

Hearing Transcript

House Homeland Security Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence Hearing on Terrorism in North Africa

March 29, 2017

KING:

Morning. The Committee on Homeland Security, Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence will come to order. The subcommittee is meeting today to hear testimony from four experts on counterterrorism and terror groups in North Africa.

I want to welcome the -- my -- Ranking Member Rice and any other member of the committee -- subcommittee that appears this morning. I understand that several will be showing up. And I express my appreciation to the witnesses who have all traveled to be here today. And I recognize myself for an opening statement.

During today's hearing, we will focus on terror groups operating in and across North Africa, their intent to attack the U.S., and their capability to do so. While Iraq and Syria are the current epicenter of the Islamist extremism movement, that certainly has not always been the case, nor will it be in the future.

The threats posed by ISIS and Al Qaida are dynamic and are expected to increase as ISIS loses ground in Iraq and Syria, and Al Qaida seeks to reclaim its status as the leader of the global jihadi movement. In this context, North Africa, which sits on the edge of Europe, has emerged as an important theater in the war on terror.

Al Qaida and ISIS elements are increasingly active and competitive, and have both expanded their reach deep into the continent. Earlier this month, Al Qaida factions in the Sahel reconciled their internal disputes and formed a single movement called the Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims, pledging their loyalty to AQIM leader, Abdelmalik Droukdel.

Additionally, the emergence of ISIS in the Greater Sahara, which was informally recognized by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in October 2016, confirmed the expansion of ISIS offshoots from Tunisia, Libya, and Sinai into the Sahel. Terror groups continue to reap the benefits of the permissive environment created out of political instability and large swaths of ungoverned space.

As of March 6th of this year, the State Department cautioned that terrorist groups, including Al Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb and ISIS affiliates, are very active in North Africa, have demonstrated the ability -- ability to conduct attacks in the region. And the U.S. government remains, quote, "highly concerned about possible attacks against U.S. citizens, facilities and businesses." End of quote.

The Long War Journal reports that Al Qaida affiliates launched over 250 attacks in the Maghreb and Sahel regions in 2016, a more than 150 percent increase from the reported 106 attacks in 2015.

Some argue that terror groups in this region are nationalist and do not pose a threat to the U.S. However, three months ago, the Pentagon confirmed that airstrikes on an ISIS stranglehold in Libya were directed against, quote, "external plotters, who were actively planning operations against our allies in Europe." End of quote.

Additionally, the return of thousands of battle-hardened foreign fighters from Iraq and Syria to their home countries in North Africa will likely elevate the threat level in the region.

The goals for today's hearing are to get a status update from you experts on the activities of the various terror groups, and the possible threat they may pose to the U.S. in the present and future. And also to solicit your expert advice on what's working in our counterterrorism strategy, and what more needs to be done as the Trump Administration is evaluating current efforts.

I want to thank you all for your work in this field, for appearing here today. I look forward to your testimony.

And now I represent (sic) the ranking member, my colleague from New York, Kathleen Rice.

Ms. Rice?

RICE:

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing.

And thank you to the witnesses for joining us here today.

About two years ago I had the opportunity to travel to Africa on a congressional delegation that was led by Senator Kirsten Gillibrand, and we were able to meet with government leaders and security officials in Tunisia, Chad, Djibouti, Kenya and Senegal.

That trip was just a few months after I was sworn into Congress and joined this committee, and it was an instructive experience for me because while groups like ISIS may have dominated headlines at the time, as they often do now, it's critical that we never lose sight of the fact that the threat of terrorism doesn't start and stop with ISIS.

That trip made it clear to me that the threat of terrorism emerging in Africa as -- is very real and cannot be ignored or overlooked until it generates more headlines. We need to confront that threat head on, and our ability to do so depends heavily on the strength of partnerships with leaders who fight on the front lines against these terrorist groups every day.

We don't have to look far to see how serious a threat we're dealing with in Africa, particularly in North Africa. A truck bomb was detonated last year near a police training college in Libya killing 60 policeman and wounding about 200 others.

A commercial plane bombing in Egypt in October 2015 killed 224 people. An attack at a terrorist (sic) resort in Tunisia in June of 2015 left 38 dead. And of course the attack on the U.S. embassy and CIA annex in Benghazi, Libya, which left four U.S. citizens dead including the U.S. ambassador to Libya, J. Christopher Stevens.

And while ISIS has taken credit for many recent attacks, Al Qaida operatives and other violent extremists groups have had a presence in North Africa for almost two decades. For example, Al Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb, I -- AQIM, had primarily operated in the northern coastal areas of Algeria and in parts of the desert regions of southern Algeria, but in recent years has expanded into Libya and Tunisia.

AQIM claimed responsibility for many terror attacks in the region, and has been responsible for kidnappings for ransom and smuggling. Most concerning according to U.S. officials, AQIM has focused on local and Western targets in North and West Africa including U.S. interests and personnel by often urging supporters to target U.S. embassies and U.S. ambassadors.

Earlier this month, the head of the U.S. Africa Command testified before the Senate and characterized the instability in Libya and North Africa as potentially the most significant near-term threat to U.S. and allies' interests on the continent.

Protecting our assets and people in this region is absolutely a national security priority for our country right now, but I'm concerned that this administration doesn't seem to recognize that.

President Trump's so-called America First budget seems to put Africa last, proposing deep budget cuts to the continent. In fact, many have speculated that confronting the threat of terrorism in Libya and throughout the region will be a low priority for this administration.

By proposing to cut the Department of State's international affairs funding by one-third, President Trump has signaled that he is not interested in maintaining long-standing international partnerships which are crucial for U.S. diplomacy and development across the globe, including in North Africa.

As I said, I believe that our success in confronting the threat in Africa depends on the success of our partners leading this fight on the ground. And while President Trump may not have a sophisticated understanding of the value of diplomacy, we cannot allow that to jeopardize the partnerships we've built in North Africa.

The terrorist threat to the U.S. homeland since 9/11 has continued to evolve and our counterterrorism policies must evolve as well. They cannot be singularly focused on prevention only within our borders.

It is imperative that the U.S. works with our allies to improve counterterrorism and intelligence efforts in North Africa, as well as investing in education, economic development, and free and open civil societies in order to root out many of the drivers of violent extremism in the region.

The level of U.S. funding resources -- of U.S. funding resources and personnel dedicated to these efforts must continue, if not increase, in order to limit the progress -- the risk and progress of terrorist groups in the region.

