also consider and think of the context of these various groups that we talked about here, and as you mentioned, Congressman, the AQIM and others.

I think what I would first say is the al Qa'ida network that we described is comprised of these key allies. There is a number of elements we—I did not bring up today, mostly in interest of time, that are affiliates or lesser allies. But there are some core allies, and Ambassador Benjamin and I both talked about most of those in our statements.

And I think the—if you look at Yemen as an illustration of what we don't know about where the next attack could be coming from. So I agree that the—everything you said about the AQ core and the relevance——

Mr. MARSHALL. What worries me a little bit is that——

Mr. REID [continuing]. Of Pakistan.

Mr. MARSHALL [continuing]. There are lots of places in the world, including within the United States where somebody could decide that they are going to do something awful——

Mr. REID. Oh, absolutely, sir.

Mr. MARSHALL [continuing]. That we would object to. Back to what is the strategic interest?

Mr. REID. Well, and I would say, sir, what I was leading to there is these other areas, particularly trans-Sahara, the Horn of Africa and the remote areas of Yemen provide an opportunity and a potential pathway of shifting the locust of attack planning against us, which does cut into our strategic interest and allows the core to continue to operate.

So a comprehensive approach to network defeat has to consider these alternate locations because they do have potential.

Mr. MARSHALL. Admiral Olson——

Mr. REID. Yes, sir.

Mr. MARSHALL. I am running out of time.

Admiral OLSON. Sir, I think the fundamental strategic need is defense of the homeland. And that requires prevention of the development of safe havens from which attacks against our homeland where our vital interests can be launched.

I would say that a group cannot self-declare effectively an allegiance to al Qa'ida and through simple self-declaration become a group of high interest to us. There is a careful and deliberate, quite precise process through which a group is designated by our government as an al Qa'ida affiliate, which then leads to a prioritization and some investment against that group. But our preference is always to work through the host nation, through supporting the development of capabilities within that nation to deal with its own problems.

Mr. MARSHALL. My time is——

Mr. SMITH. I think we will come back to you in the next round. We should have time to get to that. I want to make sure we get to the other members and give them their fair allotment of time.

Mr. Conaway.

Mr. CONAWAY. Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman—I want to apologize for missing your opening statements here——

Ambassador, the real issue in my view is radicalization. And it seems spectacularly presumptuous of us as non-Muslims, non-Islamic that we have the solution for that. If you look at the guys who attacked the airport Heathrow, doctors, educated Brits raised in the system, Hasan and Fort Hood, grew up as an American, all the advantages.

Then you look at the ones who come out of these impoverished areas and ungoverned spaces. What causes that and how are we addressing it?

Because it seems to me this is an Islam problem. It is their deal. We are caught up in it. We are collateral damage, so to speak. And

your answer to a similar question it was not until late in your answer that you used the word cleric or Muslim.

And it is troubling that given it is their problem really—now I don't think that Christians or Americans remotely have the best ideas as how to counter radicalization—that it would be that late in your quote—in your answers that we wouldn't be engaging, for the lack of a better phrase, moderate Muslims.

Because to me that is who has got to solve this radicalization problem are the moderate Muslims. They have got to stand up. Many of them are, and some that you have mentioned. But there is a comment on that.

And then broader question is, what is the Saudis' attitudes towards Yemen AQAP because it seems to me they are equally disposed at going after Saudi as they are us. And what is the Saudi's attitude in their help with us in this arena?

So any of the three want to pitch in on that.

Ambassador BENJAMIN. Sir, I don't disagree with you about the need for—the aspect of this that is religious to be hashed out between fellow believers. And that is why it is vitally important that we create more political space for moderates, that we find ways to constrain the environment in which radicals operate so that people believe that it is not in their interest to having—to have terrorists, to have radical extremists operating in their neighborhoods, in their cities, in their——

Mr. CONAWAY. That would be Alexandria, Virginia, where Major Hasan grew up?

Ambassador BENJAMIN. Well, for example, quite clearly from the reviews we have seen there were failures in not noticing the kind of radical influences that he was espousing.

And one of the things that we are looking forward to over the long term is creating environments in which people take seriously radical statements and consider that to be their problem as well, and begin to confront that and find interventions, whether it is clerical, therapeutic or of some other kind. That is one of the ways that we are going to tamp down radicalization. And there are many different ways that we are going to have to get at that.

But I think the key thing is to help other countries and communities that have a radicalization problem to create the structures in which they contain it, identify it and defeat it really. You asked about Saudi Arabia.

Saudi Arabia is every bit as concerned if not more concerned about AQAP. Remember their deputy interior minister is the head of counterterrorism was nearly killed several months ago by an AQAP attack that used a similar device to the one that was employed on the Northwest flight.

Saudi Arabia is the country that has the most influence with Yemen, and they are working very hard to get the Yemenis to maintain their tough stance against AQAP.

Mr. CONAWAY. Are they spending money in Yemen to support that government?

Ambassador BENJAMIN. According to press reports on the order of a billion dollars or more annually. And again, those are——

Mr. CONAWAY [continuing]. Having been to Sana'a recently I wondered where the money went.

Ambassador BENJAMIN. Well, you know, this is a country that has enormous economic needs, including simply budget support and they—and also training of their security forces. So it is not news that the economic requirements of the government of Yemen are rather large.

Mr. CONAWAY. Quickly, anybody, where is the next stop on this train for AQ, et al, around the world? If we drive them out of Yemen, where do they go next?

Mr. REID. Just to go back to the earlier point, I think we do have to identify and address in advance these potential safe havens. And some of these operations and engagements we have talked about today get to that. They have telegraphed us already with their interest in areas like Somalia and out in the Trans-Sahara Desert. So I believe those are some very likely places and that supports our interests in those areas, as we already discussed.

Mr. CONAWAY. Any of those particular places in the Western hemisphere, South America or somewhere?

Ambassador BENJAMIN. I think there was a period of time in the 1990s when we were quite worried about radicalization, particularly in the tri-border region in South America. But the countries in that region have done quite a good job, I think, at containing and diminishing the threat there.

And that points to a larger issue, which was in response to the earlier question, which is that however we define our strategic goal, the key part of the answer is going to be capacity building because al Qa'ida and its affiliates are going to show up in many, many different places. And we need to have a strategy for enabling those who are in those regions to confront their threats and deal with them because we cannot be everywhere all the time. And we cannot fall into the trap of expending enormous amounts of treasure running to wherever, as Admiral Olson suggested. They just declare that they are there.

Mr. SMITH. Yes.

Mr. Bright.

Mr. BRIGHT. Mr. Chairman, thank you very much for this hearing—very worthwhile.

And, gentlemen, thank you for your presence here today and your testimony. And my colleague pretty much asked my question. But I am going to probably phrase it a little differently and see if I can get a little more information. But quite frankly, I am not sure the al Qa'ida—if this is a tactic or a strategy that they have implemented. And that is striking at different locations.

South Asia initially was the primary place that we were engaging. Now the Arabian Peninsula in Yemen is the other place that we are addressing now. If either one of you had a prediction based on your expertise and your knowledge, where do you think the next area might develop to be and for us to be watching out?

And I guess my question is two-part. What specifically are we doing to find out, number one? And then once they appear, what are we doing to contain or eliminate them? Anyone.

Mr. REID. Sir, I would say it is a strategic effort, in my view, and declared by al Qa'ida as their strategic objective to establish some degree of control in the area between Mauritania and Southeast Asia, Indonesia, as you describe, sir. And so, when they lay that

out several years ago and say this is our strategic intent and then they start setting up these enterprises—and they are dots along the map all in that area, I think you have to take it for what it represents. So I do think it is a strategic effort.

And it doesn't have the same level of success in every area. What we can do to learn more about it goes back to what Ambassador Benjamin just mentioned. And that is to strengthen the security capacity and institutions of our partners in those areas. And that is where our Department of Defense efforts are focused, in the security force assistance realm across many of these countries and regions we have discussed today.

We have been engaged for many years in training, equipping, advising and helping these countries build up a force that is capable of dealing with terrorism. Very many of them have never organized their defense or security forces around that type of threat. And as we ourselves have learned over many hard years of war, it does take an adaptation of your armed forces to optimize against that threat.

Mr. BRIGHT. Sure.

Anyone else, either?

Admiral OLSON. Sir, I would just reinforce the stated strategic goal of al Qa'ida is the reestablishment of the Caliphate in the areas that you mentioned. And the decentralization of al Qa'ida is an element of the execution of that strategy. So I think we are talking less about where next and either trying to move ahead of them or chase them to that place. But it is really the notion of applying pressure wherever they are with persistence, preferably through the government of the nation that is currently serving as the location.

We have not been successful in predicting absolutely where the next attack on the United States would be launched from. We know where al Qa'ida is, but we don't know—in many cases, but we don't know for certain which element of al Qa'ida is the one most ready to launch an attack against us.

Mr. BRIGHT. Okay.

Ambassador Benjamin, anything? Any additional——

Ambassador BENJAMIN. I think Admiral Olson and Secretary Reid have captured it quite aptly. I would say simply two things. One is that we should never be complacent about the possibility of radicalization within our midst. And the trickle that we have seen of people who have gone to East Africa to fight and who have become radicalized there ought to be cause for concern.

We are certainly not immune. The same holds true for Western Europe, which has also seen occasional cases of radicalization. And there are a number of people who are training in the FATA who come from those countries.

I would also say that among the things that keeps me up at night is not so much a new geographic theater as a different form in the theaters that we are acquainted with. And so, for example, the emergence of a group like Lashkar-e-Taiba as a global threat based in South Asia is something that concerns me greatly.

Mr. BRIGHT. Thank you very much, Ambassador.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back my time.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you.

