

**THE FY22 BUDGET: STATE DEPARTMENT
COUNTERTERRORISM BUREAU**

HEARING
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON
MIDDLE EAST, NORTH AFRICA, AND GLOBAL
COUNTERTERRORISM
OF THE
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
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THE FY22 BUDGET: STATE DEPARTMENT COUNTERTERRORISM BUREAU

Wednesday, November 17, 2021

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE MIDDLE EAST, NORTH
AFRICA AND GLOBAL COUNTERTERRORISM,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
Washington, DC.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:11 a.m., in room 2172, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Theodore E. Deutch (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Mr. DEUTCH. The Subcommittee on the Middle East, North Africa, and Global Counterterrorism will come to order.

Welcome everyone. Without objection, the chair is authorized to declare a recess of the subcommittee at any point, and all members will have 5 days to submit statements and extraneous material and questions for the record, subject to the length limitation of the rules.

As a reminder to the members who are participating virtually, please keep your video function on at all times, even when you're not recognized by the chair. Members are responsible for muting and unmuting themselves.

Consistent with House rules, staff will only mute members and witnesses as appropriate when they're not under recognition to eliminate background noise, not to avoid embarrassment.

Pursuant to notice, the subcommittee is meeting today to hear testimony on the State Department Counterterrorism Bureau's Fiscal Year 2022 budget. I see that we have a quorum and I'll recognize myself for the purpose of making an opening statement.

The purpose of this hearing is to conduct oversight of the Counterterrorism Bureau's budget request, as well as the Biden Administration's overall counterterrorism policy priorities.

I thank Acting Principal Deputy Assistant Coordinator Landberg for appearing today.

In Fiscal Year '22, the Administration requested a total of \$248.8 million for the Counterterrorism Bureau, taking collectively from the NADR, ESF, American Salaries and Security Program's accounts, which is, roughly, in line with previous year's funding.

And while the nature of terrorism is changing and evolving, the threat, clearly, has not dissipated. Looking at the Fiscal Year '22 requests, we can reasonably conclude that the Biden Administration is reprioritizing efforts to combat terrorism and violent extremism and is shifting away from military-driven CT approach to one more diplomacy, cooperation, and engagement.

As the focus of U.S. foreign policy moves toward great power competition, we must remain hyper vigilant in our strategy, coordi-

nation, and action against terrorist and violent extremist that exist both abroad and at home.

We must ensure that addressing root causes of terrorism and terrorist recruitment remains at the forefront of our CT strategy. The Fiscal Year '22 budget request for ESF funds has remained stagnant at \$15 million.

Programs funded by ESF focus on combating terrorist recruitment and the radicalization of individuals in partner countries by countering terrorist narratives and messaging, strengthening the capacity of partner governments and civil society organizations to prevent radicalization and recruitment to violence and promoting effective rehabilitation and reintegration of former terrorists.

These resources are essential to addressing systemic challenges getting at the core drivers of radicalization, and I hope to hear more about what your bureau is doing in consultation with CSO regional bureaus, USAID, and DOD to implement a holistic approach to address these challenges.

This September marked the 20th anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, and while we have made significant progress in preventing and combating terror threats, the United States still faces a wide array of challenges from jihadist organizations like ISIS and al-Qaeda, Iranian-backed groups like Hezbollah and the growing threat of REMVE—racially or ethnically motivated violent extremism.

The ISIS caliphate has been destroyed but the organization maintains a network of supporters and foreign fighters who are trained by ISIS operatives and loyal to the organization's cause.

I'm concerned by the trends of continued indoctrination and radicalization at refugee camps across the Middle East, as well as the risk of recruitment or kidnapping many internally displaced people face in places like Syria.

Further, ISIS-AQ and their affiliated groups have continued to grow and spread not only within the Middle East, but also across Europe, Asia, and Africa, changing their tactics and continuing to apply pressure even as our partner capacity advances.

I'm also deeply concerned by the seemingly emboldened Iranian-backed proxy groups. The United States has long considered Iran to be a State sponsor of terrorism and its proxies, such as Hezbollah and Shi'a militias in Iraq, continue to sow chaos throughout the Middle East, threatening U.S. interests and military personnel, as well as our regional allies and partners.

I was horrified to learn of the drone attack on the Iraqi prime minister earlier this month, and I'm interested to hear how the Bureau is thinking about both countering Iranian proxies as well as adapting to the threat of UAVs and other emerging technologies.

Afghanistan, too, is on all of our minds today, and while I understand that—and I'll take the opportunity to remind my colleagues of this as well, certain topics may be challenging to speak about at length in a public setting—I look forward to hearing about how the events of this summer have changed the threat landscape in the region, our counterterrorism strategies, and the funding requests that we're speaking about today.

I also look forward to continuing the conversation in a classified space in the coming weeks.

Finally, combating racially or ethnically motivated violent extremism which encompasses individuals and groups motivated to violence by an intolerant ethno-supremacist ideology, including white supremacy and neo-Nazism, is a priority for me as well as, I know, for the Biden Administration.

The United Nations Security Council's Counterterrorism Committee cited a 320 percent increase in extreme right wing terrorism globally since 2015, and while many argue that REMVE is not as potent as jihadists or Iranian-backed terrorists, since it lacks the global networks that make both a potent threat, REMVE is continuing to evolve and spread with individuals and groups in different countries communicating, recruiting, radicalizing, and sharing tactical training including weapon making instructions both online and in person.

What's more, white supremacists and neo-Nazi groups appear to be gaining wider public acceptance in some Western countries with a commensurate rise in violent attacks.

With that, I would ask unanimous consent to submit into the record an article this morning from cnn.com entitled "What a staggering gun cache discovered in one suspected neo-Nazi's house says about far right extremism in Europe."

Without objection.

[The information referred to follows:]

freedom, prosperity, peace, and dignity. If we work together with our democratic partners, with strength and confidence, we will meet every challenge and outpace every challenger.”

House Committee on Foreign Affairs
Western Hemisphere Subcommittee

Chairman Albio Sires (D-NJ)

Opening Statement
“The Biden Administration’s Policy Priorities for Latin America and the Caribbean”
Tuesday, November 16, 2021

- I want to begin by congratulating you, Assistant Secretary Nichols, on your confirmation.
- I know you come to this role with a great deal of experience in the region and an impressive depth of knowledge about the challenges we face.
- I am confident that our policy toward Latin America and the Caribbean is in good hands.
- As we all know, it is a turbulent time for the Western Hemisphere.
- This region has been hit harder by the COVID-19 pandemic than anywhere else in the world.
- With Daniel Ortega’s coronation ceremony last week, there is no doubt that we are dealing with three fully consolidated dictatorships in Latin America and the Caribbean.
- While these regimes in Cuba, Venezuela, and Nicaragua tighten their grip on power, in other countries like Guatemala and El Salvador we are seeing major setbacks to judicial independence, the fight against corruption, and the rule of law.
- In my view, the Biden Administration came into office with the right approach to elevate Central America as a strategic priority and renew our focus on addressing the root causes of migration.
- Unfortunately, we have seen in the last ten months that there are limitations to what we can achieve when we lack reliable government partners.
- For this reason, the newly announced effort by the administration to focus our assistance on supporting local organizations in Central America is a positive and important step.
- Despite the serious challenges confronting the region, I also see many opportunities for greater engagement.
- In this sense, I applaud President Biden’s budget request, which would increase our funding for Latin America and the Caribbean by over fifteen percent to the highest level in more than a decade.
- I also commend this administration for donating over fifty million vaccine doses to this region.

- While I was frustrated that we could not take action sooner to deliver vaccines, this is still a major accomplishment that demonstrates our collective commitment to our friends in Latin America and the Caribbean.
- The next step will be supporting the region's economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.
- I traveled to the Dominican Republic with Ranking Member Green in September.
- The government there is making progress in reforming the police and fighting corruption.
- Like most countries in the region, they want our support for their economic recovery.
- I hope we can discuss today how we can spur greater investment and strengthen supply chains in the Western Hemisphere.
- As we think about how to compete effectively with China, we need to use our comparative advantages.
- This means tapping into our innovative private sector and deepening our network of alliances.
- Simply criticizing countries for doing business with China will not get us very far.
- We need to be at the table offering credible solutions and providing a serious alternative.
- We should also use our convening power to bring governments together to address challenges that transcend borders, such as the impacts of climate change and increased migration from South America through the Darien Gap.
- Ultimately, our commitment to democracy and human rights should be the backbone of everything we do.
- We must be consistent in standing up for these values across the region.
- In Honduras' upcoming elections, we should work closely with our partners to ensure the international community speaks with one voice that is informed by the assessments of the O-A-S and E-U election observers.
- I am deeply concerned by the pre-election violence we are seeing there.
- In Haiti, where we are witnessing the complete deterioration of the state, the U.S. must engage Haitian civil society and support Haitian-led efforts to restore peace, security, and human dignity.

- In Cuba, the Biden Administration and bipartisan members of Congress have taken a firm stand in defense of universal human rights, but as we saw again yesterday, the regime is doubling down on its repression.
- We need to do more to expand internet access, end the exploitation of Cuban medical workers, and unite international allies behind Cubans' demands for freedom and self-determination.
- As for Nicaragua, I look forward to seeing how we can work with the administration to implement the recently passed RENACER Act and coordinate our actions with allies in Latin America and the European Union to further restrict international financing to the Ortega regime.
- We must never lose sight of the continued political and humanitarian crisis in Venezuela and the impacts it is having on Colombia and our allies throughout the region.
- Maduro's crimes against humanity should never be normalized.
- The landscape across the region is challenging, but if we want to advance a more prosperous, sustainable, and democratic future for this hemisphere, we must begin by establishing Latin America and the Caribbean as a priority for U.S. foreign policy
- Thank you, and I now turn to the Ranking Member, Mark Green, for his opening statement.

Mr. DEUTCH. These trends are extremely concerning. I'm eager to learn more about how the Bureau is prepared to combat these threats globally, and discuss the strategy produced by the department as a result of legislation written by me and other members of the subcommittee.

Mr. Landberg, we look forward to strengthening our understanding of how the State Department's resources are utilized to counterterrorism and violent extremism and, of course, carry out these policies in accordance with our American values and respect for human rights.