Again, we cannot underestimate the value of building and strengthening local and international partnerships to combat terrorism and radicalization in North Africa. International cooperation and partnerships are the foundation of our counterterrorism efforts.

I look forward to a robust discussion with our witnesses today about the threat of terrorism and radicalization in North Africa, and how we can shape U.S. policy to support our partners and defeat our enemies.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I yield back.

KING:

Thank you, Ranking Member. Other members of the committee are reminded that opening statements may be submitted for the record. We are pleased to have, as I mentioned before, a distinguished panel of witnesses before us today on this important topic. And all the witnesses are reminded that their written statement will be submitted for the record.

Our first witness is Dr. J. Peter Pham. Dr. Pham is vice president for Research and Regional Initiatives at the Atlanta Council as well as director of the Council's Africa Center. Prior to joining the Council in 2011, Dr. Pham was a tenured associate professor of justice studies, political science and Africana studies at James Madison University where he was director of the Nelson Institute for International and Public Affairs.

He is the author of more than 300 essays and books. He contributes to a number of a publications, and regularly appears as a commentator on U.S. and international broadcasts and print media.

Dr. Pham served as head of Africa and Development Issues for the presidential campaign of Senator McCain in 2008, and co-chair of the Africa Policy team for the presidential campaign of Governor Romney in 2012. He currently serves as chair of the Africa Working Group of the John Hay Initiative. Dr. Pham has been a trusted adviser to this committee, and has testified several times on critical security issues in Africa.

Dr. Pham, it's great to have you back, and you're now recognized for your testimony.

PHAM:

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Rice, and distinguished members of the subcommittee, I'd like to begin by thanking you not only for the specific opportunity to testify before you today on the subject of terrorism in North Africa, but also for the sustained attention which the United States House of Representatives and this panel in particular has given to this challenge.

In its oversight capacity, you've been very -- much ahead of the curve of (ph) the course of the last decade and a half, and it's been my singular privilege to have contributed, however modestly, to this important effort.

Since my esteemed colleagues will be delving deeply into the threat in North Africa posed by Al Qaida, the so-called Islamic State and their affiliates, I will concentrate primarily on the threat from North Africa focusing on the danger posed by these groups in and of themselves, as well as in their competition with each other.

The continuing threat posed by the various jihadist groups operating in the Sahel is the result of their exploitation of local conflicts, including socio-economic and political marginalization, as well as the fragile condition of the many states affected.

In some cases, setbacks spur the extremists to adapt new strategies that result in renewed vigor. A good example being the fragmentation of AQIM's organization in the Sahel in the wake of the French-led intervention in Mali, and the subsequent multiplication of factions, some of which are organized along ethnic lines that facilitate both the members blending into local populations and they're making further inroads among them.

Arguably, the Sahel, rather than the Maghreb, where, with the exception of Libya, there are strong states that have shown their ability to resist Al Qaida and ISIS encroachments.

The -- the Sahel is the region in Africa most at risk, especially of (sic) hordes of battle-hardened fighters return to the continent from the short-lived caliphate in the Levant, and linked up with others of their ilk displaced from Sirte and other places on the Mediterranean littoral, and increasingly make their way into the Fezzan and other points south.

It is no accident that the Sahel is, if not the poorest, certainly one of the poorest majority-Muslim regions in the world. It's also home to the largest expanse of contiguous ungoverned spaces on the African continent. Many of the governments in the region are weak in their capacity to assert authority, much less provide real services beyond their capital cities and a smattering of urban centers is extremely limited.

These fragile states present the jihadist both a vulnerability to exploit in the short term and an opportunity to create a new hub for operations in the long term, a characteristic shared not only by ISIS- aligned groups in Africa like Boko Haram, but also Al Qaida affiliates on the continent like AQIM and further afield, Somalia's al-Shabaab, is their almost canny resilience founded in part on the flexibility with which they can put aside differences and join forces in ever shifting combinations.

Moreover, apparent splits among the extremist groups can perversely lead to increased violence, heightening the threat.

For example, the much (inaudible) schism within Boko Haram, formally aligned with ISIS since early 2015, between those militants loyal to long-time leader Abubakar Shekau and those

following Abu Musab al-Barnawi whose ISIS -- whom ISIS appointed as the new governor of its West Africa province last August may, as I saw in November when I traveled to the battle front in northeastern Nigeria with former AFRICOM commander General Carter Ham and others embedded within Nigerian armored units.

That this may be contributing to the intensification rather than the diminution of violence as both factions try to outdo each other in staging attacks, with al-Barnawi's faction gaining momentum, not only because of the defeats of Shekau's faction suffered at the hands of Nigerian forces, but also because of foreign fighters and other resources flowing in thanks to the ISIS affiliation.

A similar phenomenon may also be at work in the competition between Al Qaida-linked groups and ISIS in the Sahel. In late October, for example, ISIS confirmed they had accepted the allegiance of Abu Walid al-Sahrawi, a one-time commander within AQIM's alMurabitun, who along with a group of fighters pledged themselves to Abubakar al-Baghdadi who designated them his greater Sahara division.

What is interesting is that al-Sahrawi first made bay'a to the self-styled caliph more than a year ago, but his oath of fealty was only accepted after he carried out a string of attacks in the border lands of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger.

This broad survey permits us to draw a number of conclusions about U.S. response to terrorism in Africa and the possible threats posed to U.S. persons in interest abroad as well as to the American homeland, especially from jihadists coming out of North Africa and penetrating Europe.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and members of the subcommittee, there is no doubt that ISIS and Al Qaida-affiliated groups in the northern part of Africa are posed to wreak considerable havoc across the continent as they seek to regroup in the ungoverned spaces of the Sahel, threatening not only the countries immediately impacted, but also effecting the interests and security of the United States and its allies across the region.

Mr. Chairman, I thank you and the members of the subcommittee for your attention. And I look forward to your questions. Thank you.

KING:

Dr. Pham, thank you again once again for your testimony and very much appreciate it.

And now our second witness, Dr. Geoff Porter. Dr. Porter is the president of North Africa Risk Consulting, a political and security risk analysis firm specializing exclusively in North Africa.

From 2013 to 2016, Dr. Porter was an assistant professor at the U.S. military academy of West Point. He has made more than three dozen trips to Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia, as well as multiple trips to Libya before and after the 2011 revolution that resulted in the overthrow of Colonel Gadhafi's regime.

Dr. Porter has also briefed U.S. ambassadors to Algeria, Tunisia and Libya regarding political and security developments in those countries prior to assuming their post.

Dr. Porter, welcome you today, and you're recognized for your testimony. Thank you very much.