Now, a couple questions on the recidivism front. First of all, Saudi Arabia has a program they talk a great deal about where they take people who have been part of al Qa'ida and then try to reform them. You know, this program is used in a variety of different places.

Now, it has some obvious limits. I mean, the thought was the Jordanian who was the suicide bomber who killed our CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] agents had been one of those that had been reformed early on. I know Saudi Arabia was pretty much saying, you know, it has got a 100 percent success ratio. I question their statistical analysis.

Have you worked—I guess I will start with Mr. Reid—more closely at that to see about whether or not whether it is Saudi Arabia or Yemen, or any of these countries that some of these people have shown up in, have they had any success in actually reversing it once people have been radicalized? And if so, how has that worked?

Mr. REID. Sir, I would just note that it is quite possible as people are being released this far into the war that those that have been held the longest probably are the most hard-core. And it sort of elevates the potential of the recidivist phenomenon.

Logically those released earlier——

Mr. SMITH. Right.

Mr. REID [continuing]. Were presumably guilty of less or less along the spectrum. So I think that is a factor as we look at the timelines and the increases. I think we have to consider that there is some logic to that. And I think it speaks to the careful consideration that is given for further releases.

As to the Saudi program, from all that I have seen, sir, it is generally a successful program. Clearly, one is too many when it comes to someone like al-Rimi or one of these characters that is currently fighting us.

But among those that we work with, it has shown great success. And they do invest quite a bit in it. And they have offered to help us form these programs elsewhere. But I do just think that one point about this group of people we are dealing with is going to spike those numbers.

Mr. SMITH. You mentioned we are sort of rethinking our policy on when to release detainees in light of some of what we had learned. Can you spell that out a little bit more clearly? How have we changed that in recent months?

Mr. REID. Well, as you are likely aware, sir, the president did after the release in mid-December of—of detainees into Yemen call a halt to that, to review in particular the Yemeni problem. And it is a problem that we have been dealing with for several years in trying to find a way to release them.

Overall and broadly the system is well-developed. And it is an interagency system with a great amount of discussion and a great amount of review from all angles about the risks of release. And the factors go into what we know about the individual, what population or what country we intend to release them in, what the likelihood and the risk factors are there. And they are all very carefully considered in every decision to release.

Mr. SMITH. Okay.

Do either of you want to comment on that at all?

Ambassador BENJAMIN. I would just add that one of the key considerations is now and will continue to be the ability of law enforcement and intelligence services in those countries to monitor those who are being released and that that is something that I know that the interagency process looks at very carefully now. And that will continue to be the case because, quite frankly, a 100 percent nonrecidivism rate is likely unattainable.

Mr. SMITH. Right.

Ambassador BENJAMIN. So it is going to be important that we have capable partners who are going to be able to deal with the threats within their borders.

Mr. SMITH. Absolutely.

Follow up a little bit on—I think Mr. Marshall had raised the issue of our, you know, footprint as we go around. Every time someone pledges allegiance to al Qa'ida, we don't want to show up in force.

But I think that one of the strengths, certainly, of what SOCOM and what some of the other agencies have done is where we see threats in a variety of different places, we can deal with them with a very light footprint. In fact, I think going forward when you look, you know, Iraq, Afghanistan, those would not be the models of how we hope to be able to operate in the future, that we can do it working with the host nations in a cooperative fashion.

And I know, Admiral Olson, to the degree in which you can get into this, can you talk a little bit about, you know, how a light footprint can, in fact, make a big difference on stopping, you know, radicalization or stopping a terrorist haven from being created in a given place?

Admiral OLSON. Yes, Mr. Chairman, I could certainly answer that to the degree. The light footprint is really for a couple of different reasons. One is to gain an understanding of the place and the people there so that we can just learn better about what motivates—what may motivate elements of that society to select an al Qa'ida path. And what might motivate them to select an alternative to that.

But most of our presence in sort of what I call moving ahead of the sound of guns is a train, advise, assist kind of a presence. It is working mostly with counterparts, mostly at the small unit level, mostly for the purpose of enabling them. And the military and then the law enforcement realms to provide better for their own sovereignty and their own security.

It is difficult to measure success by what doesn't happen. But you are—I would second what you said, that there is known value to what it is we are doing in relatively small footprints around the world.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you very much.

Mr. Miller.

Mr. MILLER. Ambassador, I was looking through your remarks. And I just—if I can, attempted bombing of Northwest Flight 253 that may have resulted in the death of several hundred people, efforts to strike us, al Qa'ida militants attacked a hotel, attack on the USS *Cole*, al Qa'ida attacks, repeatedly targeted Westerners for kidnapping for ransom, have killed a number of local military per-

sonnel and an American NGO worker and a British hostage, carry out attacks and kidnappings. Hostage-taking is clearly an attempt to raise revenue. Its forces have killed scores of civilians.

And then you say the president has confirmed that we must continue to take the fight to al Qa'ida and its allies wherever they plot and train. That includes exploiting opportunities to bring al Qa'ida's operatives to justice by presenting them before a court of law.

That scares the hell out of me. Is that supposed to scare people that will cut your head off and take you for ransom and blow up ships and—I mean, you don't—the courts of law.

Ambassador BENJAMIN. As it says in my statement, sir, we do use the entire range of different capacities to target terrorists. I believe the passage that you are referring to actually talks primarily about our partners having the law enforcement capability to try terrorists within their countries, which we have found as an empirical matter to have a very powerful effect in terms of discouraging radicalization because the experience of terrorists being taken into court and treated like ordinary criminals and de-glorified, as it were, from the kind of cosmic warrior or holy warrior image that they have, is a very humbling one.

And I submit that the example of a country like Indonesia, which under our—with our advice—instituted a number of very important counterterrorism laws, and has used a law enforcement approach, among others—they have killed quite a number of terrorists—has been extremely successful in terms of tamping down radicalization within their borders.

The Saudis also use a law enforcement approach within their borders. And I would submit that many people would say that their rehabilitation system is even softer than their court system.

So I think that we need to be flexible in how we approach these matters. We have, I think, by in large encouraged our counterterrorism partners around the globe to strengthen their rule of law institutions as part of a broader counterterrorism effort, and they have been very successful.

Mr. MILLER. But your statement says doing that will require the military, intelligence, and law enforcement resources of the U.S. and the allies. So it is not just the courts of our allies. You are talking about the courts of the United States as well, are you not?

Ambassador BENJAMIN. Well, I certainly support the attorney general's decision to try people in American courts. I think that this is a vindication of our system and this is an appropriate response to the threat we have at hand. I do not suggest by any means that the only response to terrorism is to insist on the capture and arrest and conviction of terrorists.

There are many terrorists who are far beyond our ability to capture. I work very closely with Admiral Olson and Secretary Reid to deal with the others, but I certainly think that a law enforcement approach has to be part of the arsenal that we use.

Mr. MILLER. Do you think we should kill them?

Ambassador BENJAMIN. I think that when it is appropriate we should target terrorists with lethal force, absolutely.

Mr. MILLER. What about military tribunals?

Ambassador BENJAMIN. The administration has decided that in some cases tribunals are an appropriate approach. I am not the attorney general, but I will certainly bow to his authority and his counsel on this and to the president's.

Mr. MILLER. You would bow to the Attorney General?

Ambassador BENJAMIN. Yes, I would—happily.

Mr. MILLER. Defer?

Ambassador BENJAMIN. Yes.

Mr. MILLER. Okay, thank you, sir.

Mr. SMITH. Mr. Marshall.

Mr. MARSHALL. I guess I have to observe the questioning of my good friend, Mr. Miller, who really is a good friend of mine, that as I recall—and I know far more than I am free to say—but certainly all Americans know that we are prepared to hit these people and kill them.

And we are doing that, and we are doing it weekly. We are doing it not only in Pakistan, but we are doing it elsewhere. And it is not as if we are reluctant to do so. In fact, what we worry principally about is what sort of collateral damage are we going to cause once we have identified a target that is really on our list. Can we go ahead and kill that target? So, the range of things that we are attempting to do.

Back to the strategic interests. You know, Admiral Olson, obviously the goal is to protect the United States, United States' interests, United States' citizens. The question is the strategy that we adopt—in furtherance of that goal. We wrestled for a while there with how we should approach Afghanistan.

Should there be a troop buildup? And, concluded that the appropriate—we knew what our strategic interest was. The appropriate strategy here was to go ahead and build up the capacity of the Afghan people to deal with this threat themselves. That wasn't going to happen without a buildup of troops for us, so we are building up troops.

And that we had a real strategic interest—a unique strategic interest—because of the fact of Pakistan and al Qa'ida central and nuclear technology, et cetera. We are not suggesting that we apply the same strategy globally. And it certainly is our hope that it is a lighter footprint.

And it is certainly our hope that we have partnerships of partners out there, all of whom who have a strategic interest to further our interests in avoiding having somebody with a bomb in his underwear get on a plane and come to the United States. That is very minute police work.

You get information about folks like that from local people who are willing to cooperate. Probably not with us, since we have some credibility issues right now, but with local folks. So we are building capacity and at the same time, we are trying to give people a strategic interest to help us out.

Now, why would some of these countries have a strategic interest? How do we get them interested in helping us avoid underwear bombers?

Mr. Ambassador, you——

Ambassador BENJAMIN. It is actually——

Mr. MARSHALL. To do that I think we are sort of fighting against their own religion, in a sense. They can be accused of that, and they can be exposed in many different ways. Those individuals who step forward to say yes, we do have a strategic interest in keeping people like this from hitting the United States.