I also hope you'll identify areas where greater congressional support might be needed so we can work together to help keep the American people safe.

And with that, I will recognize Ranking Member Wilson for purposes of making an opening statement.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you, Chairman Ted Deutch, for holding this hearing today.

The Department of State Counterterrorism Bureau has a major role in supporting our partners in combating terrorist extremism and identifying evolving threats.

I appreciate the dedication of the men and women of the State Department to protect American families. Unfortunately, there is much to discuss regarding the global threat of terrorism.

Sadly, we see with the recent attacks in the United Kingdom, the murder of a member of Parliament, David Amess, and the explosion of the bomb Sunday outside the Liverpool's Women's Hospital that the threat is ever present.

Attacks have been perpetrated, beginning with the murderer of 13 Marines in Kabul, from New Zealand to Norway with heinous mass murder at a mosque in Afghanistan confirming the terrorist threat to religious institutions worldwide.

Additionally, despite significant efforts made by the United States and our European partners, terrorist groups are capitalizing on localized civil unrest and gaining ground on the African continent.

Undoubtedly, the catastrophic withdrawal from Afghanistan will present a number of challenges as we see the resurgence of terrorist organizations like al-Qaeda and Islamic State and the emergence of smaller, more extreme offshoots from the Islamic Invitation Alliance.

Sadly, with no remaining U.S. military presence, counterterrorism efforts to confront this rapidly evolving situation will, certainly, be hindered.

Those who think the Taliban terrorists have moderated need not look further than the cabinet that it has now, which includes Sirajuddin Haqqani, senior leader of the murderous Haqqani Network, led by those who have committed some of the worst attacks on the United States and coalition forces with the assassination of Benazir Bhutto, the former prime minister is Islamabad of Pakistan.

The return of Afghanistan as a safe haven for terrorists is occurring today, and we also have persons who were released from Guantanamo as terrorists who now actually serve in the cabinet and today, sadly, in Kabul.

One of the greatest threats to American families continues to be the Iranian regime. Unfortunately, it seems that this Administration's policy is to lift sanctions on the leading State sponsor of terrorism and hope for the best.

Iran has no intention of shifting courses. It continues to export terrorism and missiles around the globe with the mandate of death to America and death to Israel.

Mr. Landberg, your written statement refers to the departure from military-led foreign policy to one led by diplomacy. But as history reminds, one cannot exist without the other. It is peace through strength.

Last week, the Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhimi survived an attempt on his life by an explosive drone, which was carried out by Iranian-backed militias.

Sadly, it's only a matter of time before terrorism returns to America with suicide bombers over the open southern border and weaponized drones capable of attacking any public building.

The United States must maintain our commitment to fighting the evolving threat of terrorism and its causes. It is a global war on terrorism, which we cannot unilaterally exit.

Thank you, Mr. Landberg, for your service and I look forward to hearing from you on the Bureau's goals and where we can work together.

And we have a bipartisan to hear shake leadership between Ted Deutch Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

Mr. DEUTCH. I thank my friend, the ranking member, Mr. Wilson, and I'll now introduce our witness.

Chris Landberg, is the acting principal deputy coordinator for the Bureau of counterterrorism. In addition to this, he also serves as the Deputy Coordinator for crisis response and technical policy, where he provides oversight of the CTE Bureau's Office of technical programs and operations policy, as well as the Office of Crisis Response Preparedness and Special Coordination. A lot of responsibility, Mr. Landberg.

Before joining the CT Bureau, Mr. Landberg held senior positions at our embassy in Bogota, where he helped bolster Colombia's law enforcement, military, and judicial capabilities to assist the country in their fight against crime and drug trafficking, and worked as a senior staffer in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Mr. Landberg, I'll remind you that you should limit your testimony to 5 minutes. Without objection, your prepared remarks will be made part of the hearing record.

Thanks so much for being here, and you're now recognized for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF CHRIS LANDBERG, ACTING PRINCIPAL DEPUTY COORDINATOR, BUREAU OF COUNTERTERRORISM, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Mr. LANDBERG. Chairman Deutch, Ranking Member Wilson, and esteemed members of the subcommittee, I'm pleased to be here today to talk about the State Department Bureau of Counterterrorism's program and policy priorities and discuss the Fiscal Year 2022 resources we need to protect America's security at home and

interests abroad from terrorist threats and also how they align with the Biden-Harris Administration's broader counterterrorism priorities.

Mr. DEUTCH. Mr. Landberg, excuse me. Can you pull the mic a little closer?

Mr. LANDBERG. Sure.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you.

Mr. LANDBERG. Would you like me to start again or continue? Okay.

The Fiscal Year 2022 budget comes at a time when we are shifting from a U.S. military-led counterterrorism approach to one rooted in diplomacy partnerships and multilateral engagement.

The CT Bureau will play a critical role in this evolving approach as we promote counterterrorism cooperation, strengthen partnerships, and build civilian capacity to counter the full spectrum of terrorist threats confronting the United States and our allies.

CT's budget request is not just shaped by U.S. national security interests, but it's also driven by the terrorist landscape which is more dynamic, complex, and fast moving than ever before.

Terrorist groups remain a persistent and pervasive threat despite our great progress in degrading their ability to threaten the U.S. homeland. ISIS' global presence, including that of its branches and networks, continues to grow despite a destruction of its so-called caliphate, and complete—and also our complete liberation of territory it once controlled in Iraq and Syria.

Al-Qaeda and its affiliates also remain an enduring threat, capable of inflicting damage on our allies and global interests, despite significant leadership losses. Iran and its proxies, including Hezbollah, continue to engage in dangerous and destabilizing activity in the Middle East and beyond.

And, finally, we are also facing a major and growing threat from racially or ethnically motivated violent extremist actors.

What are we doing to address these diverse threats? CT, or the CT Bureau, is leading the international diplomatic campaign against ISIS, including the repatriation of foreign terrorist fighters and associated family members. The Office of the Special Envoy to the Defeat ISIS Coalition was formally merged into CT this year, and the CT coordinator is now dual hatted as the U.S. Special Envoy.

The coalition remains central to the international community's efforts against ISIS. In the wake of the tragic suicide bombing in Kabul on August 26th, we quickly convened the D-ISIS coalition leadership and together are developing collective measures to counter ISIS Khorasan, or ISIS-K.

CT is also engaged in mobilizing the international community against al-Qaeda, reminding our partners that the group remains capable and highly dangerous. CT has spearheaded a diplomatic campaign against Hezbollah, urging governments globally to take steps to recognize the group in its entirety as a terrorist organization and to restrict its activities in their countries.

And finally, CT is playing a key role in countering transnational aspects of the REMVE threat. In February, the Secretary designated the CT coordinator as department lead for REMVE-related issues.

We have developed a new comprehensive department strategy and have been involved in the development and implementation of the first ever national strategy to counter domestic terrorism.

Focusing on our capacity-building efforts, as we shift from a military heavy approach and rely more on diplomacy and partners, it'll be even more critical to help these partners build their civilian counterterrorism expertise and capacity.

We are helping them secure their borders to counter terrorist travel, investigate and disrupt terrorist plots, track terrorist financing, bring terrorists to justice, prevent and counter violent extremism, and rehabilitate and reintegrate former terrorists.

Since 2016, Counterterrorism Partnerships Fund, or CTPF, resources have allowed us to surge assistance and make gains with some of our most important partners. The Fiscal Year '22 CTPF request includes funding that will allow us to maintain our successful programs and respond to areas of growing concern.

The Fiscal Year '22 request also includes funding for the personal identification, secure comparison, and evaluation system, or PISCES, program. Additional funding for this program will allow us to enhance efforts of partner countries' law enforcement, foster collaboration with Interpol, and expand the PISCES program.

Our Fiscal Year '22 requests also includes funding for countering violent extremism, or CVE, programs, which are integral to assist our partners to prevent terrorist groups from recruiting new members and help rehabilitate and reintegrate foreign terrorist fighters.

In my written testimony, I provided examples of where our efforts had concrete results.

But, Chairman Deutch, Ranking Member Wilson, protecting the United States and our interests against terrorist threats is our top priority.

We greatly appreciate the resources Congress has appropriated to us in the past fiscal years for this important mission, especially your strong support for CTPF. These resources are vital to ensuring our partners remain committed and have the tools they need to sustain the fight against terrorist organizations. I look forward to your questions and our discussion this morning.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Landberg follows:]

STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD

CHRIS LANDBERG

Acting Principal Deputy Coordinator for Counterterrorism
U.S. Department of State Bureau of Counterterrorism

**HOUSE FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
Subcommittee on the Middle East, North Africa, and Global Terrorism
FY 2022 Budget Hearing**

Written Statement

**Wednesday, November 17, 2021
10:00 AM**

Chairman Deutch, Ranking Member Wilson, and esteemed members of the Subcommittee, I am pleased to be here today to talk about the State Department Bureau of Counterterrorism's (CT) priorities and discuss the Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 resources we need to protect America's security at home and interests abroad from terrorist threats, and how they align with the Biden-Harris Administration's broader counterterrorism priorities.

CT plays a critical role in the U.S. government's efforts to promote counterterrorism cooperation, strengthen partnerships, and build civilian capacity to counter the full spectrum of terrorist threats confronting the United States and our allies, including ISIS, al-Qa'ida (AQ), Iran-backed groups, as well as racially or ethnically motivated violent extremists (REMVE). CT is focused on strengthening our international partners' commitment to the counterterrorism fight. We help them develop and sustain the tools and capabilities they need to effectively counter our mutual terrorist enemies. CT remains at the forefront of international efforts to help partners fulfill their counterterrorism responsibilities to address top global terrorist threats.

The Administration's FY 2022 budget request for the CT Bureau includes \$326.75 million in Nonproliferation, Antiterrorism, and Demining Related Programs (NADR) for the Counterterrorism Partnerships Fund (CTPF), the Antiterrorism Assistance (ATA) program, the Terrorist Interdiction Program (TIP), and \$15 million in Economic Support Funds (ESF) for countering violent extremism (CVE) programs. This request prioritizes funding to advance our long-term capacity-building goals and directly support top counterterrorism priorities. These programs address critical areas, including developing law enforcement capacity: to investigate and prosecute terrorists, to respond to terrorism-related crises in real time, to address aviation and border security, to counter the financing of terrorism; and preventing and countering violent extremism.