PORTER:

Thank you, Chairman King.

Chairman King, Ranking Member Rice, distinguished members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. It's an honor to share with you my analysis of the threat posed by North African terrorism to the homeland and to U.S. national interests overseas.

Terrorism in North Africa in recent years is entirely Salafi jihadi in nature, or jihadi Salafi in nature depending on how you want to define that term. The goal of these jihadi Salafi organizations is to oust the political frameworks and leadership in the nation-states in which they operate.

In addition, they want to erode the influence of the United States and its European allies in North Africa. The persistence of jihadi Salafi terrorist organizations in North Africa poses a direct threat to U.S. interests abroad and an indirect and longer-term threat to the homeland here in the United States.

Jihadi Salafi terrorist groups in North Africa can be divided into two large rubrics. There are those allied with Al Qaida and those that have pledged allegiance to the Islamic State. For Al Qaida affiliated groups and the Islamic State allies alike, the U.S. remains the enemy.

With its ongoing operation in Tunisia and its regroupment in the Sahara and the Sahel, Al Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb is now the strongest terrorist organization in North Africa, and poses the greatest threat to U.S. national interests in the region.

The Islamic State suffered a severe setback in North Africa due to the loss of its bastion in Sirte, Libya. There reportedly have been fewer squinters from the Sirte offensive than anticipated. Those that did escape are dispersed throughout Libya and northern Niger. In addition, there are Islamic State sympathizers in Morocco and Mali.

Although North Africa and the Sahara are not strategic regions for the U.S., jihadi Salafi terrorist organizations threaten the U.S. in three ways. North African terrorist organizations will target the U.S. government when they can. In addition to the U.S. diplomatic core, the U.S. has soldiers and sailors and Marines and airmen in North Africa who are high-value targets for jihadi Salafi terrorists.

In addition to government personnel, jihadi Salafi groups threaten U.S. citizens in North Africa. AQIM and the Islamic State's willingness to kill civilians is well-documented. It's due to a combination of vacationing patterns, limited U.S. foreign direct investment in North Africa, and sheer luck that more Americans have not been killed by Salafi jihadi groups in North Africa.

The operations of U.S. companies in North Africa are also vulnerable to jihadi Salafi terrorism. Numerous companies -- U.S. companies have investments and activities in North Africa, particularly in the oil and gas sector, but also in petrochemicals, telecoms, defense, pharmaceuticals and renewables.

A terrorist attack regardless of whether it directly targets a U.S. company or the private sector in general disrupts commercial activity and erodes value of U.S. corporations.

Nevertheless, the threat posed by North African terrorist organizations to Europe is greater than the threat they pose to the U.S. because of geographic proximity, colonial legacies, linguistic facility, and the commonality of dual nationalities among European and North African countries. Even so, like any other group around the globe, jihadi Salafis are mobile.

What this means is that even though jihadi Salafi groups in North Africa may not pose a direct threat to the U.S. because they do not have the operational capacity to do so, or because it is not a strategic priority for them, individual North African jihadi Salafis can contribute to the capabilities of other jihadi Salafi groups outside North Africa that do have the capacity and the intention to together the United States.

Moreover, if groups are left unmolested, they will evolve to the -- and their capacity to plan and train will grow, potentially to the point where attacking the U.S. homeland is not out of reach.

Since 2013, the U.S. has employed a new model for counterterrorism operations in North Africa that relies on logistical and ISR support to allies, BPC programs, and the limited use of SOF to advise, assist and accompany local forces, and find, fix and finish high-value targets.

This approach's constant pressure slows the evolution of terrorist groups and prevents them from gaining the capabilities that could ultimately allow them to target the homeland. Despite the new approach's advantages, solutions -- military solutions never eliminate terrorism.

It is equally important to address the underlying conditions that lead to the emergence and continuation of terrorist organizations in North Africa. One of the fundamental drivers of jihadi Salafi terrorism is the sense of injustice and the belief that the implementation of a Salafi interpretation of Islam via jihad will ensure Muslim social justice.

There is a justifiable and a quantifiable perception that the playing field in North Africa, the Sahara and the Sahel is uneven. If injustice fuels the jihadi Salafi narrative, the net narrative burns bright in North Africa. Considering its historical commitment to justice and good governance, the U.S. should work through aid and development programs to reduce North African deficits in those areas.

Removing terrorists from the battlefield downrange only retards the group's evolution. To truly secure the homeland, the U.S. must address the underlying causes of North African terrorism, chief among of them injustice and lack of rule of law.

Thank you very much.

KING:

Thank you, Dr. Porter.

Our next witness is Mr. Laith Alkhouri, who is a co-founder and director of counterterrorism research at Flashpoint, which is a business risk intelligence company. He directs Flashpoint's jihadist threat intelligence service and serves as the lead on all primary source research into deep and dark Web networks used by terrorist groups.

He has researched and translated thousands jihadists documents and videos, analyzing jihadi terrorist activities across the Middle East, North Africa and central and southeast Asia. Mr. Alkhouri has presented his findings to several Cabinet agencies, the Council on Foreign Relations, New York City Police Department, and a number of academic institutions.

Mr. Alkhouri, thank you for being here today, and you're recognized for your testimony. Thank you very much.

ALKHOURI:

Thank you, Chairman King, Ranking Member Rice, and distinguished committee members.

Today, both Al Qaida and ISIS operate in major parts of North Africa, and pose a significant threat. They also pose a significant threat to Western civilians and interest. Throughout the past decade, Al Qaida in the Maghreb has kidnapped and killed Westerners and attacked Western economic interests.

Its record is heavy with such incidents starting at -- as early as 2007, including at least 16 incidents of kidnapping Westerners at gunpoint, a number of whom were executed in Algeria, Mauritania, Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso and other countries.

AQIM poses a significant threat to gas and oil facilities and hotels, among other Western economic interests. The most notable example is the group's January 2013 hostage crisis at the Tigantourine gas and oil extraction facility in Algeria's In Amenas town where three Americans and over two dozen other Western nationals employed there were killed. Other attacks targeted hotels and killed Westerners in Mali, Burkina Faso and Ivory Coast in 2016.

Al Qaida has exponentially grown in North Africa and the Sahel. This March, AQIM unified jihadi factions in north Mali under its banner, effectively inflating its ranks across the Sahel and Sahara at a time when many believe that it has largely been diminished.