Ambassador BENJAMIN. I think that by and large the level of international cooperation in defending our selves and our allies against this threat is really quite good. And many countries—and we don't need to name them all—that would—that might criticize aspects of our politics, our policies in the world——

Mr. MARSHALL. If I could interrupt, I don't have that much time. So let's take Yemen specifically and I think we would both have to concede that we cannot police the population of Yemen. Can't be done. Saudi Arabia could get closer to doing it. But certainly we can't do it. So what we would really like ideally is for somebody within Yemen to police Yemen. So how do we get them strategically interested in doing that?

Ambassador BENJAMIN. Well, I think that the experience of the last few months is indicative, in that repeated engagement, the offer of assistance, and I mean high level engagement. The offer of assistance to deal with this critical issue, which they have come to realize threatens them. This is the combination of incentives.

And when you bring together different members of the international community, such as Saudi Arabia, such as the UAE [United Arab Emirates], in their neighborhood, as well as the Brits—and others——

Mr. MARSHALL. If I can interrupt?

Ambassador BENJAMIN. Yes?

Mr. MARSHALL. So we are going to pay them, in a sense, to do this for us. And do we create an environment as a result of taking that approach, in which for decades if you give us enough money, we will keep the militants down? If you give us enough assistance we will keep the militants down?

Ambassador BENJAMIN. I don't think that is correct. We are not paying them. In fact, we do not give them cash subsidies. Our assistance to Yemen is directed on the humanitarian side, on the AID [Agency for International Development] side of things. It all goes through non-governmental organizations.

Mr. MARSHALL. So incentives that you are discussing?

Ambassador BENJAMIN. Yes. Obviously there are incentives on the security side.

Mr. MARSHALL. I was using the shorthand. Somehow we are going to help them.

Ambassador BENJAMIN. But it is also a matter of persuasion and of showing them the extent to which the threat—that they are targeted as well. And I am sure that part of the government's move toward a more effective stance against al Qa'ida was conditioned by the targeting of their own intelligence officials and others within that society, and that they have come to see that this endangers them.

They are not in alliance with al Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula in any way, shape or form. And this is really about dealing with a threat to Yemeni stability.

Mr. MARSHALL. I understand that. But the underwear bomber, how does the underwear bomber play into their strategic interest, which I think in fact is what you have identified. They are threatened as well.

Mr. SMITH. If I could——

Mr. MARSHALL. I apologize. I am way over.

Mr. SMITH. If I could move it along.

Mr. Conaway.

Mr. CONAWAY. I have just one real quick one. Monday AQAP released a statement that said jihad against the infidels and their agent helpers, not only on the ground, but in the sea and in the air, as well as their crusader warships in the Gulf of Aden—Winston Churchill-esque of them—but in this setting, Admiral, can you talk to us about the legitimacy of that statement? Is that just puffing, or is that what—could you talk to us about in general about that statement?

Admiral OLSON. Sir, my opinion would be that there is certainly an element of puffing in there, but we can't dismiss the threat. They have demonstrated the ability to strike from Yemen, including strike at sea from Yemen. So I think that we have got to take what they say seriously, although it is in their own interests to inflate their capabilities.

Mr. CONAWAY. Yes. And then, our planning and response goes without saying, but you need to say it anyway for the record. That we are in fact planning those kinds of responses necessary to counter that kind of nonsense?

Admiral OLSON. Sir, the response clearly depends on what it is we are responding to. But the government of Yemen has demonstrated a willingness recently to go after al Qa'ida on its own. And our response, to the extent that it is possible, will be in support of the Yemeni government.

Mr. CONAWAY. But if they came after one of our warships—I have to believe the crusader warships are—is code for great ships of ours?

Admiral OLSON. Self-defense is the fundamental rule at sea.

Mr. CONAWAY. Yes. One last quick one. The remaining 200 detainees, would you expect the recidivism rate of that group, given who they are and what they have done in the past, and their track record would be higher than recidivism rates in the first crew we let go, just in general?

Mr. REID. Congressman, I don't have a deep knowledge of each case, but I would not——

Mr. CONAWAY. Well, we have saved the worst for last here.

Mr. REID [continuing]. Expect that all of them would be released. There is a population within that that are not intended to be released, and that goes to the long term post-Guantanamo detention solution that the administration's working. There is not an intent, that I know of, that every person that is currently held will be released——

Mr. CONAWAY. Is it fair to say that these are the worst of that 700 that were there?

Mr. REID. I certainly think it is logical that the worst would be the last released, sir, yes, sir.

Mr. CONAWAY. Okay. I will hand it back. Thank you, gentlemen. Appreciate it.

Mr. SMITH. One more question, but then I want to make a couple of points before I make it. First of all, I want to make sure that it is very clear that the decision on where to hold the people who are currently in Guantanamo is one of the things we are debating, we have no intention of simply releasing them.

In fact, whether Guantanamo remains opened or closed has no impact whatsoever on how many of these people are going to be let out. It simply isn't part of the discussion. And I think that has been mixed up a number of times in public debate.

Mr. CONAWAY. If the gentleman would yield?

Mr. SMITH. Certainly.

Mr. CONAWAY. The point I was making though is we give these folks to others who have great intentions on the front end of detaining them for as long as we might, we run the risk that regime changes, bribes, whatever the corruption, cause these folks to get out.

Mr. SMITH. Again, I mean, you know, we have transferred hundreds of these people from Guantanamo under the previous administration, and I think the decision not to release them to Yemen any more is a reflection of the fact that that didn't always work out.

And again, even whether or not we released these inmates to other countries, that is—the decisions would be the same whether Guantanamo was open or closed. If that person is perceived to be a risk to be released to that other country, they will not be released, whether they are held in Guantanamo or held someplace else. And that is a tricky balance, I will grant you that.

And certainly in the past both administrations have released people that later returned to the battlefield, and we are going to take steps to change that policy. And we have released some people to countries where we thought they were going to be held, and they weren't held, as well. So we have learned from that experience and we will hold them. But again, that is a separate issue.

And returning a little bit to Mr. Miller's points about holding people in civilian court and trying them and convicting them. That is one piece of the broader strategy. And whenever those issues come up, you seem to get the impression from the people questioning them as if that is all that we are doing. It clearly is not.

This is a comprehensive strategy. And a huge element of that comprehensive strategy has been to target and eliminate leaders in various al Qa'ida groups across the globe. And we have been statistically more aggressive in doing that in the last year than under any year since 9/11.

So we have not backed down in the least bit under the idea that there are some people who threaten us who we don't have the opportunity to bring them to court and we will use whatever means necessary to make sure that they do not threaten us. However, there is value to bringing these people to justice.

To trying them, convicting them, and locking them up. And if that is available, if that is a piece of it, then that we must do. There has been this false dichotomy like well, either we are at war or this is a law enforcement issue. And I can't believe we are still

having that conversation, because anybody who is paying any attention knows that the answer to that question is it is both.

It is obviously both. These people threaten us in a variety of different ways, some of which call for a law enforcement mechanism and some of which call for a military action. And I can't believe that even the former vice president would disagree with that basic assessment. It is both, and then it is a matter of how you choose to do both and how smart you are in implementing that policy.

And we are all learning, and getting better at it. But there is an absolute commitment I know from this administration to do what is necessary to make us as secure as possible and to weigh all of those options appropriately.

The question that I have has to do with something that is concerning us. There were some earlier questions from Mr. Marshall about these various groups, al Qa'ida in the Maghreb, AQAP, al-Shabaab—and I think a lot of these groups started out with purely local concerns.

Certainly that was the case in Algeria. They didn't like the Algerian government. It was a revolutionary effort. And I think it would be a mistake to treat those people as part of a broader global thing and give them greater importance than they have.

But what has seemed to be happening with these groups is they seem to have gone from being local groups to being more invested in the broader jihad. And we have even seen that with the Pakistani Taliban, Baitullah Mehsud.

These were groups that had local grievances, but all of a sudden decided that they were at least publicly going to state that they were trying to do broader attacks. Certainly, that has happened in Yemen. I think we have some evidence that al-Shabaab is talking in the same way. AQIM to this point has confined themselves within their region, but has in fact started to attack westerners. Tell me a little bit about, you know, what our analysis is of these various, you know, localized groups' thinking and why we think they may suddenly now be willing to do these broader outside of the area attacks—if that, you know, portends of a broader trend that we need to be concerned about and try to confront.

Mr. Reid, I'll let you take the first crack at that?

Mr. REID. Yes, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

I think there are two things that you have to consider in this, and one of these is just practicalities. And as the core element has lost the—certainly the degree of movement and communications and financing that it had pre-2001 up till now, they have called upon the affiliates to take more action, and even to the extent that the affiliates are being looked at to raise revenue for the core instead of vice versa, as it used to be.

So I think that is a factor in why we see them doing that.

Mr. SMITH. Sorry to interrupt, you know, why would they do that? Why would a group that is, you know, who want to overthrow the Algerian government—what is sort of the different reasonings that would make them, because it seems to me it would be sort of counter their certain, you know, stated and focused goal of, in many cases, years, if not decades, to all of a sudden start, you know, doing the broader approach? Why would they view it in their interests to make that transition?

Mr. REID. I would agree with you that it ought to be probably viewed as a miscalculation on their part. And I think it speaks to back too, I believe, Mr. Marshall's question about how do you divide this. And they have weakened their brand, weakened their ideological strength across the network by expansion.

And, again, I think there is practical needs, but I also think there are certainly plenty of indicators of the stature that bin Laden and Zawahiri hold within these movements is powerful. And there are these leaders and sub leaders that want to gain in stature by aligning with them and pledging loyalty to them. And it only takes one or two in these movements to generate this type of activity.

So I think there is a gaining favor and gaining stature and credibility as a jihadist aligning yourself with the core. And then there is the practical side of revenue generation and recruitment. And they—when they do an attack, it generates more recruits. And I think that is part of it.