In addition, the request also includes \$30.17 million in the Diplomatic Programs account to strengthen the counterterrorism workforce at the State Department. This request includes funding for additional positions that will enable the Bureau to increase oversight and accountability of foreign assistance programs and for additional contractors to support our leadership of the

Coalition to Defeat ISIS. This figure also includes the requirements for the Office of the Special Presidential Envoy for Hostage Affairs.

The FY 2022 budget comes at a time when the overall U.S. government approach to counterterrorism is shifting, as we move away from military-led approaches to ones more rooted in diplomacy, partnerships, and multilateral engagement. CT's budget request is important to the execution of this strategy shift, as the new approach will require considerable investments in our partners' civilian counterterrorism capabilities – exactly the work that CT is focused on.

CT's budget request is not just shaped by U.S. national security interests, but it is also driven by the terrorist landscape, which is more dynamic, complex, and fast-moving than ever before. In that vein, before providing additional detail on our budget request, I'd like to provide a brief overview of the threat.

Terrorist groups remain a persistent and pervasive threat to the United States, allies, and interests abroad. ISIS, AQ, and their affiliates have proven to be resilient and determined, despite the significant progress we have made in degrading their ability to directly threaten the US homeland. They have responded to increased counterterrorism pressure by adapting their tactics and techniques. ISIS's global presence continues to grow despite the complete liberation of territory it once controlled in Iraq and Syria. Globally, ISIS continues to leverage branches and networks across the Middle East, Asia, and Africa to advance its agenda. Some ISIS branches and networks are increasing the volume and lethality of their attacks, particularly in West Africa, the Sahel, and Mozambique, causing more fatalities by ISIS affiliates in Africa in 2020 than in any previous year. We are also concerned about the threat of ISIS in Afghanistan and potential spillover to neighboring countries. AQ also continues to pose a serious threat and has branches – notably AQAP and al Shabaab – that are quite capable of inflicting damage on our allies and on our global interests. This remains the case despite the significant losses of leadership and degraded capacity to execute large scale attacks that AQ has suffered.

In parallel with all of this, Iran, and its proxies – including Hizballah in Lebanon and groups in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen – continue to engage in dangerous and destabilizing activity in the Middle East and beyond. Iran has been funding and arming its proxies – including with sophisticated technology – and enabling attacks across the region.

And finally, we are also facing a major threat from REMVE actors, including those who promote the superiority of the white race. The threat is real, and it is acute: FBI Director Wray elevated REMVE to a “national threat priority” in 2020, the same level as ISIS and AQ. And between 2015 and 2020, the UN Security Council's Counterterrorism Committee tracked a 320 percent increase in REMVE terrorism globally.

Now let me turn to what the State Department is doing to address these diverse threats. The CT Bureau is leading the international diplomatic campaign against ISIS. Structurally, the Office of the Special Envoy to Defeat ISIS was formally merged into CT earlier this year, and the CT Coordinator is now dual hatted as the U.S. Special Envoy to the D-ISIS Coalition. This step has brought additional synergy to the State Department's efforts to counter ISIS and has helped us better align our foreign assistance programs with our diplomatic engagement.

The Coalition, which now includes 83 members, remains central to the international community's efforts against ISIS. One of our signature accomplishments has been to expand the Coalition's focus beyond Iraq and Syria, and to include ISIS threats further afield. Though the number one priority for the Coalition remains countering ISIS in Iraq and Syria, the Coalition is now actively engaged in addressing ISIS threats in Africa and South and Central Asia.

With the formal endorsement of the Coalition's foreign ministers in Rome in June, the U.S. and Italy are developing a stand-alone Africa platform that will work in parallel with the four existing working groups, which include Communications, FTF, Counter ISIS Finance, and Stabilization. We intend for African participation and leadership to be front and center with the Africa Platform and intend to request two African members serve as co-leads with the United States and Italy. We have also requested the co-leads of the previously mentioned working groups consider ways to expand their leadership to include African members as well. We expect the first meeting of the Africa Platform will be on the margins of the next Coalition Political Director-level meeting in Brussels in December.

In the wake of the terrible suicide bombing in Kabul on August 26, we quickly convened the D-ISIS Coalition leadership and asked it to consider how it might leverage its experience and expertise to counter ISIS-Khorasan as well. The working groups have already responded and identified potential efforts against the ISIS-K threat in the Communications Working Group meeting on September 28 and the Foreign Terrorist Fighter (FTF) Working Group on October 13.

With these expanded global efforts, we are most certainly not neglecting the persistent threat of ISIS in Iraq and Syria, including the thousands of FTFs and family members who remain in custody or in displaced person camps. CT is leading the coordination of the diplomatic and logistical pieces of the effort to repatriate these FTFs, working closely with the U.S. interagency and our international partners to successfully repatriate hundreds of FTFs and associated family members to their countries of origin for rehabilitation, reintegration, and prosecution, as appropriate.

We applaud the efforts of our international partners who are also repatriating FTFs and their family members, and we urge other countries to take back their citizens. The situation at the prisons and at the camps is not sustainable and will only grow more challenging over time.

In Iraq, our Operation Inherent Resolve has transitioned firmly into an advisory/enabling role to the Iraqi Security Forces which carry out counter ISIS missions. CT will increase its engagement with civilian-led government ministries and agencies to enhance their counterterrorism capacity and the overall judicial sector to ensure long-term success against ISIS in Iraq.

Separately, we are deeply concerned about the reported drone attack targeting the residence of Iraqi Prime Minister Kadhimi. This apparent act of terrorism, which we strongly condemn, was directed at the heart of the Iraqi state. We are in close touch with the Iraqi Security Forces charged with upholding Iraq's sovereignty and independence, and have offered our assistance as they investigate this attack.

CT is also continuing to lead international efforts against AQ, and to remind our partners that the group remains capable and dangerous. Last year, we brought together 60 countries to discuss threats posed by AQ and endorse guiding principles to combat AQ and its affiliates.

CT has also spearheaded a diplomatic campaign against Hizballah, urging governments to take steps to recognize the group in its entirety as a terrorist organization and to restrict its activities in their countries. These efforts are yielding results – with 14 countries from Europe, South and Central America taking steps in the past several years to sanction, ban, or otherwise restrict Hizballah from operating in their territory.

CT has also taken on the duties of the Special Envoy for Guantanamo Closure, implementing an important Administration priority to responsibly close the detention facility at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

And finally, CT is playing a key role in countering the transnational aspects of the REMVE threat. In response to the FY 2020 NDAA requirements, in February, the Secretary designated the CT Coordinator as the lead for the Department on REMVE-related issues. In this role, we have developed a new comprehensive Department strategy which we submitted to the Hill in June, which outlines our efforts to leverage all of our tools – from sanctions to watchlisting to diplomatic engagement – to counter this threat. CT also leads the Department's efforts to implement the first ever National Strategy to Counter Domestic Terrorism.

And now I'd like to turn more specifically to our capacity building efforts, which are at the heart of our FY 2022 budget request. As the U.S. moves away from a U.S.- and military-led approach to one relying more heavily on partners and diplomacy, it will become even more critical to help our partners build their civilian counterterrorism expertise and capacity. We'll need our partners to be able to secure their borders, investigate and disrupt terrorist plots, track terrorist financing, bring terrorists to justice, prevent and counter violent extremism, and rehabilitate and reintegrate former terrorists.

Let me flesh out some of our key initiatives. The President is requesting \$276.7 million for NADR-ATA in FY 2022. This request encompasses the ATA program primarily implemented by the Bureau of Diplomatic Security, the CTPF, counterterrorism finance programs, and our capacity building efforts through important multilateral partners such as the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF) and the United Nations, among others. The ATA request encompasses the State Department's largest programs to build the counterterrorism law enforcement capacity of our foreign partners.

I'd like to focus for a minute on CTPF. Since 2016, CTPF has allowed us to surge assistance and make gains with some of our most important partners. Reflecting on the past five years, these funds were instrumental in the progress we've made against ISIS, as well as to combat AQ and counter Iran's terrorist activity. To continue to solidify these gains and expand efforts to select countries with emerging terrorism challenges, the Administration is requesting \$105.5 million for in NADR/ATA for CTPF. This request will allow us to maintain our successful programs. For example, CTPF investments led to the establishment of dedicated crisis response

capabilities for Bangladesh, Indonesia, Mali, and Tunisia. These units are successfully translating the skills learned from CTPF-funded training and mentoring to disrupt attacks and arrest terrorist criminals, which ultimately saves lives. Since the beginning, CTPF has also been a key tool in addressing the FTF challenges from Iraq and Syria. In the Western Balkans, CTPF training and assistance helped countries investigate and successfully prosecute 246 FTF cases. And on Iran, our programs are enabling partners in South America to effectively investigate and prosecute Hizballah facilitation cases. In addition to sustaining some of these very successful programs, the FY 2022 CTPF request includes funding that will allow us to respond to areas of growing concern, where we are seeing ISIS and AQ networks expand, such as West Africa and Mozambique. We are also planning to work with countries in Central Asia to strengthen border security efforts as we seek to constrain terrorist movement.

The President's request also includes \$50 million for NADR/TIP. This program funds the Personal Identification Secure Comparison and Evaluation System (PISCES), which deploys cutting edge technology that allows border control officials to screen travelers against terrorism databases in 23 countries. This funding will allow us to enhance efforts of partner countries' law enforcement to detect terrorist use of increasingly sophisticated fraudulent travel documentation, to foster collaboration with INTERPOL, and to provide the PISCES program to new priority partners, especially those where we see significant terrorist transit flows.