The emergence and rise of ISIS, arguably today's most significant global threat has amplified the pre-existing sense of insecurity and instability. ISIS has captured significant territory and aggressively expanded across Sirte, has heavily operated in Darna, Benghazi, Tripoli, Misrata and other cities amid a political turmoil in Libya.

ISIS operates not only in Libya, but also in Algeria and Tunisia, and it has killed dozens of tourists. It has set up camps in Algeria in 2014, and networked with jihadist cells in Tunisia, dispatching operatives to kill tourists in Tunisia. Two of these attacks killed over 40 Westerners combined in March and June 2015. It has recently launched its first suicide bombing in Algeria.

ISIS has orchestrated and -- and -- and inspired attacks in the West. It directed major terror attacks in Paris and Brussels, and inspired the worst mass-shooting in U.S. history at the Pulse Nightclub in Orlando, Florida.

Part of its MO is, yes, launching suicide bombing against security forces, but importantly, its leadership's explicit threats to an orchestration of attacks in Europe and the U.S. are part of its branch in Libya agenda.

Its branch in Libya has verbalized threats to the U.S. It not only expressed threats to attack beyond the Mediterranean, but also vowed attacks in Washington and New York in its official propaganda.

ISIS has exerted influence among jihadists in the West, and incited them to launch attacks. The group has influenced radicals in the United States and Europe who are encouraged to attack in their home countries instead of actually join the group on the ground. This has been explicitly encouraged by ISIS leaders in official propaganda.

Libya is poised to become a launching pad for operations in the West. As ISIS struggles to maintain control of its territory in Iraq and Syria, it will likely up the ante in inciting and plotting external operations in the West.

Its branch in Libya is poised to welcome many of its foreign fighters already in its ranks in the Middle East, which might turn Libya into the biggest ISIS camp for foreign fighters outside of Iraq and Syria. Fighters from at least 10 nationalities so far have been fighting with ISIS in Libya featured in its propaganda.

Both groups seek to dominate the jihadi landscape with mutual focus on Westerners. AQIM and ISIS oppose each other. ISIS' emergence has not only exacerbated the terror threats but also polarized the jihadi movement in the region, effectively creating a competitive landscape that raises the threat prospects against the West.

AQIM has concentrated on condemning France. Each group seeks to reassert itself as the main jihadi leader in the region, and both groups see Westerners as enemy number one.

ISIS has a more powerful recruitment strategy than AQIM. While both groups pose a threat to the West, ISIS appears to have developed a stronger radicalization and indoctrination agenda than its competitor. ISIS external operations facilitators appear to have developed a more inclusive and aggressive call to launch attacks by all means necessary, unlike AQIM, which has not heavily focused on calls for external attacks overseas.

Returnees to the United States and Europe, those who have gained experience in militant tactics in ISIS camps as well as self-radicalized individuals likely pose the most significant jihadist threat to the West today.

Thank you so much.

KING:

Thank you, Dr. -- Mr. Alkhouri.

Our final witness is Dr. Frederic Wehrey. He was a senior fellow in the Middle East program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. He specializes in post-conflict transitions, armed groups and identity politics with a focus on Libya, North Africa and the Gulf.

His commentary and articles appeared in numerous publications. And he routinely briefs U.S. and European government officials on Middle East Affairs. Dr. Wehrey is a 21-year veteran of the active and reserve components of the U.S. Air Force, with tours across the Middle East and North Africa.

Dr. Wehrey, you're recognized for your testimony. Thank you.

WEHREY:

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman King, Ranking Member Rice, committee members, I'm grateful for this opportunity to speak with you today about the extremist threat from North Africa. The challenge here is especially dire given the numbers of fighters who fought abroad with ISIS and Al Qaida, and who are now returning.

But beyond the threat of returning jihadists, it is the weakness of states in the region that is the most important driver of extremism. Many states here are increasingly unable to meet the demands of their citizens and are facing mounting economic pressures in an era of low oil prices.

Faced with rising expectations and diminished futures, some youth in the region have fallen prey to the appeal of jihad peddled by ISIS and Al Qaida. Critiques of corruption, social injustice and police abuses feature prominently in the jihadist appeal.

Heavy-handed policies by North African governments have often fueled the very radicalism they purport to quash. Added to this are the regions ungoverned spaces and porous borders where extremists have negotiated access with marginalized tribes or co-opted smuggling networks.

And finally, a key enabler of jihadism is the outbreak of armed conflict. Anytime there's an insurgency or civil war, we can expect to see transnational jihadist arrive, often with superior motivation, funding and fire power.

I will focus my remarks on Libya, a country that embodies many of these afflictions and that I visited repeatedly over the past several years, including Sirte last year. It is a failed state that presents the most immediate extremist challenge.

Despite the successful Libyan-led campaign against ISIS in Sirte and other successes in the west and the east last year, the country remains at risk. Scattered ISIS members are regrouping in Sabratha near the Tunisian border in cells in and around the capital of Tripoli, and in the south where they have easy transit into the Sahel.

Also, some Al Qaida affiliated fighters who defected to ISIS are now returning back to a reconstituted and expanded Al Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb. But more importantly, I want to emphasize that its Libya's worsening political crisis that has pushed it to the brink of open conflict, and this could create a vacuum for terrorists to reemerge.

The recent campaign against ISIS has helped embolden General Khalifa Hifter and his forces in the east to push for a national domination capturing oil facilities and threatening to topple the U.N.-backed government in Tripoli. If this were to happen, it would invariably throw the country into civil war creating yet another vacuum for ISIS, Al Qaida or some new permutation of jihadism to emerge.

It is a looming danger, Mr. Chairman, that demands a redoubling of diplomatic engagement by the United States. This could entail several efforts. First, deterring moves towards escalation by exerting pressure on the warring parties to include the threat of sanctions.

Second, brokering a dialogue among regional and concerned states with interests in Libya. But beyond the task of forging a new political compact in -- in Libya, the United States must stand ready to assist the capacity of whatever Libyan government emerges.

This should focus on the following areas: Rationalizing the oil- driven economy and diversifying to other sources of income; training the army and police; reforming defense institutions; and especially promoting the rule of law, especially in prisons which we know are incubators of violent extremism.

The United States also has an opportunity to reengage with Libya society in areas like municipal government, civil society organizations, media and education. But proposed -- but proposed cuts to American foreign aid programs on this front would deprive us of this opportunity. So, too, would a ban on Libyan visitors to the states.

Counterterrorism efforts in Libya, whether ISR, border control, direct action or training and equipping of local forces must always re-inforce the building of inclusive, durable governance. The United States must also ensure that any counterterrorism engagement with local Libyan groups does not inadvertently worsen conflict by privileging one faction over another.