Now, with the great strategy, however, it has to be looked at as part of their overall effort to attack at us, to make us look weak, to strengthen themselves and to spread out over time.

Mr. SMITH. I will—I am going to—sorry. I am going to let Mr. Marshall get back in here, and I will let you answer that question, as I have gone over time. You can turn this off and—go ahead.

Mr. MARSHALL. Well, why don't we just—what do you think about just sort of opening it up to, you know, mutual questioning. You can interrupt any time you want to. I will understand.

Mr. SMITH. Yes, go ahead.

Mr. MARSHALL. So just taking AQIM as an example, faltering effort, hard to persuade people to join, those who are—you know, they attempt to recruit, sort of look at their—you know, the circumstances of AQIM as a nationalist movement, a secessionist movement, a rebel movement, and an Algerian now comes and says, "Well, why would I be interested in that?"

And you change it to al Qa'ida, and all of a sudden there is an interest, and new life in a sense is breathed into the operation. And those folks who have been at it for while don't know any other life. Part of the problem with the folks that we returned to—that we let out of Gitmo or wherever, this is what they do. This is how they make their living. And in economies like the ones that sort of foster this kind of problem, there is not much else they can do to make a living, so recidivism is no big surprise.

What worries me is if we sort of get suckered into it, and we acknowledge that this is a key strategic interest of the United States, well, then that is confirming and somehow elevating their status. And yet we also can see there is not a whole heck of a lot that we can do about them. The locals are going to have to deal with that. So all of a sudden this is an almost heroic Robin Hood-like group that we have defined now, which makes it more difficult for the locals to deal with that Robin Hood-like group.

And so again, I am back to, you know, sort of what is our strategic vision here and how we are—I just want to make that observation.

Mr. SMITH. Sure.

Ambassador, did you want to follow up—similar points there?

Ambassador BENJAMIN. Yes, I view it as one large set of questions. I think Secretary Reid has touched on many of these points.

I do think that this was for several groups an important step in branding. I think that they viewed the al Qa'ida brand as being a global attractive brand precisely because al Qa'ida had inflicted the damage of 9/11 on a superpower. It had attached itself, rightly or wrongly, to the glory of driving the Soviets out of Afghanistan, and so I think that they felt that this was a way of getting a shot in the arm for a—in that particular case of Algeria, for a group that was actually on the ropes.

And, you know, it has not necessarily worked out very well for them, but you can understand how they made that decision. What I would also point to is that there are counter trends as well, and so——

Mr. MARSHALL. Could I interrupt and ask you what you mean by it is not very—it hasn't worked out very well for them?

Ambassador BENJAMIN. Well, I think that they did not attract the recruits or the finances that they expected from taking this plunge by associating themselves with al Qa'ida. And in fact, if anything, it drew greater attention from regional partners, from the United States and from others, who decided that they wanted to contribute to capacity building in the area in cooperation so that the—this group would be further diminished. And the fact is that as a force in Algeria, when it—which was a primary theater——

Mr. MARSHALL. If what you just said—what you stated to be your belief that they didn't really get that much out of it, is that widely conceded by those who are actually working this in Mali and elsewhere?

Ambassador BENJAMIN. That would be my assessment, but I—you have two other experts here, so I will defer to them.

Mr. REID. I would agree that the GSPC [Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat], and with everything Ambassador Benjamin said, they were greatly diminished by the Algerian force effort against them. And we don't see that it strengthened their hand, particularly with their movement by aligning with AQ.

But what it brings to us is the added dimension of these external aspirations directed at us and our European allies. And they do have potential, and there are indications of their external planning that concern us. And that is what the AQ dimension brought to this group.

We were very well focused on GSPC in trying to assist partners in the region before the merger. The TSCTP [Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership] existed long before the AQ merger. So we see a situation where we are relatively succeeding against a group. Al Qa'ida comes in, tries to prop them up, take advantage of them and the situation, just like they took advantage of JI [Jemaah Islamiya] and Hambali in 2001, 2002. This is their nature. And so I do agree that it hasn't strengthened GSPC's agenda by aligning with AQ.

Ambassador BENJAMIN. I——

Mr. SMITH. Ambassador, you stated earlier you were going to get to some counter trends.

Ambassador BENJAMIN. That was just what I was going to get to, and that is that there are other groups that have looked at al

Qa'ida and who have been approached about merging and have declined to. And the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group is a case in point, a group that is actually, you know, in negotiations to put down its arms, or perhaps those negotiations have been concluded, a group that saw that it didn't have a future with al Qa'ida, didn't want the external direction of that sort.

And, you know, that it suggests to me that the picture is more complicated out there. And in fact, within the Egyptian group of radicals, some chose to go with al Qa'ida, some chose not to. Some decided that the al Qa'ida argument about attacking the far enemy, attacking the West, was persuasive. Others did not.

So it is not a monolithic picture, and I think that is important to keep in mind.

Mr. SMITH. I want to—just one more area of questions I want to ask. Going back, you mentioned early on, you know, some of the efforts of the administration to do outreach to help with some of the counter radicalization efforts, the Cairo speech, you know, being most prominent.

I think we need to do a better job sort of making clear why that is so important in the broader battle against al Qa'ida. And I think that sort of gets into the narrative that al Qa'ida is pushing. I think there are a number of different pieces. I mean one of the things I do believe that we need to do better is a little bit of negative campaigning.

I think al Qa'ida has fallen the most, based on their own actions, basically. Certainly, we have disrupted them, but, you know, you look to the bombing in Jordan when they bombed the wedding party at the Hotel Jordan, just totally, you know, the population in the country always was against them. The population turns against them.

The violent acts of Zarqawi and others in Iraq totally turned the Iraqi population against them, so sort of pointing out, as I like to put it, that, you know, for all of the ideology, you know, they love to go online and talk about their Islamic outlook and all of this stuff, but the bottom—at the end of the day, they are a bunch of violent psychopaths. And when that is made obvious, it undermines their support across the Muslim world. We certainly want to make that point.

On the other side, their message to Muslims that have some appeal, because, you know, many, many Muslim countries don't have a great deal of economic opportunity, don't have a great deal of political freedom, and al Qa'ida blames the West for that. The West is at war with Islam. In a nutshell, that is their message.

If you go into jihad, it is a defensive posture because of what the West is doing to us. They want to eliminate us. I mean that is the message they send. It is, obviously, not true and not what we want to do, and I think some of the outreach efforts are designed to counter that. And this is a place where, even though we are not the most reliable interlocutor, as you correctly pointed out, we still have to deliver some kind of message that begins to counter that.

So walk us through the Cairo speech a little bit, and then the overall strategy of how we present an image that makes it clear to the Muslim world that al Qa'ida is lying about us—simply isn't true—why that is so important and how we do it.

Ambassador BENJAMIN. Well, of course, this is a very large and multifaceted effort. I think that the president did a superb job of reopening the dialogue, in a sense, between the United States and large parts of the Muslim world, many different Muslim communities. And his focus on our need to work together based on common interests and shared respect, I think, is vitally important. And that is a message that he has gone to great lengths to underscore along the way.

I think that his general message, and the administration's message, that we understand that we cannot—that we as a nation will not prosper and that we will not—that we will not flourish as long as others are lagging behind is a very powerful one. At the moment, we have to recognize that there is an awful lot going on out there that is that those communities are looking to—for support of that message.

And I think that the president and his team have shown, for example, a great deal of engagement on the Middle East peace process as a further example of that kind of commitment to deal with key issues of concern.

Obviously, there is a lot of work to be done here, because we did not get to the position that we saw in the last year or two in that kind of low polling numbers which were indicative of that position overnight. And so there does need to be that kind of engagement.

I know that my boss, the secretary of state, is deeply committed to this. And, you know, she has appointed the first ever special representative to Muslim communities. She made a point of going to the conference in Morocco and to continue to amplify on these messages her commitment to a whole range of different programs of engagement in the Middle East, but in other parts of the Muslim world, I think, is also exemplary in that regard.

There is no question we have a lot of work to do. And, you know, a great deal of it will be in the realm of the dialogue, and a great deal of that will be in the realm of action.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you. That is all I have got at this time. If there are any other questions?

Mr. MARSHALL. Ambassador, your countering violent extremism office—how are you organized, staffed, is it interagency, how are you funded, what are you essentially doing, planning to do, just thumbnail summary of all of that?

Ambassador BENJAMIN. We have actually convened a number of interagency conferences to discuss this work. I have hired a number of staff to do this. We are looking to work closely, particularly with embassies, because they have the ground knowledge, and they are the ones who will——

Mr. MARSHALL. Do you have a separate budget?

Ambassador BENJAMIN. We have within our budget a line for, a line item for CVE. And we are working on making that a more robust number in——

Mr. MARSHALL. Can you go ahead and tell us what is right now?

Ambassador BENJAMIN. I cannot tell you what it is right now. I——

Mr. MARSHALL. How many personnel? Do you roughly know how many personnel——

Ambassador BENJAMIN. Are doing it in my office?

Mr. MARSHALL. Yes.

Ambassador BENJAMIN. Half a dozen in——

Mr. MARSHALL. And current programs besides convening and talking about this?

Ambassador BENJAMIN. We are working with NCTC and others to come up with an agenda to visit a number of different posts. We have put out notices to post of the kind of programming that we are interested in doing. We have done quite a lot of smaller projects in the past through the Ambassador's Fund, which is roughly a million dollars.

Mr. MARSHALL. So it sounds like you are sort of getting up and running at this point?

Ambassador BENJAMIN. We are getting up and running.

Mr. MARSHALL. Okay.

Ambassador BENJAMIN. I would not present it as more than that.

Mr. MARSHALL. Is this a new effort or is it modeled after something we have been—are you taking over from others within state that we are doing something similar?