As we look to expand and improve PISCES, we are continuing to integrate it with DHS and international organization watchlisting and biometrics technology and programs, and to incorporate emerging technologies designed to defeat increasingly sophisticated efforts by terrorist networks to travel. For example, PISCES has integrated with IOM's MIDAS border management system in Somalia and Guinea and with a private commercial firm in Zambia. We expect to continue this kind of integration work in several other countries in Africa, in the Balkans, and in the Western Hemisphere in the coming years. In Panama, we have integrated with DHS-provided ATS-G and BITMAP programs as well as with INTERPOL's I/24-7 portal to provide host nation immigration officers with near real-time access to critical international databases and analytical tools to scrutinize advance passenger information contained in incoming flight manifests. Integration means better, more effective border security capabilities for our foreign partners and reduced global mobility for terrorists.

In addition to strengthening the capacity of partner government to counter the plotting, violence, and criminal activity perpetrated by terrorists, we also need to assist them to prevent terrorist groups from recruiting new members and pull away those who are headed down the path of radicalization. The President's request includes \$15 million in ESF for CVE programs that build the capacity of government officials, community leaders, including religious figures, and others who have the standing to counter terrorist radicalization and recruitment in their communities. These funds are also integral to our efforts to help our partners rehabilitate and reintegrate former FTFs and their family members, a critical piece of our strategy to address this growing and ongoing threat.

A key component of our ESF investments is supporting international CVE institutions such as Hedayah, Strong Cities Network, and the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF). These institutions are an important part of our approach, they allow us to rally the international community around shared counterterrorism and CVE priorities. As a result of this

approach, we also have seen international donors increase their contributions to these organizations, so the United States' relatively small investments are being matched and exceeded by other key donors such as the European Union, Japan, the Netherlands, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, and Switzerland, among others.

Finally, I'd like to highlight that we recognize that it is critical that our partners adopt a counterterrorism strategy and approach based on the rule of law and respect for human rights. Effective counterterrorism efforts and respect for human rights and the rule of law are inseparable. Research has shown that human rights violations can fuel terrorism, conflict, and instability. CT's law enforcement and justice sector programs seek to advance democratic values and respect for human rights to ensure that counterterrorism efforts don't become counterproductive to achieving national security goals. Our programs also greatly rely on progress that USAID and other international donors make on democracy and governance to address the underlying conditions that are conducive to the spread of terrorism in the first place.

Chairman Deutch, Ranking Member Wilson, protecting the United States and our interests against terrorist threats is our top priority. We greatly appreciate the resources Congress has appropriated to us over the past several fiscal years for this important mission, especially your strong support for CTPF. We have made good, effective use of those resources. They are vital to ensuring that our partners remain committed to the fight and have the tools they need to sustain the fight against ISIS, AQ, and other terrorist organizations.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you very much, Mr. Landberg. We will now move to member questions under the 5-minute rule. I will defer and, therefore, yield to the president of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly and, Mr. Landberg, like you, a former professional staffer from the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Mr. Connolly.

You are recognized for 5 minutes.

Okay. We will come back to Mr. Connolly.

I am now pleased to yield 5 minutes to the gentlelady from North Carolina, Ms. Manning.

Mr. Landberg, I'd like to think that there was no hack into our system today as this CT discussion takes place.

But while we work that out, I'm going to continue to defer and I'm going to yield to my friend, the ranking member, for 5 minutes to ask questions.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Landberg, thank you for being here and, actually, I was looking forward to hearing from President Connolly. So that'll be later.

But as we address issues today, Iran is a State sponsor of terrorism. In fact, it's the leading world sponsor of terrorism. Is that correct?

Mr. LANDBERG. Yes, it is.

Mr. WILSON. And, additionally, we need to confirm that Iran's central bank, its national oil company, its national tanker company, its national petrochemical company, and the other host of banks and companies that today are subject to U.S. sanctions support terrorism. Is that correct?

Mr. LANDBERG. Sir, they're definitely involved with the Iranian government in activities. Whether those specific entities are involved, I'd have to take that question.

Mr. WILSON. And with that, I am concerned that the Biden Administration may be lifting terrorism sanctions on any of these banks or companies as part of an agreement that does not include a behavioral change on terrorism—that is, an agreement focused solely on the nuclear program with no change to Iran's financing of terrorism or the IRJC.

It would be safe to assume these banks and companies would still fund terrorism if there's not sanctions. Is that right?

Mr. LANDBERG. Sir, I'm not aware of alleviating sanctions on any group related to Iran that would be involved in terrorism.

Mr. WILSON. That's encouraging and that's the way it should be in a bipartisan manner.

Additionally, I was visiting the southern border a couple of weeks ago at Del Rio and I learned that names on the terrorist watch list have crossed into the United States. How many people on the terrorist watch lists have crossed the southern border from Mexico into Texas, Arizona, California?

Mr. LANDBERG. Sir, I think for a specific number, I would refer you to DHS. But I'm happy to take the question as well and talk to them.

Mr. WILSON. But there have been terrorist watch list persons coming across. That's correct?

Mr. LANDBERG. So, you know, I know that we work very closely with Mexico to track travel and we have sort of layered defensive

approach internationally. Whether there have been individuals that have crossed I think I would have to refer you to DHS.

Mr. WILSON. And another issue—less than a month ago, the Undersecretary of Defense Colin Kahl discussed with the Senate Armed Services Committee members that intelligence community assessed that both ISIS-K and al-Qaeda intend to conduct external operations, including against the United States. Reports indicate that ISIS-K and al-Qaeda could possess the capability within a year to strike American families in the United States.

What actions are being taken by the Bureau to account for their near-term concerns?

Mr. LANDBERG. Sir, I think Undersecretary Kahl said that they have the intent, not—at the moment, not the capability.

General Mingus, the J3 at the Joint Staff, was with him. Said that the IC assessments about ISIS-K becoming a threat to—external threat to the United States within six to 12 months and AQ within one to 2 years are without pressure.

So I think we are working collectively in the U.S. Government to ensure there is pressure on both of those groups to lengthen those periods where they would be able to do external plotting against the United States.

Mr. WILSON. And what is the status of the Administration urging the European Union as well as other European member States to designate all of Hezbollah as a terrorist organization and to sanction it?

What is the hesitancy of some of our European allies to designate Hezbollah, particularly, obviously, in Lebanon and the threat that it has by way of rockets against the people of Israel?

Mr. LANDBERG. Well, sir, I will say that we have had many discussions with Europeans about not just designating them, the military—what they have designated the military side of Hezbollah.

We have had a lot of success working with partners around the world over the last few years in particular to get them to designate Hezbollah as a whole group. And I would be happy to respond to the question for the record in more detail about what their specific concerns might be.

Mr. WILSON. And it's really sad to me that, in fact, in Latin America only five countries have designated Hezbollah as a terrorist organization.

Are there discussions underway with our regional neighbors to adopt a framework to sanction Hezbollah terrorists that are such a threat to the people of Israel?

Mr. LANDBERG. Yes, sir, there are, and it's been quite successful. In 2018, we started an annual ministerial—Western Hemisphere Ministerial—focused on counterterrorism. We hosted the first one in Argentina, the next one then Colombia, and next spring it's going to be in Peru—in Lima. And those are always opportunities to talk to our counterparts about designating Hezbollah and counter—

Mr. WILSON. And with the issue of Hezbollah also Hamas, with 4,400 rockets this year from Gaza, what's being done to work with our allies and others to sanction Hamas?

Mr. LANDBERG. Sir, well, I believe that Hamas is also a designated organization, and so we work with all of our partners to

counter the activities of these organizations, especially related to their financing.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you very much.

And my time is up but thank you for your service and thank you for the State Department personnel.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you very much, Mr. Wilson.

I believe Representative Manning can now be recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. MANNING. Thank you, Chairman Deutch and Ranking Member Wilson, for organizing today's very important hearing.

It is vital that Congress and the Administration continue to work together to identify and increase dedicated resources to confronting the evolving terrorist threats worldwide.

I want to pick up on something that Ranking Member Wilson was discussing, and, of course, the concerns about Hezbollah and about Hamas, and Mr. Landberg, you did mention that there are efforts to counter the activities of Hamas.

Well, one of the things that I found particularly concerning about the recent conflict in Gaza was the determination that most of the 4,500 rockets that were fired by Hamas at Israel were actually produced in Gaza.

Can you talk to us—you know, you mentioned trying to stop the foreign assistance, but can you talk about whether you—what efforts are being made to make sure that Hamas does not continue to have the ability and the materials to produce weapons in—right there in Gaza?

Mr. LANDBERG. Thank you, Representative. We work really closely with Israel—

Mr. DEUTCH. Is your mic on?

Mr. LANDBERG. Can you hear me?

Mr. DEUTCH. Just make sure your microphone is on. It is. I'll just—I'll move this closer. Sorry.

But we work very closely with Israel on a whole range of counterterrorism initiatives including related to technology that's being used by terrorist groups against Israel and other partners in the region. That includes unaccompanied air vehicles, that includes rockets, and we do quite a bit of work on technological aspects of that.

And so I'd be happy to get into more detail in a different setting or take a question for the record that I can answer in a classified response.

Ms. MANNING. Thank you. And we know—we do want to make sure that humanitarian assistance gets to the Palestinian people who need help. But how can we make sure that that assistance gets to the right place and does not end up in the hands of Hamas for rebuilding tunnels, for example?

Mr. LANDBERG. Thank you. So just generally, when it comes to humanitarian aid, we monitor very closely to make sure that when we have designated groups that that does not impede the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

We're confident that in most or almost all cases that is the case. We're confident that the organizations, which are very experienced, especially working those types of environments that are engaging in humanitarian assistance can work with us to make sure that it

doesn't fall in the wrong hands and definitely gets to the right people.

Ms. MANNING. Thank you. You mentioned that you work very closely with Israel to—on these issues. Can you talk more generally about how does the Bureau of Counterterrorism allocate resources to balance between helping bolster our partners' capabilities to disrupt and dismantle terrorist networks on their own and countering violent extremism to prevent these terrorist threats from taking root in the first place?

Mr. LANDBERG. Thank you. So with Israel, we do not provide assistance because they're a higher income country. So our initiatives with them are more focused on collaboration.

But just generally, we use—we use our assistance to—for a whole range of activities that include everything from prevention, so that's countering violent extremism, to building law enforcement capabilities of our partners so they can actually do counterterrorism crisis response, to also working in the judicial sector to help the—you know, the judicial sector actually do investigations and prosecutions and even work like on the incarceration of terrorists, which would be related to, for example, trying to preclude radicalization in the prisons.