Mr. Chairman, committee members, my travels to Libya have left me with a strong appreciation for Libyan's resilience. The political fissures that racked the country are not unbridgeable, and contrary to some alarmist accounts, Libya has not fallen to extremism. But the United States needs

to act now to avert a looming crisis that it could -- could have far reaching effects for its interests beyond the country's borders.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you here today.

KING:

Thank you, Dr. Wehrey. Appreciate it very much.

I'll begin with my questioning. Which of the groups do you think represents the most dangerous, long-term threat to the U.S. between ISIS and Al Qaida?

Dr. Porter?

PORTER:

I've asked this question multiple times, and I also asked it to my cadets when I was teaching at West Point, and it comes down to the different strategies that the different groups employ, whether it's the Islamic State or its affiliates around the world, or Al Qaida.

And in my opinion, while the Islamic State is burning very brightly, it's also burning very quickly. And Al Qaida has employed a more conservative, longer-term strategy and is likely to be more enduring of an organization than the Islamic State will be.

It's more likely Laith -- Mr. Alkhouri mentions that there is a -- a less rigorous recruiting process for Al Qaida, and I would argue that it's less aggressive in its recruiting because it's more selective in its recruiting. And the membership of Al Qaida, I think, is more capable than the membership of the Islamic State over the longer term.

So in North Africa, the more enduring threat to the U.S. and to U.S. national interests overseas is without a doubt Al Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb, and not the Islamic State.

KING:

Dr. Pham?

PHAM:

I would pick up where my friend, Dr. Porter, left off and say that I would agree with him.

In the Sahel and parts south, what we see is Al Qaida embedding itself within -- picking up local grievances, local groups and multiplying, where necessary, local front groups that the identities shift.

For example, the Peul (ph) or Fulani people of the region who straddle the entire region have increasingly seen and witnessed a group -- Al Qaida-linked group emerge, the Macina Liberation

Front, which has now merged into this group that you cited earlier, Mr. Chairman, this group for the support of Islam and Muslims, but still also operates independently at times when convenient.

Attacks not only in Mali and Niger, Burkina Faso, but we're seeing increasingly attacks in Nigeria and even parts farther south than the Boca Haram have, targeting largely predominately Christian communities in Nigeria.

KING:

Mr. Alkhouri?

ALKHOURI:

I believe both of them pose a significant threat. I think, though, Al Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb poses a bigger threat to Western civilians and interests in the region, meaning in North Africa, the Sahel and the Sahara. But I believe in the long-term, ISIS' message has really been extremely disseminated across the West, a lot -- a much more powerful message than AQIM.

In 2015 alone, ISIS released between 750 to 800 videos, unlike AQIM, which released only a couple of dozen of them. These videos have largely concentrated on indoctrinating individuals in the West and inciting them. These videos will continue to be a recruitment tool, an indoctrination tool for Westerners for decades to come.

So I believe that ISIS in the long term, its message is a lot more aggressive in targeting the West than Al Qaida's.

KING:

And Dr. Wehrey?

WEHREY:

Well, just to second what was said, I think AQIM poses the more enduring threat. I think because of its focus on embedding in societies in the -- in this region and its focus on governance. But I would just caution that much of this is -- is transactional. So, again, I think its maneuverability is somewhat limited on what kind of groups it can -- it can co-opt.

Certainly, it's a threat to -- to American interests in the Sahel in West Africa. In Libya, at least, I would argue ISIS could try to stage a comeback through spectacular attacks, especially if there's a return -- any return of Western embassies or the U.N. to the capital. ISIS could try to make its presence known through attacks there.

KING:

Thank you. Again, I'd ask the four of you, how significant is online -- recruiting online propaganda in -- in this region? And how would you compare what Al Qaida is doing there and ISIS compared to how they online in the rest of the world, you know, as far as targeting.

Mr. Alkhouri?

ALKHOURI:

I believe, as I mentioned earlier, ISIS has a much aggressive call for attacks, and its operations online, essentially, I would say -- when looking at AQIM's operations online, it has only two channels that operate online. Their followers are only in the low hundreds. When I look at ISIS channels online, they have over 50 of them, and they operate, you know, across encrypted-messaging platforms as well as the deep, dark Web.

I've been following ISIS' operations online for -- since its inception, and I would say that it -- it has really dominated the internet, not only in its dissemination of propaganda, but actually its use of technology to incite others, provide them with advise on how to evade scrutiny and -- and essentially operate very comfortably in the West.

So I would say ISIS has a -- a -- a much more dominating presence online than Al Qaida or Al Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb.

KING:

Anybody else want to comment?

Dr. Pham?

PHAM:

I -- I would agree with Mr. Alkhouri that online -- but I would caution the subcommittee that online is just one dimension of media, and where Al Qaida perhaps has an advantage as an ideology and its ideological roots is the fact that its built on a matrix that has been developed over years of foreign money, foreign influence, mosques and social networks.

And so in many respects, it -- this is an area where online is one thing, but we have low -- very low literacy rates as well. And so access to the internet and -- is lower, and so there are other ways of social messaging that we should be aware of.

KING:

OK (ph).

Dr. Porter?

PORTER:

In fact, Dr. Pham took the words right out of my mouth. I think, you know, when we think about the online recruitment among Islamic State or Al Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb in North Africa, we have to bear in mind that internet penetration rates in the Sahel, and particularly in Niger, Chad, Mali, and especially in northern Mali and northern Niger, are low.

And that's going to be a natural -- or inherent barrier for Islamic State or Al Qaida online recruitment methods in those regions. And as Dr. Pham also pointed out, there are other mechanisms on the ground that these organizations can use to generate followers.

Now conversely, internet penetration rates despite the -- the instability and turmoil in Libya are fairly good. Likewise, internet penetration rates in Morocco are also very good, which comes part and partial of Morocco's economic development.

So that -- it poses a double edged sword. On the one hand, you have economic opportunities developed -- generated by telecommunications developments, but on the other hand, you know, you have the risk posed by online communications, online recruitment.

Thank you, sir.

KING:

OK.

Dr. Wehrey?

WEHREY:

Just to echo what was said, I think the, you know, online penetration and also, you know, media in general can sort of sensitize people. But I think the -- the ultimate recruitment, and this is stemming from a lot of interviews I've done in Libya, is really based on social groups and -- and sort of neighbor influences.

You look at Al Qaida groups like Ansar al-Sharia, they were very effective in promoting a certain culture with youth camps, social works, and -- and from there it was an easy path to -- to armed jihad.