Ambassador BENJAMIN. There have been a number of different CVE programs within the Office of the Coordinator. One of the problems that we have in the government is nomenclative—lots of people believe they are doing CVE. It means a lot of different things to different organizations. To us, this means addressing concerns in communities that are on the edge of radical issue.

Mr. MARSHALL. We are the Armed Services Committee.

Ambassador BENJAMIN. Right.

Mr. MARSHALL. So pardon me if I demonstrate my ignorance about how state is organizing, what it has been doing in this effort. CVE is a term that you all have had around—right.

Ambassador BENJAMIN. Counter violent extremists.

Mr. MARSHALL. Well, I got that part, but——

Ambassador BENJAMIN. I am sorry.

Mr. MARSHALL [continuing]. How long has that term been around?

Ambassador BENJAMIN. I will be very frank. It met me when I walked in the door in late May and I guess it has been going on within the government for several years, but I was not familiar with it until I got sworn in.

Mr. MARSHALL. Okay.

Ambassador BENJAMIN. I really don't have anything else. Thank you——

Mr. MARSHALL. Do you want to talk about the CVE——

Ambassador BENJAMIN. Well, thank you all.

Mr. MARSHALL [continuing]. Of it. We can all agree that we are in favor, right, countering violent extremism?

Mr. SMITH. Well, I want to thank all of you and, also, you know, point out, you know, all three of you represent agencies that have men and women across the globe in harm's way doing very difficult tasks in very dangerous places as part of this effort. Certainly DOD, Special Operations Command, they are fighting the fight in a number of different countries.

You know, the State Department as well has people doing the development, the communications piece in harm's way. I am really

confronting the challenge that we face in a very comprehensive way and we appreciate that.

We can always get better at it. The purpose of this hearing is to have that conversation so that we in Congress can cooperate with you to get to that point, what we can improve and do better at this very, very important task. But we really appreciate all the work that you are doing.

Mr. MARSHALL. Mr. Chairman? Mr. Chairman? Could I say one last thing to——

Mr. SMITH. So I am finished there anyway.

Mr. MARSHALL. This may be the chairman's last formal hearing as chair of this committee. I have a sense that he may be moving on to another subcommittee.

And for the record, I would just like to say that all of us who have worked on the committee have enjoyed his leadership and found him to have been very thoughtful and very, very energetic in sort of exploring the—you know, in a very creative fashion frankly, I thought, the different issues that this committee ought to be, this subcommittee ought to be wrestling with.

So I want to compliment you on the record before you moved on.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you, Jim. I appreciate that and I know we will see. We are going to be reorganizing in light of a retirement on our committee. I will say that no matter what, I will remain on this committee even if not as chair. These issues are very important to me and will continue working on them. That's kind of you Jim—I appreciate that.

And with that, we are adjourned. Thank you very much for your testimony.

[Whereupon, at 4:19 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

A P P E N D I X

JANUARY 20, 2010

PREPARED STATEMENTS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

JANUARY 20, 2010

Statement of Terrorism, Unconventional Threats and Capabilities Subcommittee Chairman Adam Smith Hearing on the Threat Posed By Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and Other Regions

January 20, 2010

"Today, the Terrorism, Unconventional Threats and Capabilities Subcommittee will meet to discuss the threat posed by Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and other regions. I want to thank our witnesses for lending their expert opinions on this important subject. They all have extensive experience in this arena and I look forward to hearing their thoughts.

"The focus of the hearing will be to receive an update on the status of Al Qaeda as a threat to the United States at home and abroad. Though we can count many tactical successes against Al Qaeda in the battlefield, the organization consistently reconstitutes itself through aggressive strategic communication. This enables the group to leverage its affiliates across the globe to carry out attacks on its behalf and we must constantly be improving and evaluating how we respond to this threat.

"Al Qaeda continues to target our transportation industry and last December we witnessed a grim reminder of their intent to harm us on our own soil. Its affiliate in Yemen made a strategic decision to engage us not in their region, but above our skies. We cannot take that threat lightly. While we can respond accordingly, it is imperative that we keep our finger on the pulse of all potential safe havens of Al Qaeda and ensure we are adjusting our policies appropriately.

"The Department of Defense has a large role to play in engaging our enemies abroad, but it will take a confluence of U.S. agencies to confront the root causes of terrorism. Indeed our colleagues in the State Department, USAID, Treasury, and others all have important roles to play in our struggle against radical ideologies.

"I thank the witnesses and look forward to hearing from them on how we can more effectively tackle this critical challenge."

Mr. Miller Opening Statement on the Threat Posed by Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and Other Regions

January 20, 2010

Washington, D.C.—The House Armed Services Subcommittee on Terrorism, Unconventional Threats and Capabilities today held a hearing to receive expert testimony on the threat posed by al-Qaeda and its affiliates on the Arabian Peninsula and in other regions around the world. The subcommittee's Ranking Member, U.S. Rep. Jeff Miller (R-Florida), released the following prepared remarks for the hearing:

"We were reminded over the holidays that the terrorist threat remains and that al-Qaeda and likeminded groups do not rest in their efforts to bring violence and destruction to our citizens. Since September 11th, we have sought to disrupt al-Qaeda and to deny it safe havens from which to operate. We cannot constrain our efforts, however, to specific countries or regions as our enemy is unbounded in its approach. As al-Qaeda continues to morph and adapt, we must also be agile in our approach to countering the threat of terrorism.

"Afghanistan and Pakistan have been forefront in our discussions regarding al-Qaeda and remain central to our efforts to disrupting and defeating al-Qaeda. While I was encouraged by the Administration's recent approval of additional forces for Afghanistan and aid to Pakistan in combating the terrorist threat, we must be careful to avoid artificial timelines if the facts on the ground call for our continued presence and efforts in the region.

"Al-Qaeda's reach, however, is not limited to the tribal regions along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, the so-called Christmas Day underwear bomber, reportedly received training and support from handlers in Yemen, and Major Nidal Hassan, of the Fort Hood shootings, communicated with the radical imam Anwar el-Awlaki who resides in Yemen and is described as the 'bin Laden of the internet.' Further, the Yemeni government faces a Shiite rebellion as well as a growing branch of al-Qaeda, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). And given Yemen's shared border with Saudi Arabia, both an important partner in the fight against terrorism and the source of the repressive strain of Islam that motivates al-Qaeda and other such groups, the Arabian Peninsula represents another central front on the battle with violent extremism.

"There are troubling signs for the Arabian Peninsula and for Yemen in particular. Although Yemeni forces have scored recent victories over the insurgents and terrorist cells, the central government still struggles with extending governance and security much beyond the capital of Sana'a. Additionally, the strife and conflict in nearby Somalia is driving many young Somali men to Yemen—representing a growing source of potential new recruits for al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula.

"Understanding al-Qaeda Central's ability to morph and adapt its approach, we can see, with some alarm, the group's efforts to further its violent goals through other, proxy groups. Somalia, Indonesia, Algeria, and the Philippines are just some of the countries where terrorist groups are forwarding a fundamentalist, extremist message—most often through violent means. Some bear

the al-Qaeda stamp while others receive discrete support or encouragement while allowing al-Qaeda to distance itself from direct responsibility.

"Further, we must be cognizant of the reach of al-Qaeda's twisted message through a variety of media, especially the internet. While a coordinated, complicated attack may be more difficult to direct from the tribal areas of Afghanistan and Pakistan, an individual—radicalized and trained through on-line chat rooms and websites—poses a threat that is difficult to identify and stop, regardless of the breadth of our intelligence, law enforcement and military efforts.

"On the front line in this struggle are the men and women of U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM). From the mountains of Afghanistan to Latin America, these special operators are working with their interagency partners and partner nation forces to provide security and stability and to deny al-Qaeda and other groups the time, space and ability to plan and conduct their operations.

"It is with pleasure, therefore, that I welcome all of our witnesses today, but especially Admiral Olson, the commander of SOCOM, whose forces are at the operational end of this struggle. Today's hearing will provide us key insights about what the terrorist threat looks like, where al-Qaeda and other groups are operating, and what the U.S., especially special operations forces, must do to disrupt these violent groups and protect the nation and its citizens, not only through direct military force, but also using the 'by, with, and through' method that Special Operations Command employs with such skill and effect. I look forward to your comments on this important topic."

STATEMENT OF DASD GARRY REID

TO

THE HOUSE ARMED SERVICES SUBCOMMITTEE ON

TERRORISM AND UNCONVENTIONAL THREATS

REGARDING THE THREATS POSED BY

AL-QAIDA IN THE ARABIAN PENINSULA AND OTHER REGIONS

20 January 2010

Mister Chairman, Congressman Miller and distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me here today to discuss the threat of al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula and other regions of the world. The Department of Defense appreciates the enduring efforts of this committee to provide our special operations forces with the tools they need to defeat al-Qaida, to protect themselves from improvised explosive devices, and to operate at the leading edge of technology in today's extremely complex global security environment.

Although the attempted terrorist attack of December 25, 2009 appropriately brought increased attention to the current threat emanating from Yemen, it is vitally important that we always view al-Qaida in a global context. The enemy certainly has a global agenda - - Osama Bin Laden himself declared in his 1996 fatwa, it was the duty of all Muslims to fight "in every part of the world." His speeches, declarations, and video messages since 2001 have consistently appealed to a core constituency of Arab supporters in the Arabian Peninsula, Southwest Asia, and North Africa. At the same time, however, he has paid special attention to non-Arab Muslims, especially those in Southeast Asia, Central Europe, and sub-Saharan Africa. Bin Laden's exploitation of ungoverned or poorly governed regions

such as Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas, the Trans-Sahel, the Horn of Africa, and the remote islands of the south Pacific, as sanctuary for his movement reflect his aspirations to establish a new "caliphate" that would extend from Mauritania to Indonesia.