So we work on the whole spectrum of counterterrorism with our partners. With some countries, we focus more on some aspects and in some countries, we—it's the whole spectrum. But we use assistance in every part of the chain of terrorism in building our partners' capabilities.

Ms. MANNING. Thank you. One of the things that we have grown increasingly concerned about is the ability of terrorist groups or would-be terrorist activists interacting on the internet, and terrorist groups have become increasingly sophisticated at using the internet to fuel recruitment and radicalization.

And in recent years we know ISIS has posted videos on TikTokay. Al-Qaeda has developed a new website to disseminate terrorist content around the world.

What is the State Department's strategy for countering this potent source of terrorism and extremism and does the Bureau have the resources necessary to do so?

Mr. LANDBERG. Thank you. That's an excellent question. Terrorists' use of the internet is something we have been focused on for quite a while. It actually affects both sort of a traditional kind of CVE programming in our REMVE programming.

We, generally, are approaching radicalization via the internet by working with social media companies directly often to help them or to encourage them to enforce their terms of service, encouraging them to work with—especially the larger social media companies to work with smaller companies, and then also encouraging those companies to support initiatives through positive content to counter the negative content.

Our experience and research has shown that responding with positive content tends to work best. So terrorists' use of the internet is something that we're very focused on. We work with partners and through multiple organizations.

We recently joined the Christchurch Call to Action to counter radical speech online. And so this is an area of intense focus by both the CT Bureau and the U.S. Government.

Ms. MANNING. Thank you. My time is expired. I yield back.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you, Ms. Manning.

I'm now pleased to yield 5 minutes to Mr. Mast from Florida.

Mr. MAST. Thank you, Mr. Deutch. I appreciate it. Thank you for your time today.

You were with the State Department under President Trump as well?

Mr. LANDBERG. Yes.

Mr. MAST. What was your position when you were with State under President Trump?

Mr. LANDBERG. So I was first—for the first 3 years I was the head of the counternarcotics operation in Bogota.

Mr. MAST. First 3 years—what is that?

Mr. LANDBERG. First 3 years of the Trump administration.

Mr. MAST. Not the year.

Mr. LANDBERG. In the last year I was Deputy Assistant Secretary in the Counterterrorism Bureau.

Mr. MAST. When the embassy in Afghanistan was evacuated in an emergency way, was that under the Trump administration or the Biden Administration?

Mr. LANDBERG. That was under the Biden Administration.

Mr. MAST. When Bagram was evacuated, which was followed on by retreating into a not wholly protected airport, resulting in the death of 13 of our U.S. service members and hundreds of others killed and injured from other countries, was that under the Trump administration or the Biden Administration?

Mr. LANDBERG. It was under the current administration.

Mr. MAST. On April 14th, President Biden announced leaving Afghanistan on September 11th, probably the date most synonymous with terrorism in the United States of America. What did you think about announcing September 11th as a withdraw date from Afghanistan?

Mr. LANDBERG. Well, I have a long history working in and on Afghanistan. I'll be honest, I think, looking back, I wish over many administrations we'd made fewer mistakes and that we had left in a better way.

Mr. MAST. Totally agree. What did you think about leaving on September 11?

Mr. LANDBERG. I guess I wasn't—I think I thought the deadline, really, that we were looking at was August 31st.

Mr. MAST. Okay. President Biden said September 11th. He said that on April 14th.

Mr. LANDBERG. Okay.

Mr. MAST. Let me move to another question. On August 19th, President Biden was doing an interview with George Stephanopoulos and he said, "We will stay until everyone is out." Did we stay until everybody was out?

Mr. LANDBERG. We continue to work to get everybody out.

Mr. MAST. Did we stay?

Mr. LANDBERG. Well, my understanding is that—I think I need to say it this way. My understanding is that determination was

made that if we stayed beyond August 31st it would be more difficult to get everyone out and more dangerous.

So no, when we left not everyone was out. We continue to aggressively get the people out who need to get out, especially American citizens.

Mr. MAST. I thank you for your candor.

I want to move a little bit to the Haqqani Network—the remains of the Haqqani Network. The implications of members of the Haqqani Network, a designated terrorist organization holding positions in the new Taliban government and what you think our engagement in that shadow should be with the Taliban government.

And you can expound on that and there's a number of directions you could go, but I'm asking about the Haqqani—

Mr. LANDBERG. Absolutely. And we're—you know, we're concerned. Siraj Haqqani is the minister of interior. We're, obviously, concerned with that.

We have been very clear at all levels about what we expect from the Taliban.

Mr. MAST. Be more specific, please. You're concerned. That's a big umbrella of things that could be potential problems.

Mr. LANDBERG. So from the President, the Secretary of State, other members of Cabinet, we have been clear with the Taliban what we expect from them, especially on counterterrorism.

What was in the Doha agreement was that they cannot allow Afghanistan to become a safe haven. That includes no training, no financing, no allowing foreign fighters to go back and forth. No external plotting.

That's what we expect, right. That's what—they can earn legitimacy with us and the international community if that's what they fulfill.

So it's on them. The onus is on them. And no, we understand that there are members of their group that are from Haqqani which was a mostly internally focused organization. But our greater concern with regards to terrorism emanating from Afghanistan are ISIS-K and al-Qaeda.

Mr. MAST. You're leading the CT Bureau. That's serious. And so your opinion on this is a valuable opinion. Should the U.S. recognize a government that includes designated terrorists?

Mr. LANDBERG. We have no obligation to recognize the Taliban government. It will be determined over time. They know exactly what they have to do in terms of allowing freedom of movement, allowing people to leave, ensuring protection of human rights and civil liberties, and especially on counterterrorism. They know exactly what they need to do to earn legitimacy over time.

At this moment, we do not feel any obligation to recognize them and it's, generally, been U.S. practice not to do so after a change of government like this.

Mr. MAST. Thanks for your candor.

Mr. DEUTCH. I now yield 5 minutes to Mr. Keating.

Mr. KEATING. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you for your service. I just wanted to delve into counterterrorism finance aspects of your responsibility and, in particular, how does—how would you describe the partnerships that we have,

going forward? Are they continuing to—are we continuing to bolster the capacity for partner countries?

How are we dealing with what is a stronger global threat by working with, particularly, our transatlantic allies as well? Could you go into that in a little greater depth, please?

Mr. LANDBERG. Sure. So counterterrorism finance has been one of our priority lines of effort for a very long time. It's been very successful.

We use designations, in particular, for foreign terrorist organizations, especially designated global terrorist organizations and individuals to help to block terrorist financing and that we work with our partners for them to also designate and, obviously, work within the U.N.

It's been a successful area of cooperation internationally. We have had quite a bit of success. This year, one of the things we have done is we have integrated CTF funding into our broader CTPF line of funding, which allows us to have integrated programs to help build capabilities, not just specifically in counterterrorism financing but, like, we can work with prosecutors in a country to build their broader counterterrorism capabilities but include specific training on counterterrorism financing.

So I think this approach that we're going to be taking, going forward, with the current budget that we have requested, I think, is going to give us more flexibility and have more success.

Mr. KEATING. And, generally, how is the—what do you determine—what are you seeing in terms of white supremacist type extremism behavior? How are you able to contract?

I know that it's happening, expanding. We have our own issues in the U.S. but also Central Eastern Europe and that expanding area. How do you see some of that cooperation going?

Mr. LANDBERG. I'm sorry. I think I heard you ask about—was it REMVE—related terrorism? Is that what you were asking? Sorry.

Mr. KEATING. White identity terrorism.

Mr. LANDBERG. White identity terrorism?

Mr. KEATING. Yes.

Mr. LANDBERG. Yes. So we have a long history of working on counter violent extremism and we're building on a lot of the lessons learned, which also include our countering terrorists' use of the internet.

So with REMVE, or white identity terrorism, we are working closely with partners. But, essentially, we're using designations just like we do elsewhere. We're trying to block travel. We're using diplomatic engagement.

There are a number of international organizations that we have helped to create, which are ways we can build capabilities of partners to deal with REMVE or violent extremist organizations and, you know, we're also building capabilities directly.

And then we started something that we modeled on a really successful program we have in countering Hezbollah, which is a law enforcement forum where we bring together law enforcement partners, especially from countries like some of our European partners, to focus on trends and share information.

We are doing that in the REMVE space for white identity terrorism as part of that where we're bringing together—you know,

we'll have DHS and DOJ on our side along with State Department and they'll have their equivalents, and they'll come and share information about how we can counter that——

Mr. KEATING. Has there been more difficulty in that regard in areas where there's been some democratic backsliding in terms of the rule of law issues because of the work with prosecutors and work with their criminal justice investigators? You know, have you noticed any slippage due to democratic backsliding in that enforcement cooperation and participation?

Mr. LANDBERG. So I think there—when we looked at, for example, that sub-Saharan Africa space, you know, there's some concerns. When it comes to our assistance in, first of all, human rights, and civil liberties are built into everything we do. We do a lot of vetting related to that.

So when there might be concerns, we are going to react really quickly to try to pressure our partners to change their approach or we have to discontinue our work in that area.

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

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you, Mr. Keating.

I'm now pleased to yield 5 minutes to Mr. Burchett.

Mr. BURCHETT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I, too, share your passion for, I guess, hatred of neo-Nazis and all that that represents. My mama lost her brother fighting the Nazis in the Second World War and I'm constantly reminded of that. I've got a 48-star flag that was draped over his casket.

Not a day went by that my mama didn't refer to her brother, Roy, and so I appreciate that and anything I can do to sign on anything I would appreciate that opportunity, brother. I really would.

Sir, I've asked this question, and thanks for being here, brother. I've asked this question in the past committee hearings and I really didn't receive a satisfactory answer.

There are recent reports that U.S.-trained former Afghan security personnel are joining ISIS-K because they're the strongest group still fighting the Taliban. How do you think this plays out in Afghanistan and how does this complicate our efforts to stamp out terrorism in the country?

Mr. LANDBERG. Thank you. I think—again, we're going to have a classified briefing in early December. I think some sensitive issues like that is something we could talk about at that point.