KING:

(inaudible)

Ms. Rice.

RICE:

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Porter, I'd just like to start with you. You had said in your testimony that the greatest threat in North Africa is injustice and the lack of rule of law. Are -- are you, you know, or commitment to justice and the rule of law are foundations of any properly functioning government.

There is -- all last year we heard a lot America First, American First, and it's yet to be seen what - - how that is going to translate from a campaign slogan to a governing party. But what effect is that going to have on how receptive people in North Africa are going to be to our intervention there in the various different ways that we intervene?

PORTER:

Thank you, ma'am, it's a very pertinent and, to be frank, difficult question.

You know, I think depending on the types of programs that the United States initiates overseas in, and particularly in North Africa, which is the subject of today's subcommittee hearing, for the most part, U.S. engagement in the region is positively received.

It's received well by the Chadian armed forces, the Nigerian armed forces, the Malian armed forces. So military aid is welcomed by those host countries, and I think that's yielded dividends in counterterrorism campaigns in North Africa and the Sahel.

In addition, parallel to that, the United States aid programs and development programs through USAID and through State Department are also well-received. And they pay dividends in a different way.

And I think, you know, one of the things that we should emphasize here today, and speaking more broadly about the current budgetary environments on the current foreign policy environment in Washington, is that, as I said in my testimony, there is no strictly military solution to counterterrorism. That removing terrorists from the battlefield only slows the group's evolution. It does not eliminate the group.

What eliminates the group is changing the conditions on the ground, and the military does not do that, nor should they. It's not their job. That job falls to State Department. And I think these are an -- this is a -- an important a (ph) component of counterterrorism as the military is.

Thank you very much, ma'am.

RICE:

So that leads to my next question, that the Trump administration has proposed a 28 percent cut to the State Department, which would devastate foreign aid programs. What -- what say you about that? I mean what effect is that going to have on the non- military programs that you were just talking about?

PORTER:

A negative one.

RICE:

And how do we address that? How -- how do we make the point that -- I mean there are members of this -- the administration, the secretary of state, the secretary of defense, who have talked about this. In what ways -- how is this being received, if -- if at all, by the countries that you're talking about that rely on foreign aid from the U.S.? And what is their take on this?

PORTER:

To the best of my knowledge, ma'am, there is a -- a -- a sense of anxiety among North African capitals about what the retreat of U.S. State Department programs, USAID programs in their countries will have. In particular, there are concerns in Tunisia about the -- the good governance programs that the United States is supporting there.

There are concerns in Morocco. And Morocco does have a -- a -- a constant battle against the Islamic State supporters within their own borders. And to Morocco's credit, it's doing a very good job on the counterterrorism front, but it needs help on rule of law and good governance issues. Likewise, Algeria, and then the Sahel states even more so.

And so this will have a deleterious effect on the good governance rule of law environment, and I think it will aggravate the sense of social injustice that upon which Salafi jihadi groups feed.

Thank you, ma'am.

RICE:

Thank you.

Dr. Wehrey, I -- I -- a question for you. What -- how valuable is a strong E.U., right? We're talking today about the threat not just to the U.S., to the terrorism that's going on in being -- growing in North Africa, but also to Europe. In your opinion, how important is a strong E.U.? Or is it not to kind of combatting -- doing their part to combat terrorism in the North African region?

WEHREY:

Thank you, ma'am. I think it's, you know, absolutely essential a place -- and especially in a place like Libya where the U.S. can't bear the burden on -- on its own. I mean after the 2011 revolution, the European countries had a number of, you know, programs to address various aspects of Libya's governance and security. They're now engaged on the border issue.

But I think, and I -- this speaks to your previous question. I think they -- they do require some U.S. leadership behind them. And so the U.S. can lend certain capabilities here, which is why to echo

what Dr. Porter said, it's so important that we -- we stay involved. But, no, I mean the E.U. is absolutely essential.

RICE:

Thank you.

I -- thank you, Mr. Chairman.

KING:

Mr. Keating from Massachusetts.

KEATING:

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

You had mentioned before that this is more of a direct threat to Europe. Could you comment on - particularly on threats to Europe directly from this area, particularly southern Europe where countries like Italy, most the migration is coming from Northern Africa? Could you really -- any of you -- all of you hopefully -- comment on what the nature of those threats are? What the U.S. and what our allies there can do to try and counter that?

PORTER:

Sir, thank you. Thank you for your question.

As I said in my -- in -- in my -- my oral testimony, the -- the threat posed by jihadi Salafi organizations in North Africa to Europe is much greater than that posed to the United States simply because of geographic proximity.

You know, when I brief the FBI or ICE, a couple throwaway facts, you know, the -- the Strait of Gibraltar separating Morocco from southern Spain at its narrowest is eight kilometers wide. The - - a flight from Algiers, the capital of Algeria, to Massy, which is the second largest French city, is about the same length and time as the New York/D.C. shuttle.

So North Africa is in Europe's backyard. And that poses a -- a -- a grave concern for European countries, especially those on the shores of the Mediterranean.

I do want to address a -- or what I think is a red herring, which is the fear that Salafi jihadi terrorists will embed themselves with refugees or immigrants trying to cross the Mediterranean and illegally penetrate Europe's borders.

You know, on the one hand, Islamic State and Al Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb have sufficient resources not to have to throw themselves into a rickety dinghy and try and cross the

Mediterranean. They -- they can easily by a plane ticket with a clean passport from a third party country. There is no need to take the risk of trying to cross the Mediterranean.

In addition, Islamic State and Al Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb have likely supporters in Europe, and many of those supporters as we've seen in the case of the Paris attacks, the Brussels attacks, the Nice attacks are -- or have connections to the North African diaspora in Europe.

So the -- the -- the threat I think is substantial, given (ph) the fluid movement of peoples back and forth across the Mediterranean, but not necessarily through illegal channels. And more and more likely through legal channels such as airplane tickets, ferries, and -- and -- and car crossings.

Thank you, sir.

KEATING:

Anyone else have -- want to comment on that threat in Europe?

PHAM:

Sir, thank you for your question. I would add to what my -- Dr. Porter said, also, highlight the threat to European interests and personnel including military and diplomatic personnel throughout this region in the region itself.

In particular, France has a -- our allies there have a tremendous network of business and other contacts in the region that are there. The French lead the peacekeeping efforts in Mali. The -- there are German units, even Swedish units in Mali which has turned into the bloodiest U.N. peacekeeping operation anywhere, the deadliest, because of the ongoing instability in the northern part of the country.