Al-Qaida Core (Afghanistan and Pakistan)

Al-Qaida's core – namely its senior leadership, training camps, logistics infrastructure, and financial support network – has been significantly weakened by the operations and activities of many nations against them since 2001. Driven from Afghanistan by the advance of U.S. forces in 2001-2002, the al-Qaida core has relocated to the remote mountainous regions on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. Through a complex web of local tribal alliances, often intertwined with both Pakistan and Afghan Taliban militias, al-Qaida retains its safehaven in Pakistan… but not without a price. In the past 18 months, al-Qaida has suffered significant loss of senior leaders. Among those believed to be killed are Khalid Habib, a veteran combat leader and operations chief; Abu Khabab al-Masri, an expert on explosives and chemical and biological weapons; and Baitullah Mehsud, leader of the Pakistani Taliban affiliated with al-Qaida. Through the resources and authorities provided by the Pakistan Counterinsurgency Fund, the Department of Defense will continue to provide equipment, training, and assistance to Pakistan security forces to help improve their capabilities to defeat al-Qaida and its extremist allies in their country.

Beyond its core, al-Qaida has fostered development of a trans-regional conglomerate of affiliates and supporters. In some cases they have merged with long-standing terrorist groups, in others they have built or inspired new groups from the ground up. Al-Qaida continues to pursue its goals of conducting spectacular terrorist attacks against the United States, exploiting weakly governed lands to sustain and support its operations, and inciting instability in countries along the arc that extends from northwest

Africa to the south Pacific. Although our efforts to counter the al-Qaida agenda must be tailored to each specific region, they all rely on the concurrent execution of training and equipping local security forces, increased intelligence collection, and counterterrorism operations.

AQ in the Islamic Maghreb

In north-central Africa, al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb, or AQIM, is engaged in a region-wide kidnapping campaign to terrorize U.S. and European travelers and members of the diplomatic community. AQIM is an Algeria-based Sunni Muslim jihadist group that officially joined al-Qaida in September 2006. AQIM operates primarily in northern coastal areas of Algeria and in parts of the desert regions of southern Algeria and northern Mali. Its principal sources of funding include extortion, kidnapping, donations, and narcotics trafficking. Following its formal alliance with al-Qaida, AQIM expanded its aims and declared its intention to attack Western targets. In May 2009, they executed a kidnapped British citizen in northern Mali. In June, a private U.S. citizen was shot and killed in Nouakchott in an apparent kidnapping attempt by individuals associated with AQIM. In August, an AQIM suicide bombing attack near the French Embassy in Mauritania injured two French guards and one local citizen. In November, heavily armed AQIM terrorists attempted to kidnap U.S. embassy employees in Niger, and later the same month three Spanish NGO workers were kidnapped from their vehicle while driving outside the Mauritanian capital.

The centerpiece of our efforts to counter AQIM is the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP), which is a multi-year U.S. interagency program aimed at defeating terrorist organizations by strengthening regional counterterrorism capabilitiès, enhancing and institutionalizing cooperation among the region's security forces, promoting democratic governance, discrediting terrorist ideology, and reinforcing bilateral military ties with the United States. The Department of Defense conducts bilateral

training events with partners in the region, designed to improve counterterrorism capabilities, and provides CT-related equipment through Section 1206 authorities. Political instability hinders these efforts - the 2008 coup in Mauritania caused a one-year interruption in our CT assistance programs. The ongoing constitutional crisis in Niger has significantly reduced our activities there, and could lead to significant disruption of CT cooperation depending upon the outcome.

AQ in East Africa

On the other side of the African continent, al-Qaida continues to use the Somalia safehaven as a training and recruitment base, while concurrently fanning the flames of an already combustible situation that shows few signs of abating. Al-Qaida has provided training to al-Shabaab, which although predominantly an internal Somali movement has shown signs of expanding its operations across Africa, into Yemen, and further into Europe. Department of Defense counterterrorism engagements in the region are designed to deal with both near term threats and long term development challenges. We work closely with our international and interagency partners to address al-Qaida and other terrorist threats emanating from the Horn of Africa. Our long term strategy is led by Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa, which employs an "indirect approach" to counter violent extremism, conducting operations to strengthen partner nation security capacity to enable long-term regional stability, prevent conflict and protect U.S. and Coalition interests.

AQ in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)

Just across the Gulf of Aden from the northern Somali coastline, al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) is the AQ affiliate that poses the greatest threat to the U.S. Al-Qaeda in Yemen was responsible for the September 2008 attack on U.S. Embassy Sana'a, and subsequently in January 2009

the Saudi and Yemeni al-Qaeda branches merged to form al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). AQAP is responsible for killing South Korean tourists in Yemen in March 2009, the attempted assassination of Saudi Prince Muhammad bin Nayef in August 2009, and the attempted December 25, 2009 attack on a U.S. commercial airliner. Like most al-Qaida operations, the attempted bombing of Northwest flight 253 near Detroit, Michigan was relatively simple in design. What is most concerning about this attack is the manner in which al-Qaida sought out, recruited, trained, and successfully dispatched their operative under the close scrutiny of U.S. intelligence. We should expect them to continue pursuing operatives that fit this description – particularly those they believe will have the highest chance of getting past U.S. security screening procedures.

To defeat AQAP, the Department of Defense cooperates closely with Yemeni security forces. Since 2006, we have provided over $98 million in CT assistance to increase their capabilities to prevent cross border arms trafficking and regional foreign-fighter flows, develop competent counterterrorism forces, and mitigate the threat of improvised explosive devices. We anticipate continuing a high level of commitment to developing Yemen's military and counterterrorism capacity in the future. In addition to counterterrorism cooperation, the Department will continue security assistance and training exercises to expand the capacity of the Yemeni Coast Guard and Navy to counter regional maritime security challenges, including smuggling, trafficking-in-persons, and piracy. Through a broad array of bilateral and multilateral initiatives, the Department supports U.S. government efforts to address Yemen's political, economic, and humanitarian concerns.

AQ in Iraq (AQI)

Although still capable of dramatic suicide bombings, al-Qaida in Iraq (AQI) has been declining since the June 2006 U.S. operation that led to the death of former AQI leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi.

Despite spectacular attacks in Baghdad late in 2009, overall deaths from terrorism for the year were only about 1/10th of their 2006-2007 peak. AQI is largely isolated around Mosul, and still receives some support from external sources across the Syria border. Their once-powerful foreign fighter pipeline is greatly diminished, and their focus is on disrupting the transition to Iraqi control, the withdrawal of U.S. forces, and the resurrection of Sunni-Shia violence. The U.S. military continues to provide training and assistance to Iraqi counterterrorism forces, facilitating the creation of a Second Iraqi SOF Brigade headquarters in August 2009. This will allow the 1st Brigade to focus on security around Baghdad, and the new 2nd brigade to focus on the rest of Iraq. We will continue to provide CT assistance to Iraq until US forces are withdrawn at the end of 2011.

AQ in Southeast Asia

Al-Qaida has always been attracted to the large population of Muslims in Southeast Asia. Long before the attacks of 9/11, al-Qaida sought to exploit Jemmah Islamiyah (JI), an organization led by Indonesian extremists with cells scattered across Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, and the Philippines, and with links to the terrorist Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) in the Philippines. JI's hotel bombings in Bali and Jakarta 2005-2003 killed hundreds. Despite these attacks, Indonesian security forces have had significant successes. Most recently, in September 2009, they killed Nordin Mohammed Top, the most wanted JI member.

The U.S. military counterterrorism commitment in the region is anchored by the Joint Special Operations Task Force - Philippines (JSOTF-P) and is supported by other training and assistance engagements throughout Southeast Asia. JSOTF-P is comprised of between 500 and 600 personnel from all four military series, including Army Special Operations Forces, Navy Seals, air Force special operators and a host of support personnel from all four U.S. military services. The mission of JSOTF-P

is to support the comprehensive approach of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) in their fight against terrorism -- especially JI and ASG – in the southern Philippines. JSOTF-P does not engage in combat, but at the request of the Government of the Philippines, provides support for the AFT to defeat terrorists and create the conditions necessary for peace, stability and prosperity.

Although I have not covered every aspect of al-Qaida, this short review of the core element and numerous affiliates illustrates their persistent pursuit of a trans-regional enterprise intent on attacking the United States, its allies, and our interests abroad. They are at war with us globally, and we must continue to counter them in every region. Thank you again for inviting me today, and I will gladly address your questions.

STATEMENT OF ADMIRAL ERIC T. OLSON

TO

THE HOUSE ARMED SERVICES SUBCOMMITTEE ON

TERRORISM AND UNCONVENTIONAL THREATS

REGARDING THE THREATS POSED BY AL QAIDA IN THE ARABIAN PENINSULA

AND OTHER REGIONS AND SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND'S EFFORTS

AGAINST THIS ENDURING THREAT

20 January 2010

Good afternoon. Chairman Smith, Congressman Miller, distinguished members of the Committee...

Thank you for the invitation to appear before this committee to highlight the enduring terrorist threats posed by al-Qaida and its affiliate violent extremist organizations. Thanks to the foresight, advocacy and strong support of this body, we remain well positioned to meet the Nation's expectations of its Special Operations Forces.

First, I will highlight that USSOCOM is responsible for organizing, equipping, training, and providing fully capable special operations forces to serve under the operational control of Geographic Combatant Commanders. In this role

USSOCOM headquarters shares many of the responsibilities, authorities, and characteristics of a Military Department or Defense Agency including a separate Major Force Program Budget established by Congress for the purpose of funding equipment, material, supplies, services, training and operational activities that are peculiar to special operation forces.