I'd say, generally, it's a dynamic environment and there are, you know, people joining different groups. Our focus is on countering ISIS-K, ensuring that, you know, they do not develop external operations plotting capabilities, and over the longer term, making sure that al-Qaeda does not—is not able to use Afghanistan as a safe haven to do the same. We are working with all our partners to make that happen.

So we're very focused on that. ISIS-K, what they're doing on recruiting, I think, maybe—and what happened after the—some of the prison breakouts we could talk about that in early December in that briefing.

Mr. BURCHETT. Okay. OK, this is the next question. Kind of hits close to home to me because it was—because of a constituent of mine. It was Staff Sergeant Ryan Knauss.

He was listed as the last person to die of the 13. He was the last person to actually die in Afghanistan, and he died, of course, when the Hamid Karzai International Airport was attacked, and the botched withdrawal, whatever.

But it's been reported that the suicide bomber in the attack was released from the Bagram airbase when the Taliban took control. What are the near-term and long-term counterterrorism implications of these prison breaks conducted by the Taliban during their summer offensive?

Mr. LANDBERG. Thank you. That was a devastating attack and there were 13 enlisted killed and many wounded as well, and I think I want to point that out. And I think we need to be worried about the breakouts and how that led to increasing the ranks at ISIS-K. The prison itself was the called the DFIP.

The Detention Facility in Parwan near Bagram was run by the Afghans, and when they left their posts and they got out, I mean, you know, many of those prisoners have now joined the ranks of ISIS-K. It's something that we're really closely monitoring and I think—I'll say this, that I think the Taliban are very motivated to go after ISIS-K as well.

And so I think what we're seeing is increased activity by ISIS-K activity for sure within Afghanistan, but increased Taliban countering—efforts to counter that threat.

So we're looking at it really closely. I think our priority is always going to be the external operations plotting, which at this point we do not fully see. But, certainly, it's our major concern, going forward.

Mr. BURCHETT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back the remainder of time. But I would say that we still do not have the proper refreshments in the break rooms and I just want to bring that to your attention.

And I put that in the form of a motion. A Dr. Pepper or a Mountain Dew would go a long ways, Mr. Chairman. I know you're a giver. So I appreciate that.

[Laughter.]

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you, Mr. Burchett.

Mr. BURCHETT. Thank you, brother, for—

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you, member, and I will take that under advisement.

I'll now yield 5 minutes to Mr. Vargas from California.

Mr. VARGAS. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I didn't realize you were a giver like that. Fantastic.

Director, I appreciate very much your testimony today. I do want to ask you some questions, if I could, about potential help that we could get.

Just recently I returned from a congressional delegation to Indonesia, and I didn't realize that they had a ministry of religious affairs. Are you familiar with that ministry?

Mr. LANDBERG. I'm sorry. In what country was that, sir? I couldn't quite—

Mr. VARGAS. Indonesia.

Mr. LANDBERG. Indonesia?

Mr. VARGAS. Yes.

Mr. LANDBERG. Did you hear me? Sorry. I wasn't personally aware of that.

Mr. VARGAS. Okay. The reason I ask that, it was fascinating, really. When I first heard of the ministry, I suspected it wasn't going to be something very positive. But turned out something I found very interesting.

What they attempt to do through this ministry and, frankly, everyone that I met in the ministry was Muslim, they attempt to harmonize the religions in Indonesia.

In particular, they try to make sure that there's no radicalization, and they seem to have been pretty effective so far, and that's why I was curious if you had any information about that or any collaboration with them.

Mr. LANDBERG. Sir, I'm happy to take that question back. We have a really strong counter violent extremism team. They work with a lot of different organizations that work with communities and including religious leaders on exactly this type of counter radicalization efforts, and I'm sure that they are familiar with this and I'd be happy to give you more detail.

Mr. VARGAS. I think it is important to take a look at what other nations are doing. As you know, Indonesia is the largest Muslim nation in the world, and they haven't been afflicted with all the terrorism that we have seen in other countries and the Middle East.

And, again, speaking to the ministers, the minister and his aides, I was very impressed with what they do to try to harmonize and also to take a look at the troublemakers and either work with them or have them under surveillance.

But again, I think it's been very effective for them.

Mr. LANDBERG. Sir, I wanted to point out that Indonesia is actually a member of the Global Counterterrorism Forum, the GCTF, which is an organization we set up years ago.

Been highly successful in bringing many countries—it's about 30 members, kind of core members. They coordinate on exactly this type of thing. So Indonesia has actually been a leader in the GCTF including on these issues.

Mr. VARGAS. I would also bring up that we met with the foreign minister, who's a woman, and we talked to her about having her meet with Taliban and have a stronger presence.

I mean, it's very fascinating to be in such a Muslim country and have so many women involved in government and have a woman in charge of the foreign ministry and super capable, super impressive, and very, very well respected in her country and, certainly, in the region.

We should team up with her more and more to see if we can help in Afghanistan with women and with girls. I think she also would be a great force to make sure that there isn't the radicalization that you see in other countries.

Mr. LANDBERG. Well, thank you. Certainly, I'll take that back. I think, just generally, when we think about rehabilitation and reintegration of radicalized individuals or foreign fighters that are returning to their homelands, women often play a really key role both in the helping to rehabilitate and reintegrate, but also just in catching or getting ahead of the whole radicalization cycle early on.

So in all of our counter violent extremism work, women play a key role. And we also are working with women in law enforcement, and one of the things we have been really pressing, we have an empower program where we press for more high level professionalization of women law enforcement members. So it's two areas that we have been working on pretty consistently.

Mr. VARGAS. And last, I would say this. I heard your comments and responses to Congresswoman Manning about Israel, and I hope we do collaborate closely with them. I think they're a great, of course, ally of ours, a great friend.

And I hope that we do more and more work with them because I think, again, they do an excellent job. They're in a very dangerous neighborhood, and we're very good friends, obviously. And so, anyway, I hope that our collaboration becomes closer and closer.

I know you've said that because they are a higher income nation we do not give them much financial support. But, certainly, I hope we get more collaboration with them. I know they're anxious to work with us.

Mr. LANDBERG. Yes, they do not need the financial support, but we collaborate both on specific initiatives but also just generally the very close cooperation. Israel faces a lot of terrorism-related threats, Hezbollah being just one of them, and I mentioned what we're doing on countering Hezbollah's activities globally.

So I think, you know, there's really close cooperation just between our governments on counterterrorism issues, but specifically with the CT Bureau we interact with our Israeli counterparts on a regular basis.

Mr. VARGAS. My time is up. I appreciate that very much. Thank you. Continue—and I hope you continue that.

Again, Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity.

Mr. DEUTCH. My pleasure. Thank you, Mr. Vargas.

Mr. Kinzinger, you're recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. KINZINGER. Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for being here, everybody.

I'm going to ask a couple of questions. I'm sorry if they've been repeated. I, unfortunately, had other commitments and I couldn't be on for the whole hearing. But appreciate your willingness to be here.

One of the first things I want to say is I think we need to continue. For some reason, it's always been kind of slow to progress, but we need to continue to push for alliances with India, particularly in the region that we're talking about, given how difficult that is.

I want to ask you a few questions about Pakistan. I think it's hard to discuss the failures in Afghanistan without Pakistan. Over the past two decades, we have seen every administration attempt to appease Islamabad.

A few months ago, there were reports of Pakistani drones helping the Taliban fight against both Afghan forces and the National Resistance Front in the Panjshir Valley.

How can we hold Pakistan accountable for the Taliban's armed coup? And I think that's an important point to keep in mind. The legitimately elected government of Afghanistan is not the Taliban.

So how can we hold them accountable for the coup of a democratically-elected government and should the Administration reconsider Pakistan's status as a major non-NATO ally?

Mr. LANDBERG. Thank you. So some of this I'd be happy to get into in more detail in early December when we have our classified session. But I'll say this.

I mean, Pakistan has played a complex role in all of this, has suffered greatly as well, has serious concerns about terrorism activity emanating—and not just terrorism activity, but instability emanating from Afghanistan.

So they are an important country for us to work with and I believe as in the SASC hearing when Under Secretary Kahl was discussing how—you know, we work closely with Pakistan on everything related to doing over-the-horizon counterterrorism.

So, you know, that is an important partnership, going forward. We're actually trying to enhance our discussions, specifically with the State Department lead with Pakistan on counterterrorism.

That said, you know, we're very clear on our expectations for Pakistan and we'll work with them closely where we can. There are other areas where our interests might diverge and then we'll be clear about that and we'll, you know, make sure that we're defending, you know, United States core values and interests.

Mr. KINZINGER. Well, let me ask—you mentioned the over-the-horizon capabilities. I think there's no doubt that, you know, leaving Afghanistan, which I opposed, but I understand there's, you know, positions on both sides.

We are where we are. But we have lost a lot of contact, obviously, with Afghan Special Forces, intel assets, and a lot of real view into the rise of extremism. We tout this over-the-horizon capability.

Is the Administration, in your view, committed to defending the homeland should a threat arise out of Afghanistan, a real threat to the United States?

And let me add to that, where do you see—given the difficulties we have had, where do you see Afghanistan in five or 10 years, in your mind?

Mr. LANDBERG. So the first answer is yes, I believe the Administration is extremely committed to ensuring, and I think the President, certainly, Secretary of State have both said and I think Secretary Austin as well have been very clear that we will do what's necessary to ensure that we're disrupting, deterring, and degrading any terrorist threat that would—to the United States in particular.

And so, yes, that commitment is there. I would like to point out that when it comes to the Counterterrorism Bureau, when we are working on over-the-horizon activities, a lot of what we do is actually counterterrorism cooperation with countries in the region.

So our focus is really more on helping our partners in the region control their borders, you know, disrupt any possible plotting, deter foreign fighter flows crossing their borders, and improve their law enforcement capabilities.

So that's where we focus. Where Afghanistan goes in 5 years depends completely on whether the Taliban is willing to meet the expectations of not just the United States but, really, the international community and what they need to do. And I did mention

what they were before, and I'd be happy to go through that again. But—

Mr. KINZINGER. Yes, that's fine. Look, I appreciate that. I know it's a tough position. I do want to mention in the last 30 seconds I have I read an article today—I forget which—where it was at, but it was talking about the mental health impacts on State Department employees.