So I would add that there's the threat there, and many of the victims in the Al Qaida linked attacks in Cote d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, Mali were European citizens. So there's a threat to Europeans in that area.

One other low note I would add to that is there's the downside of the -- the North African diaspora in Europe, but there is also the upside that some of the North African countries, Morocco in particular, have extraordinarily capable not only counterterrorism but counter-radicalization programs driven not just by security services but by religious leaders and social networks that help not only in their region -- in their own country, but throughout this region, and increasingly, even reaching back to -- to Europe as well.

KEATING:

OK. Just a comment that yesterday in Foreign Affairs Committee we had a hearing regarding the budget, the foreign aid budget, and I share a very optimistic view that the president's budget will not be the budget that we'll endorse or support here in the House. That's a bipartisan statement yesterday, and a very strong one.

But what about the role with our kind of assistance on empowering women in these regions to a greater extent? We've found in many areas that that's more successful, the money gets where it should, goes to the health and goes towards children. Does anyone want to comment on how spearheading some of those funds empowering women to -- to be more involved in that area could be successful?

PORTER:

I think it should be duly noted that you're asking a question about empowering women to an all-male panel. But...

KEATING:

Well...

PORTER:

... I will do my best.

KEATING:

Well, maybe that's part of the problem that...

PORTER:

Roger that, sir.

KEATING:

... that we should be better prepared to answer those things as men. But go ahead.

PORTER:

Or there should be more women sitting on this side of the table. But, sir, thank you very much for your question.

Yes, I think that's -- it's 100 percent correct that -- and there was -- I -- I saw some information yesterday that there is a -- a quantifiable, decreased likelihood of terrorist attacks or the emergence of jihadi Salafi groups in countries in which women are more fully integrated into the economic and public and government life of the country. And I can get you further statistics to support that.

KEATING:

OK (ph).

PORTER:

I just don't have at the top -- top of my head, sir.

KEATING:

Yes. And we have some and I'd appreciate anymore.

Yes?

WEHREY:

Just in the case of -- of Libya, our support to women's civil society groups after the revolution, and the (ph) support of other countries I think was -- was absolutely essential in -- in creating a sort of momentum against armed groups and a counterweight to violence.

So you see a lot of the civil protests against militias, not necessarily against -- against extremists too, but against militias were, in fact, led by -- by women's groups. So I think it's tremendously empowering.

The other dimension is in a lot of these marginalized communities, especially in the south that -- where young men fall prey to extremism or get in -- involved in smuggling, I mean women's, you know, roles can be incredibly useful I think in -- in sort of curtailing that impulse.

And again, with returning jihadists, you -- we can't just throw them all in prison. There has to be some sort of integration program into their communities after justice is served. And so there again, I think women's groups can play an essential role there.

KEATING:

Thank you (ph).

I yield back. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

KING:

The gentleman from Texas, Mr. Hurd.

HURD:

Thank you, Chairman, and thank you, all, for being here. This is -- this is an important topic. And I actually have one question, and it's a 30,000 foot view question, and I'd love to hear everybody's opinion on it. And, Dr. Pham, maybe we start with you and just go down the line.

When it comes specifically to terrorism in North Africa, what day do we celebrate? What day do we get to raise our hands and say we won? Can we imprison and kill everyone? Can we -- I -- I

don't think so. And so -- so help me understand what is that -- what is that end point, that end state that if we achieve, we're going to say we solved the problem? Is that a fair -- is that a fair question?

Dr. Wehrey, you want to -- if you -- it seemed like you're ready to answer, we can maybe start with you and go down the other way.

WEHREY:

Sure, sure (ph). I think it's a -- it's an excellent question. Yes (ph), I think we need to be very surgical and discrete in terms of identifying, you know, what groups really pose a threat to us because I think in a -- in a lot of these countries, you have traditions of -- of -- of religious conservatism, you have militancy. These -- this has been going back decades. And now on top of that, you have these named terrorist groups, ISIS and Al Qaida.

You know, the question is these groups are very good at marbling into one another, and the question is how do we defeat those groups that -- that matter to us? And I think, you know, the question really is have we eliminated groups that have both the will and the capacity to threaten the interests of our allies, the economic interests, the personnel of our allies?

Now are we going to defeat, quote/unquote, "extremism" in places like eastern Libya? We are not. Or are we going to completely, you know, eliminate illiberal extremist ideology in some of these places? We're not. So again, I don't think there's even going to be a -- a day we're going to declare, you know, victory and we shouldn't widen the circle to the -- to the extent that we're involved in this -- this sort of never-ending war.

ALKHOURI:

Thank you for the question.

The question is whether we're (ph) tackling terrorist groups as -- and the word terrorism, or are we talking about extremism, because I believe extremism is -- is -- is a much bigger issue. And I think that terrorist groups really capitalize on the issue of extremism that they have -- a lot of people have been bred up with, you know, for -- for many years, and it doesn't take him long to get that extremism up and -- and get these individuals to actually carry acts terrorism.

But I think part of the solution, or at least the way I see it, that economic opportunities are a major part of the solution, and I think that it -- the -- the region, North Africa and the Sahel at large, there is a high unemployment rate in -- in many of these places, especially in Libya.

If we look at de-radicalization programs, they essentially do not exist, and the -- we're not only talking about de-radicalization programs, meaning individuals who have already been radicalized and you put them through programs, but also we're talking about the necessity for anti-radicalization programs, programs that such exist prior to individuals actually having gone to the, you know, off -- off that threshold.

We're also talking about society building, and I think that's -- that's extremely important because they don't want to just see programs dedicated to, you know, to potential radical individuals, but also the society at large.

If we're missing vital, you know, basic necessities in certain societies, then specific groups can capitalize on that, provide these necessities or -- or these basic needs to the individuals in this society, and then, you know, take advantage of that, indoctrinate them, and so on.

And finally, I would say a major part of cutting these off these groups is cutting off their finances, and I think that the United States has succeeded in large part in cutting off the finances of Al Qaida and ISIS.

But also this is a -- a -- a problem that we keep seeing as individuals are dealing with digital currency, as individuals are still taking advantage of the banking system, and taking advantage of fraud. And we're seeing a nexus between jihadist terrorist groups and cyber-criminal groups. So that would be essential to tackle that problem.

PORTER:

Sir, thank you for your question.

You know, as I said in my -- in my written testimony, you know, in counterterrorism, there is no mission accomplished. There's just continuing to accomplish the mission. There is no winning. There is just mitigating the risk to what we consider to be a tolerable level. And that's it.