USSOCOM is also responsible for synchronizing Department of Defense planning against terrorists and terrorist networks globally. In this role, we receive, analyze and prioritize the Geographic Combatant Commanders' regional plans, and make recommendations to the joint staff on force and resource allocations. We also serve as an extension of the Joint Staff in the cooperation with our interagency partners. We have an effective collaborative venue to do this, collectively known as the global synchronization process. Because USSOCOM does not normally have operational authority over deployed forces, the plans and operations themselves are conducted by the Geographic Combatant Commanders.

Additionally, we are the Department of Defense proponent for Security Force Assistance. This collaborative effort is nested within our existing global synchronization process. In this role, we help foster the long-term partnerships

with other nations that will shape a more secure global environment in the face of global challenges such as transnational crime, migration, and extremism.

On December 25th of the past year, a terrorist trained and equipped by al-Qaida in Yemen conducted an attack on the United States homeland. This attack was not planned or directed by al-Qaida's core leadership located in the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region, as was expected. This attack was inspired, planned and conducted by one of al-Qaida's affiliate groups from the Arabian Peninsula. Usama bin Laden's vision of a global movement and his ideological messages aimed at polarizing this conflict are now manifesting in the actions of his followers. Regional extremist groups affiliated or aligned with al-Qaida are becoming increasingly important to the greater al-Qaida network and provide its core leaders with an ability to simultaneously conduct violent acts in North Africa, the Horn of Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, Afghanistan and Pakistan, Iraq, India, Southeast Asia, and again in the United States. These affiliate groups are working together more closely than ever and are becoming the new base of al-Qaida's regeneration, a process by which individuals are recruited, trained and promoted to the top of al-Qaida's leadership hierarchy. Increasing recidivism rates are contributing to al-Qaida's resilience; former detainees are rejoining the ranks of

the violent extremist and un-rehabilitated extremists are completing their prison sentences in various countries and returning to the battlegrounds. Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) is a rising affiliate group that is benefiting from this process and whose leadership ranks are made up in part from Saudi and Yemeni extremists who have been released from detention or escaped from Yemeni jails. As these al-Qaida affiliate groups improve their operational capabilities and expand their regional influence, core al-Qaida leaders will have the ability to establish redundant command and control nodes and broaden their reach.

Al-Qaida relies on a global network that extends into every Geographic Combatant Command's theater of operation. The network sustains its operations mainly through individual relationships that are rooted in the 1980's Afghanistan jihad against the former Soviet Union. The strength and tenacity of this network is due to the environment in which it functions. It is woven in the fabric of multi-ethnic communities, working with legitimate companies and charities while simultaneously exploiting the criminal networks to move people, money, and supplies around the world. Al-Qaida thrives on sources of friction created by a growing nexus between extremism, crime, and migration. This confluence of relationships creates a dangerous convergence of nation states and non-state

actors who are influencing and shaping the choices of populations as nation states fail to adequately address their needs and grievances. These factors are why al-Qaida continues to present the most significant and enduring terrorism threat to global security, international law, and our own way of life.

Today, USSOCOM is a strategic-level organization that addresses global threats to our national interests. USSOCOM observes trans-regional dynamics from a uniquely cross-organizational perspective. This perspective provides us with a comprehensive appreciation of the strategic environment that suggests the type, scope, and scale of the security challenges facing our nation have evolved significantly in recent years. In light of this knowledge, our approach to the security environment must be increasingly agile and adaptive.

While the high, long-term demand for SOF in Iraq and Afghanistan has led to 86% of the overseas force currently being deployed in the US Central Command (CENTCOM) area of responsibility, SOF maintains a global presence. In FY 2009, SOF conducted operations and training in 106 countries around the globe, including Yemen. Throughout these operations, SOF have taken a long-term approach to engagement, designed to forge enduring partnerships that

contribute to regional stability. This balance of effective direct and indirect actions, the combination of high-end tactical skills and an understanding of the operational context of their application, is the core of special operations. From support to major combat operations to the conduct of irregular warfare in remote areas, SOF normally accomplish their missions with small, highly capable and agile forces.

The problems we must be prepared to address include the inability of nation states to deal with increasingly complex challenges and to meet the needs and expectations of their populations. These challenges are exacerbated by the growing number of non-state actors who have strategic effect in a networked and interconnected world. In the vacuum created by weak or failed governments, non-state actors have achieved greater influence over benign populations by addressing their basic needs and grievances, and by intimidating and sometimes brutalizing them into submission. When governments fail to address the needs of the population, they become irrelevant and the people will make choices that are shaped by their own immediate needs for survival.

One such choice is to leave their current situation in the hope of finding greater opportunity. As a result, uncontrolled migration is occurring across the world and the challenges associated with this dynamic are manifesting themselves in numerous ways. We are witness to accelerating urbanization that is overwhelming many under-developed cities and the burgeoning diasporas that are becoming increasingly difficult to assimilate into host nation societies.

USSOCOM headquarters will continue to lead and to manage the development and sustainment of the world's most precise and lethal counterterrorism force. We will provide the world's most effective special operations trainers, advisors and combat partners. We will provide advice and comment on issues of national security. This great Nation's special operations forces will continue to find and kill or capture our irreconcilable enemies, to partner with our global friends and allies, and to pursue the tactics, techniques, procedures and technologies that will keep us ahead of dynamic threats.

We believe that SOF must simultaneously focus on the environmental dynamics and root causes that create today's and tomorrow's threats and adversaries. This belief requires an approach that is integrated with our interagency partners to

foster US credibility and influence among relevant populations. We clearly recognize that deterring, disrupting and defeating terrorist will require a whole-of-government and international approach.

Thank you again for the opportunity to address this committee, I stand ready for your questions.

TESTIMONY OF
AMBASSADOR DANIEL BENJAMIN
COORDINATOR FOR COUNTERTERRORISM
HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
TERRORISM, UNCONVENTIONAL THREATS AND CAPABILITIES
SUBCOMMITTEE
JANUARY 20, 2010

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Miller, and Distinguished Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before this Committee today.

The attempted bombing of Northwest Flight 253, which nearly resulted in the death of several hundred people, was a close call. The President has rightly demanded reviews of and corrections to the key failures that led to the incident– most importantly in the realm of intelligence analysis and watch-listing. Notwithstanding our many successes against al-Qa'ida, the event was a stark reminder that, as the President stated recently, "we face a nimble adversary."

Indeed, the events of December 25 have shown that at least one al-Qa'ida affiliates – not just the group's core leadership in Pakistan – has the potential and interest to carry out strikes against the American homeland. We can no longer anticipate that such group's sole focus will be on the governments in their own countries and regions. As the President said two weeks ago, "just as al-Qa'ida and its allies are constantly evolving and adapting their efforts to strike us, we have to constantly adapt and evolve to defeat them."

Al-Qa'ida and its affiliates are not omnipotent. As intelligence officials have noted, the group faces unprecedented pressure along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border– thanks to the significant efforts of Pakistani security forces – and continues to suffer significant setbacks and losses. Al-Qa'ida and its affiliates have failed to mobilize large numbers of supporters and in some cases, notably in Iraq, their violent behavior has turned potentially supportive populations against them. That said, their continued ability to attract recruits and technological savvy means they continue to constitute a formidable foe. Al-Qa'ida and its affiliates comprise a system of networks and the relationships between the parts vary over time. What is absolutely certain is that together they continue to represent an enduring and potent threat.

Al-Qa'ida in Afghanistan and Pakistan

The beating heart of the global network remains located in the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region. The President has made clear that the mission of the United States in Afghanistan and Pakistan is to disrupt, dismantle and defeat al-Qa'ida and prevent its return to both countries. The case for action against al-Qa'ida and its allies has always been clear, but the fog of another war obscured our focus on Afghanistan and Pakistan. Al-Qa'ida is under great pressure in Pakistan and Afghanistan, but the Taliban and other extremist groups continue to provide it with support. Consequently, it remains a capable, dangerous enemy. Should the Taliban succeed in Afghanistan, it would greatly strengthen al-Qa'ida's message that extremists are "winning." The Taliban and other supporting groups must be marginalized if we are to defeat al-Qa'ida.

A key element of our efforts against al-Qa'ida is the significant expansion of our support for Pakistan and its people. Our assistance demonstrates the United States' commitment to addressing problems that affect the everyday lives of Pakistanis. This effort will bring our people closer together and bolster Pakistan against the threat of extremism. A village where girls have the ability to get an education will be more resistant to al-Qa'ida and the Taliban. And a young man with a bright future in a growing economy is less likely to waste his potential in a suicide bombing.

As a result of a long, troubled history, there remains in the minds of some Pakistanis a great deal of mistrust for the United States. Pakistan is a front-line partner in our counterterrorism efforts and we are committed to working with Pakistan to defeat and dismantle al-Qa'ida and counter the violent extremism that threatens both of our countries, as well as Afghanistan. Both nations are heavily invested in this relationship and General McChrystal noted earlier this month that the "trust deficit between Pakistan and the U.S. forces has been shrinking."

Accomplishing our goal of eliminating the al-Qa'ida threat in Afghanistan and Pakistan will not be easy. It requires a legion of tools from military action to communications to delegitimize radical rhetoric, as well as economic and developmental assistance for Afghanistan and Pakistan. We must work with both countries to eliminate al-Qa'ida safehavens, stabilize the region, and develop long-term, sustainable relationships so that we do not repeat the mistakes of the past. The duration of our military presence will be limited, but our civilian commitment must continue even when our troops begin to come home from Afghanistan.