And I think it's important to point that out. You know, as a military guy, we get a lot of focus of, you know, mental health effects on the military, rightfully so, you know, law enforcement, everybody.

But I think, you know, given the—really, the tragedy of what happened in Afghanistan at the end, you know, thinking of these employees on the phone dealing with these issues, I do think it's important to mention.

And so please pass my best to everybody and thank you for being here.

Mr. LANDBERG. Thank you. We have all been working on Afghanistan for years, very committed, some of us—maybe me—obsessed. It's been a hard period but everybody's been volunteering, doing overnights and work very hard. Very proud of my fellow State Department colleagues.

Mr. KINZINGER. Me, too. Thank you, sir. I yield back.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you, Mr. Kinzinger. I want to associate myself with Mr. Kinzinger's comments and concern and appreciation for our dedicated State Department employees.

And I'm pleased to yield to Ms. Jacobs for 5 minutes.

Ms. JACOBS. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you for letting me unofficially join here—your subcommittee.

Mr. Landberg, thank you for testifying today on this topic. It's great to see you again.

I want to dig into how the Bureau is incorporating lessons learned and the latest research. As I think we might have talked about, when I worked at the State Department, we did a study on the factors that drive violent extremism, which found that much of the conventional wisdom on what causes violent extremism is not actually validated.

So it's not poverty. It's not income inequality. It's not madrassa education. Rather, we found that there's empirical evidence of the link between violent extremism and factors like State repression and an absence of civil liberties.

Since I left the State Department, there have been multiple studies that have continued to come out that show that one of the key drivers of violent extremism is the abuse or the perception of abuse by government authorities, including a 2018 study funded by the EU and the U.N. that found that the most determining factor contributing to vulnerability or resilience to violent extremism in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger is the experience or perception of abuse and violation by government authorities.

The 2017 study done by UNDP found that confronting extremism with heavy-handed or extrajudicial law enforcement is likely to backfire by inflaming real or perceived socioeconomic cleavages and exclusionist narratives that are used by violent extremist groups.

And so I was wondering how is the Bureau incorporating lessons learned and research and analysis on preventing and countering violent extremism into your policies and programs? And to what extent are you looking at the abuses or perception of abuses as root causes of violent extremism and how you're doing your program design and overall strategy?

Mr. LANDBERG. Thank you, Congresswoman. I absolutely agree with you, and I think that's how we see it, that human rights violations and restrictions on civil liberties are, certainly, drivers of radicalization. Absolutely.

And I think what we see is a lot of—when we talk about ISIS and al-Qaeda expanding in places like sub-Saharan Africa, they're moving into places where there's lack of good governance. They're moving into places that are uncontrolled. But also they're taking advantage of exploiting local grievances often to build their brand.

So I think that's something we're really seeing. Monitoring and evaluation efforts, I think, is one of the big successes of the last few years for the Counterterrorism Bureau.

We have dramatically increased how we're both doing the internal monitoring and we have added resources, and in our budget request we're actually requesting three more positions that will help us with program oversight.

And then on the evaluation side, we do a lot of contracting now, and I'll just point out one contract that we had with RAND where they evaluated our prison programs, and they actually found out that a lot of what we were doing, I think what—like what you're talking about was probably not that effective.

And so we used that study to then help alter how we're approaching, you know, deradicalization or counter radicalization efforts in the prisons. And so that's one example of how we're trying to do a better job and I think we have been improving every year.

Ms. JACOBS. Well, that is music to my ears and, certainly, a change from when I worked with you all.

As I think it's actually on the M&E, if you could talk a little bit more about how you're measuring the effectiveness, what key indicators are you looking at, what surveys are you using, and, in particular, how are you measuring outcomes versus just the outputs?

Mr. LANDBERG. So I think a fulsome answer is probably maybe in writing.

Ms. JACOBS. Sure.

Mr. LANDBERG. I'll be happy to take that. What I can tell you is that we have multiple contracts ongoing to evaluate different aspects of our programs, and what we—what we're trying to do is measure—we have—in our program design we have what the outcomes are and when we're not meeting those outcomes or where we see problems or when we see our partners aren't fulfilling their side of the deal and when we see concerns, for example, related to, you know, human rights, that's when we're able to use these results to alter.

Happy to give you also summaries of those evaluations. The evaluations themselves are often very sensitive. But happy to give you more information.

Ms. JACOBS. Wonderful. I will look forward to reading that.

I guess just on that point, what kind of feedback loops exist between local civil society organizations and the folks in D.C. who are designing these programs and either the M&E portion or just the program design itself?

Mr. LANDBERG. Okay. So, really quickly. Sorry. There are multiple organizations we work through. I think you're familiar with Hedayah, Strong Cities Network, GCERF, the International Institute of Justice, and, obviously, the GCTF, which is sort of like the mothership for all those organizations, and we do constant program implementation and evaluation, and then there's natural feedback loops in those organizations.

So I think that's where you see it happening and I think it's been fairly—a good process and I think which is why we're helping to implement sort of better CV programming, trying to then also use that when we're looking at the REMVE threat as well.

Ms. JACOBS. Wonderful. Well, thank you. I will look forward to reading your written response, and I yield back.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you, Ms. Jacobs. Thanks for joining us today.

I'll now yield 5 minutes to Mr. Schneider of Illinois.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Thank you, Chairman Deutch, and thank you for having this important hearing. I'm very grateful. And Mr. Landberg, thank you for sharing your thoughts.

I want to start with in June of this year the Biden Administration released a national strategy for countering domestic terrorism. Can you elaborate a little bit on how the CT Bureau's role—what role CT Bureau played in the strategy?

Mr. LANDBERG. Yes, sir, and very easily. Our authorities start at the water's edge and look out. So our involvement was everything related to the transnational linkages of domestic groups with international groups.

So that was our focus on domestic strategy. So we weren't the main piece of this. But we played a very important role in tracking of all that international activity of concern.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Great. And just building on that, the Bureau's actions on REMVE, you know, internationally fighting terrorism in other countries, how does the interagency coordination look in that respect?

Mr. LANDBERG. You said the interagency coordination?

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Interagency. Yes.

Mr. LANDBERG. I think excellent. One of the things that we are working on very closely with DHS and DOJ, as I mentioned a little bit earlier, a law enforcement forum focused on REMVE.

So this would be something that we'd work, especially with European partners, but partners around the world that are dealing with, like, sort of a growing REMVE actor problem.

And in this is going to be, you know, all three of our agencies working together. It's a forum that's useful for sharing information, information about trends, and then coordinating our activities.

So I think that's a perfect example of how, I think, you have very strong interagency coordination.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Great, thank you. And, you know, expanding on that, we have our own issues here in the United States with REMVE. How does the U.S. response here at home and the impli-

cations it's having at home, how does that affect the work you're doing with countries abroad?

Mr. LANDBERG. Well, the way it affects it is, I think, what we have seen is growing transnational linkages among these groups. So that is our main concern.

So there's communication, which is quite hard to track. There is efforts to train and share information that's helpful between these groups.

So this growing transnational connectivity is what we're most focused on and that's why the State Department's and, especially, the CT Bureau's work is enabling our partners in building their capabilities, and using other tools, for example, like designations and also countering terrorist travel are so important.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Sure, and are there things that we can do in Congress? You have the tools currently, but are there other tools or other steps that Congress can take to help assist that effort?

Mr. LANDBERG. Sir, I guess maybe the best thing would be for me to respond to you in writing on that.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Fair enough. Let me shift gears and talk about the Middle East. We see continuing cause for concern by actions Iran is taking not just in their nuclear program, which is alarming enough, but their support for terrorism groups like Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza, their actions in Syria and Iraq and Yemen as well.

You touched on this in your opening statement, again, specifically the work you're doing to try to push back. Are there things that we might be able to do to advance that work as well?

Mr. LANDBERG. Yes, sure. So we have multiple—you know, Iran is a State sponsor of terrorism. We have multiple initiatives ongoing to work to counter those activities—the terrorist related activities that Iran might be supporting or is supporting.

That includes all of our counter Hezbollah work, which it's a designated organization so a lot of it is counterterrorism finance related to Hezbollah where we work really closely with many partners.

Just over the last few years, we've—14 of our partners have designated Hezbollah in its entirety. We have a Western Hemisphere Initiative where we have annual summits where we share information and talk about Hezbollah activities.

We also are working to counter different groups that they might be supporting. We have designated many of the organizations that you're talking about, including what we call Iran-aligned militia groups, or IMGs, or Shi'a groups operating in Iraq—for example, KH and AH.

So through designations, through work with our partners, and we have—I think we have pretty extensive multiple lines of effort to counter those activities.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Great. Staying on that for a second and, in particular, Hezbollah, 7 years ago, I was proud to help author the Hezbollah International Financing Prevention Act.

We're 7 years later. Do you have a sense of how that act is holding up the test of time? Are there more steps that we can or should be taking to box in and constrain Hezbollah and support Lebanon?

Mr. LANDBERG. So I have experts on that, I think, to get you a precise answer. But I will say that just generally on counter Hezbollah financing activities, we have made pretty significant strides, especially in Latin America, but also with our European partners to counter Hezbollah's illicit economic activities, just broadly.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Great. Thank you. And with that, I'm out of time. Again, Chairman Deutch, thanks for holding this hearing. And I yield back.

Mr. LANDBERG. My pleasure.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Schneider.

I yield to Mr. Cicilline of Rhode Island.

Mr. CICILLINE. Thank you, Chairman Deutch and Ranking Member Wilson, for holding today's hearing on a really important issue. And thank you to Mr. Landberg for being here today and for the work of the State Department's Bureau of Counterterrorism in countering violent extremism, which is making the United States and the entire world a safer place.

Mr. Landberg, I want to begin, I serve as the chair of the Antitrust Subcommittee and we have done a lot of work in challenging the large technology platforms in their—the use of these platforms as it relates to disinformation and radicalization.

And so my first question is, are there countries that are conducting really good or successful online counterterrorism programs that we can learn from or examples we should look at?