I mean combatting terrorism is hard. Counterterrorism is hard. The solutions exists along a -- a continuum of military approaches and non-military approaches. You know, I think, you know, we have seen some progress in some North African countries. The threat is not uniform across North Africa.

I don't think any country, and I don't mean to -- to -- to be facetious or -- or -- or to treat your question quibbly (ph), but I don't think any country, despite the successes that its making in combatting terrorism, ever celebrates. I think a prime example of this is Algeria which has struggled with terrorism since the 1990s.

And during the 1990s, terrorism was an egregious and horrible problem that left more than 150,000 dead. Today, when you travel to Algeria, especially in and around the area -- the capital, but also along the coast, you rarely think about terrorism. Now is that celebratory, or is that cause for a celebration? No. But it's a satisfactory outcome. Does terrorism still exist in Algeria? Yes, to a severely mitigated extent.

So I think, you know, it's a continuous and ongoing and difficult process where there is no victory, there is just a satisfactory outcome.

And thank you, sir, for your question.

PHAM:

Just very briefly, sir. I can make two points. First, I think what we are -- we're not going to have success as my colleagues have said, but what we can do successfully is to lower the risk by lowering, first, the threat, the frequency and likelihood of these events, the vulnerability, the likelihood that when these events occur, they will be successful.

And lowering the costs, the (ph) -- each event, even if successful exerts. And we can do that by helping our allies, which leads me to my second point, which is that I think one measure of success -- of a successful policy in the region is the extent to which we can have governments in place that are legitimate in the eyes of their people.

And legitimacy does not mean necessarily, although it's often expressed as such, but not necessarily electoral -- the -- winning majorities at the ballot box. It's governments that are accepted by their people that provide basic security and services and can exert control to a large measure across their national territory. That's a long road to that, but it's certainly a -- a significant step towards de-risking.

KING:

Mr. Gallagher.

GALLAGHER:

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you to all our -- our -- our panelists for joining us today.

One question that's come up with increasing frequency is the question of whether or not we designate the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt as part of a broader strategy of getting tougher on terrorism.

Obviously, the Muslim Brotherhood is not a monolithic organization, but it has goals that are antithetical to our own foreign policy. It espouses the establishment of a global caliphate. Its charter says that death in the way of Allah is the ultimate end for its members.

Help us think through, sort of, the second and third order effects of designation. Would that enhance our counterterrorism effort in Egypt, and more broadly across North Africa and in deed the Middle East as well? For the entire panel.

PORTER:

Thank you for your question. Just to -- to -- to begin quite simply, if you increase the number of terrorists by designating people that were not previously terrorists -- terrorists, then you make your counterterrorism problem more difficult.

So -- but I -- I -- I think a more nuanced answer is that I am not entirely convinced that the threshold for designating a group a terrorist group is that they are antithetical to the U.S. foreign policy overseas.

In addition, there -- as you also mentioned, the Muslim brotherhood is a nuanced group that does have a range -- or embrace a range of ideologies and is engaged in a range of activities throughout North Africa.

In terms of second and third order -- order effects of designation of the Muslim Brotherhood as a foreign terrorist organization, I was speaking with a client yesterday and I was speaking with another client last week who have businesses. These are U.S. companies with businesses in North Africa that employ foreign nationals on their staff, and to whom they pay salaries.

It is guaranteed in our conversations with these individuals -- with these representatives of these companies, it is guaranteed that among their staff overseas are members of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Designating the Muslim Brotherhood as an FTO would then leave these U.S. corporations vulnerable to accusations of material support for terrorism. In addition, it would raise the bar extensively for U.S. corporations doing business overseas in terms of KYC. Again, running the risk of exposing U.S. corporations to material support for terrorism.

So I think the implications, as (ph) particularly for U.S. foreign direction (ph) overseas are -- are - - are enormous, in addition to the fact that I don't think the Muslim Brotherhood genuinely qualifies as a foreign terrorist organization.

But thank you, sir, for your question.

GALLAGHER:

Thank you.

Can I go to Dr. Wehrey just because we had many a productive debate and discussion when I was but a lowly staffer on the Senate Foreign Relations committee on Tunisia and -- and Libya. So I'd be interested in your -- your thoughts on the topic.

WEHREY:

Well, I think the second and third order effects I think would be quite frankly catastrophic, especially in a place like Libya where the Muslim Brotherhood is backing the U.N.-backed government of national accord in Tripoli through which we are working to counter ISIS.

I think designating it would create a whole new class of political losers in Libya, people that are shut out of the political process, and that's a prime recruiting pool for -- for ISIS. So I think it would actually widen the circle of terrorists that we're trying to combat.

GALLAGHER:

Thank you. And, Dr. Pham, quickly since my time is expiring and since I apologize for being late to the hearing.

Given your extensive work in Africa and given some -- some conversations we've had at, you know, putting Africa in the -- in the front view versus the rearview mirror, has there anything that hasn't been discussed today about terrorism in Africa, or an area that we're not paying enough attention to that you think we should pay more attention to on this subcommittee?

PHAM:

Thank you very much, Mr. Gallagher, for that question.

I think two things that we need to pay more attention. One is the seamless nature and the -- throughout this hearing, my fellow panelists and I have discussed how things have moved north/south from the Mediterranean shore down into Africa.

Department of Defense treats all of Africa as a whole. Since 20 of January, so does the National Security Council. It makes sense. Threats move north/south. Economics works in the same direction, but the rest of the whole of government still draws a line and a lot falls through that -- that chasm in the middle.

The second point I would make is that we would do well to work with partners. We've got effective partners in the region, but we don't always work and coordinate. Morocco for example has a highly effective counter-radicalization program. Mr. Keating earlier asked about women. Morocco trained -- it's the only Muslim country that requires the training of a quota of women religious leaders and scholars.

It has agreements with countries throughout the region to train imams in moderate forms of Islam. That's a counter to the Muslim Brotherhood or more radical forms. And so working with them should be a part of our agenda.

GALLAGHER:

Thank you.

Thank you, gentlemen. Appreciate your time.

KING:

Thank you, Mr. Gallagher.

And let me thank all the witnesses for their valuable testimony, and the members for their questions. The members of the subcommittee may have some additional questions to the witnesses, I will ask you to respond to those in writing.

Ms. Rice, do you have any...

RICE:

No.

KING:

OK. Pursuant to committee rule 7(D), the hearing record will be held open for 10 days.

Without objection, the subcommittee stands adjourns.