Al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula

Al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula, or AQAP, claimed credit for the Christmas day bombing attempt. AQAP officially established itself in January 2009 to formalize cooperation between Yemeni and Saudi operatives, but the Arabian Peninsula is not a new front in our war with al-Qa'ida. Indeed, al-Qa'ida has had a presence in Yemen since well before the United States had even identified the group or recognized that it posed a significant threat. In 1992, al-Qa'ida militants attacked a hotel in Aden which was then housing American military personnel who were on their way to Somalia to support the U.N. mission. In the 1990s, a series of major conspiracies were based in Yemen, most of them aimed at Saudi Arabia. Following the attack on the U.S.S. Cole in 2000, the Yemeni government, with support from the U.S., dealt significant blows to al-Qa'ida's presence in Yemen through military operations and arrests of key leaders.

During much of the subsequent period, the Government of Yemen was distracted by other domestic security concerns, and our bilateral cooperation suffered. After the May 2003 al- Qa'ida attacks in Saudi Arabia, the Kingdom dramatically improved its counterterrorism efforts. However, the downside of this good news story is that many of the radicals driven out of Saudi Arabia fled to Yemen, joining other fighters who had returned from Afghanistan and Pakistan. In 2006, a group of senior al-Qa'ida leaders escaped from a Yemeni prison, further strengthening al-Qa'ida's presence in Yemen. This is one of the great challenges of the AQAP threat – the geographical flexibility of al-Qa'ida and its affiliates and their ability to continually exploit poorly or ungoverned territories.

Upon entering office, the Obama administration quickly came to understand that this al-Qa'ida-related activity, as well as poor and deteriorating development indicators – including poverty, illiteracy, and a lack of access to health care – troubling human rights conditions, and a bleak long-term economic outlook, demanded a reappraisal of our Yemen policy. We needed a strategy able to match the complexity and gravity of the challenges facing Yemen.

The U.S. Government review, completed last year, has led to a new, whole-of-government approach to Yemen that seeks to mobilize and coordinate with other international actors. Our new strategy aims to address the root causes of instability, encourage political reconciliation, improve governance, and build the capacity of Yemen's government to exercise its authority, protect and deliver services to its people, and secure its territory.

U.S. strategy toward Yemen is two-pronged: (1) strengthen the Government of Yemen's ability to promote security and minimize the threat from violent extremists within its borders, and (2) mitigate Yemen's economic crisis and deficiencies in government capacity, provision of services, and transparency. As Yemen's security challenges and its social, political, and economic challenges are interrelated and mutually reinforcing, so U.S. policy must be comprehensive and flexible in order to be effective both in the short and long term. In the past year, the administration has maintained a vigorous tempo of senior level visits to Yemen, most recently by General Petraeus and Deputy National Security Advisor Brennan to press our concern about Al-Qaeda's ability to operate from and within Yemen.

This intensified engagement has paid off. To be sure, the Government of Yemen's willingness to take robust measures to confront the serious threat Al-Qaeda poses to the nation's stability has historically been inconsistent. But in the past month, Yemen has conducted multiple operations designed to disrupt AQAP's operational planning and deprive its leadership of safe haven within Yemen's national territory. Yemen has significantly increased the pressure on al-Qa'ida, and has carried out airstrikes and ground operations against senior al-Qa'ida targets. The United States commends Yemen on these successful operations and is committed to continuing support for an effective counterterrorism effort that will include both security and economic development initiatives.

On the security front, we provide training and assistance to Yemen's key counterterrorism units. We provide training to security forces in the Ministry of Interior, including the Yemeni Coast Guard and the Central Security Force's Counterterrorism Unit (CTU). We are also looking to deliver much-needed courses on Border Control Management, Crime Scene Investigation, Fraudulent Document Recognition, Surveillance Detection, Crisis Management and a comprehensive airport security/screening consultation and assessment. We also see additional opportunities now to increase our law enforcement training programs to provide basic police training, increase the capacity of Yemen's criminal justice system, strengthen prison management systems, and bolster civilian customs and border security. In addition, we are working with the Defense Department to utilize other funding sources for counterterrorism assistance to Yemen. With support from Congress, levels of U.S. security assistance and our engagement with our Yemeni partners has increased in recent years. The Departments of State and Defense coordinate closely in planning and implementing assistance programs.

The United States is determined to work bilaterally and with our partners to help Yemen in its efforts to halt and reverse its troubling socio-economic dynamics. Priorities for U.S. assistance include political and fiscal reforms and meaningful attention to legitimate internal grievances; better governance through decentralization, reduced corruption and civil service reform; economic diversification to generate employment and enhance livelihoods, and strengthened natural resource management. The United States also engages directly and positively with the people of Yemen through educational and cultural programs and exchanges. These initiatives contribute to the long-term health of our bilateral relationship and help allay suspicion and misunderstanding. As public understanding of U.S. policy and American values increases in Yemen, extremist and anti-American sentiment wanes.

Al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb

Al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) continues to menace parts of the Maghreb and the Sahel. In addition to conducting low-level attacks in northeastern and southern Algeria, AQIM elements have repeatedly targeted Westerners for kidnapping-for- ransom in the Sahel, and have killed a number of local military personnel, an American NGO worker and a British hostage.

We are encouraging greater coordination among regional states and with European states, France in particular, to frustrate AQIM's desire to establish itself in Europe. We view the near-term likelihood of such an expansion of operations as less likely than it was just a few years ago. Algeria, a strong partner to the United States in the war on terror, has stepped up operations against AQIM, with notable success. These efforts have put pressure on AQIM, resulting in a shift of activity to the ungoverned areas of northern Mali and Mauritania. In fact, the group faces difficulties in recruiting and increasingly lacks popular support in Algeria. Our regional partners value U.S. and other international assistance to build their capacity to disrupt terrorist attacks, better control their sovereign territory, and counter those who advocate violence. Our long-term approach provides the best opportunity to improve our security and that of our partners from this terrorist threat.

For the foreseeable future, we view AQIM as posing a persistent threat in the Sahel. It will continue to carry out attacks and kidnappings in the area as it is able, but does not threaten the stability of the region in the way that AQAP in the Arabian Peninsula or al-Qa'ida in the FATA do. AQIM has been unable to

conduct large-scale attack since 2008. The group is financially strapped, and the increase in hostage-taking is clearly an attempt to raise revenue. AQIM has failed to establish a viable presence in Morocco, Tunisia, or Libya. Despite an increase in the recruitment of Mauritanians, which is troubling, the Muslim populations of the Sahel and the Maghreb generally reject AQIM's extremism.

East Africa al-Qa'ida

East Africa al-Qa'ida (EAAQ) is composed of a handful of experienced operatives—including one of the FBI's most wanted terrorists and those responsible for bombings U.S. Embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam in 1998. They have maintained a safehaven in Somalia for years, and now have the increasingly vocal support of the foreign terrorist organization, al-Shabaab. Despite some key setbacks, most notably the death of EAAQ leader Saleh Nabhan in late 2009, the presence of these al-Qa'ida operatives in Somalia continues to pose a potential threat to Somali, regional and Western interests.

EAAQ maintains links to al-Shabaab, which has in turn publicly pledged its support for al-Qa'ida and is actively trying to overthrow the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) and other moderates in Somalia. Al-Shabaab leaders have publicly threatened to target US and Western interests throughout East Africa. Although they have been unsuccessful in doing so to date, their public rhetoric suggests plotting efforts could be underway. Its forces have killed scores of civilians—including TFG ministers and foreign and Somali aid workers. They have stolen aid and greatly exacerbated Somalia's already dire humanitarian situation, even driving the United Nations World Food Program earlier this month to cease operations in parts of southern Somalia. Al-Shabaab has also managed to recruit an unknown number of foreign fighters—including some Americans.

Our governance and counterterrorism goals in Somalia are clear and they are mutually reinforcing: achieve a stable national government to help ensure that Somalia will no longer be exploited as a base of operations by foreign terrorists; Somalia will not be stable as long as terrorist groups are active there. In addition to humanitarian assistance, the United States has been providing support, primarily through equipment, logistical support, and training, to the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and the TFG.

Conclusion

The terrorist threat we face remains a dynamic and evolving threat. I must say that our efforts against al-Qa'ida will be long term in nature. Contemporary terrorism has been decades in the making and it will take many more years to unmake it. In addition to their common extremist ideology, al-Qa'ida and its affiliates share common operational characteristics. They are ruthless and violent. They seek to operate among, reach out to and exploit those with longstanding political, social and economic grievances. They are good at messaging and propaganda and retain enough appeal to fulfill recruitment needs.

The President has confirmed that we must continue to take the fight to al-Qa'ida and its allies wherever they plot and train. Doing that will require the military, intelligence, and law enforcement resources of the U.S. and our allies. We must maintain effective intelligence and operational capabilities to identify and neutralize threats. That includes exploiting opportunities to bring al-Qa'ida's operatives to justice by presenting them before court of law, and robbing them of any claim to martyrdom or public support by revealing them as the vicious criminals they are.

However, defeating al-Qa'ida requires a range of strategies and resources. We need to look to look to what my colleague Deputy National Security Advisor John Brennan has called the upstream factors. We need to confront the political, social, and economic conditions that our enemies exploit to win over new recruits, funders and those whose tacit support enables the militants to carry forward their plans.

We know that violent extremism flourishes where there is marginalization and perceived –or real– relative deprivation. In recognition of this, my office has set up a unit focused on "Countering Violent Extremism" which will target local communities most prone to radicalization. Such initiatives will allow us to do more to address the underlying conditions for at-risk populations– and improve the ability of moderates to voice their views and strengthen opposition to violence.

The contemporary terrorist threat was decades in the making and it will take many more years to unmake it. But I believe we now have the right framework for our policies, and ultimately, I am confident, this will lead to the decisions and actions that will strengthen security for our nation and the global community.

Thank you again for the invitation to speak before you today, and I look forward to answering your questions.

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