Mr. LANDBERG. I believe, certainly, there are. Recently we joined the Christchurch Call to Action and, you know, I think working with New Zealand and France on those activities.

I think there are countries where we can learn. I think I do want to caution that, you know, for example, related to designations and using that kind of thing to counter some of the activities of these groups, we cannot go after hate speech on its own, right, and some of our partners can.

So some of the capabilities that our partners have in the United States because of the First Amendment is, you know, that's not something we're going to do. So we're going to—we tend to be more focused on working with social media companies to encourage them to take action.

And, you know, I think when we joined the Christchurch Call to Action, we made really clear that when we were joining it that that meant that we were going to continue to ensure that freedom of expression was—you know, continued to be protected.

So I think there's some differences sometimes in our authorities. But I think there's also a lot of information sharing going on, and we're learning from our partners.

Mr. CICILLINE. Thank you. And, again, recently released documents by whistleblower Francis Haugen suggests that Facebook knowingly used recommendation systems and algorithms to push some of its users toward fringe ideologies and extremist groups.

And given the widespread use of platforms like Facebook and, really, the kind of failure of Congress, at least so far, to regulate them in any significant way, can you just describe what kinds of challenges that these practices create for your work in countering online threats and deradicalization efforts and what Congress can

do to help mitigate some of the effects you're seeing from these practices?

I mean, where their business model incentivizes them to share the most provocative, most dangerous, most untrue content because it has the deepest engagement.

Mr. LANDBERG. So I'll partly reiterate what I said earlier. I think, you know, we are working with these social media companies to strongly encourage them to enforce their terms of service, which in every case prohibits hate speech and the kind of radicalizing speech.

That's our approach. We have a number of organizations that we work with, including the U.N. but there's also a group called GIFCT, and in these organizations we work with them as a group to try to get them to do so.

That's the right approach. One of the things we try to do is help them—encourage them to support the creation of positive content also to counter the negative content.

Mr. CICILLINE. But when you say, you know, you're working with these platforms to encourage them to, you know, follow their own policies, I mean, are there things—I mean, it seems as if you shouldn't be at the mercy of their willingness to do this because what we have seen over and over and over again is they are motivated by a single objective, to grow their companies, increase their profits, increase user engagement regardless of the content, and they have displayed no willingness to curate the content in any way which protects the public good or which reduces violence or limits the sharing of radical false information.

And so, I mean, clearly, you must have thought about having some tools that Congress could give you to not just nudge them but to prevent them from being platforms that, in fact, facilitate deep radicalization in this country.

And what I'm asking you—and if you do not have thoughts today I'd ask you to give it some thought—because we have a responsibility. We can no longer just sort of hope and prod and push and wish that they are going to prevent their platforms from being used to facilitate violence and radicalization and real harm in our country and around the world.

We have got to make them stop playing that role and I just—I think—again, I appreciate your effort to try to make them follow their—but that's not working. These platforms are, you know—so I do not know if you have some thoughts on—I do not mean to take—

Mr. LANDBERG. Well, I think they're probably listening to you right now. So I think, you know, it's in their interest to do what you're talking about, to limit hate speech, limit efforts to use their platforms to radicalize individuals, especially radicalize them to violence.

We're going to keep working with them and keep pressing them to do the—

Mr. CICILLINE. As you point out, they have not—

Mr. LANDBERG. Happy to provide more.

Mr. CICILLINE. Right. Great. Thank you so much. And I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. LANDBERG. My pleasure.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you, Mr. Cicilline, for your excellent line of questioning. I'm going to followup on where Mr. Cicilline left off as we bring this hearing to a close.

Mr. Landberg, you're the acting principal deputy coordinator for the Bureau of Counterterrorism, and what you said today and just now with Mr. Cicilline was that we have been encouraging the social media companies to take action, that we have strongly encouraged them to enforce their terms of service, and that we have encouraged them to post positive content to counter the negative content.

This is a hearing on counterterrorism. You understand—and I'm grateful for all you do and your thoughtful answers today and your dedication to public service. I do not want you to take this the wrong way.

But I want—I just want to spend a moment reflecting on the fact that we have seen this increase in REMVE terrorism and white identity terrorism, so much of it lone actor, so much of it driven online, right? That's correct, right?

Mr. LANDBERG. Correct.

Mr. DEUTCH. And the response from the Counterterrorism Bureau, trying to prevent acts of terror against American citizens, is that we're strongly encouraging them to enforce their own terms of service.

I'm going to join with Mr. Cicilline in asking you to give a lot of thought to what more can be done beyond the mere encouragement that we have been offering, because I know, given the thoughtful answers that you've given today and all of—and your deep knowledge of these issues and all of the ways that you've used the many tools that you do have here and around the world to help keep America safe that you would use more tools, if you had them. That's clear, as you're really good at what you do.

But if what we're doing is strongly encouraging companies to enforce their own terms of service, then you need some more tools.

Mr. LANDBERG. Sir, I probably should have mentioned, using our foreign assistance funds we work to build the capabilities of a lot of our law enforcement partners to do online investigations, for example, on the dark web, you know, as part of their investigations and, you know, going after malafide actors.

So we do use foreign assistance to do that. When it came to the social media companies, that's why I was answering in that way.

Mr. DEUTCH. No. No. I understand, and I—do you work—Mr. Landberg, can you just share—since we're wrapping this up, is there anything you can share with us more specifically about how you encourage these companies to enforce their terms of service, what you share with them in terms of the real threats to our Nation if they fail to live up to their responsibility, even to enforce their own terms of service?

Mr. LANDBERG. Well, I think this has been mainly with the social media companies an effort to work collectively with them to deal with this problem, recognizing that there are some larger companies that have more capabilities than smaller companies.

So we have been working with them through the organization I was telling you about, GIFCT, also through the U.N. group that we work with to address this issue.

As far as trying to force them to do it, I mean, no, we're working collaboratively with them. We work with partners overseas using foreign assistance.

In many cases, we have helped—for example, we worked with the Philippines police. They were tracking online radicalization efforts. Started tracking certain individuals using our training and assistance and actually were able to foil a building plot.

So, I mean, I think we have had success in that respect.

Mr. DEUTCH. What I'm getting at, just to try to be a little more specific, is when I—and I know you're working with them and I appreciate that, and I appreciate that—I readily acknowledge that the companies do not want their services to be used to create dangerous situations and acts of terror.

But what I'm—what I'm asking is what do you—what do you provide to them? In those conversations, what is it that you're sharing with them to encourage them to take action? What is it that you're warning them might happen if they do not enforce their terms of service?

Mr. LANDBERG. So I do not think that we have been very clear about punitive actions.

Mr. DEUTCH. No. No. I'm not—I'm not asking you about—I'm approaching this from a cooperative—I acknowledged the cooperative effort and I'm not—I am curious to know, and we have asked you to think about additional tools that you might need, but from a cooperative standpoint, what—encouraging them to take these actions, what is it that you're presenting to them?

What is it that you're showing them that should lead them to conclude that they need to redouble their efforts to enforce their terms of service and to take action when there's dangerous content?

Mr. LANDBERG. Yes. So we're, certainly, sharing with them what we know is going on in terms of terrorists' use the internet. So we do have that dialog about trends we see, how terrorists are using the internet, what groups that we're most concerned about, and how they're operating.

And so, yes, there is that dialog, for sure.

Mr. DEUTCH. And then, finally, there are—there are lots of groups, NGO's, who have their own various forms of expertise who also work with providing information to social media companies.

Do you interact with those groups? Is there a coordinated effort among your Bureau and among the NGO's who are focused on these issues to provide as much information as possible to these companies about what's actually happening?

Mr. LANDBERG. Sir, the extent there's a lot of coordination going on, the extent of that in how much we work with NGO's, I'd have to get back to you.

Mr. DEUTCH. Okay. I am—I would ask that you do.

And just very—the last question on this topic of REMVE and white identity terrorism, you talked about designations and blocking travel.

Mr. LANDBERG. Yes.

Mr. DEUTCH. How many groups have been designated? Have there been actions taken to prevent individuals from traveling to our country or elsewhere?

Mr. LANDBERG. Yes. We have designated one group, the Russian Imperial Movement, and we are always looking for opportunities to do more designations, both as groups and also for individuals.

Designations is complicated with REMVE actors. They've learned lessons from ISIS and al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups. They're more diffuse, unclear command and control. Often, they use end-to-end-encrypted applications to, you know, hide their communication.

So it's more complex. But we're absolutely looking at opportunities to designate more.

On terrorist travel, we have put in place a layered security system worldwide working with partners, and we integrate names of known suspected terrorists into those data bases, working with our partners to prohibit travel.

Mr. DEUTCH. Great. Well, Mr. Landberg, I really want to thank you. I'm grateful for your appearance today. Really appreciative of your very thoughtful answers. I think that I can speak on behalf of the members in expressing our gratitude for that and as I said before, immensely grateful for your public service.

I will remind all of the members that additional questions to the extent that any of the members have them should be submitted within five business days, and we'll ask you to respond to those questions in writing.

And with that, this hearing is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:34 a.m., the committee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING NOTICE
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6128

Subcommittee on the Middle East, North Africa, and Global Counterterrorism

Ted Deutch (D-FL), Chair

November 17, 2021

TO: MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

You are respectfully requested to attend an OPEN hearing of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, to be held by the Subcommittee on the Middle East, North Africa, and Global Counterterrorism in Room 2172 of the Rayburn House Office Building and via Cisco WebEx (and available live on the Committee website at <https://foreignaffairs.house.gov/>):

DATE: Wednesday, November 17, 2021

TIME: 10:00 a.m., EST

SUBJECT: The FY22 Budget: State Department Counterterrorism Bureau

WITNESSES: Mr. Chris Landberg
* Acting Principal Deputy Coordinator
Bureau of Counterterrorism
U.S. Department of State

By Direction of the Chair

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MINUTES OF SUBCOMMITTEE ON Middle East, North Africa, and Global Counterterrorism HEARING

Day Wednesday Date 11/17/21 Room 2172/Cisco Webex

Starting Time 10:11 Ending Time 11:34

Recesses 0 (____to____) (____to____) (____to____) (____to____) (____to____) (____to____)

Presiding Member(s)

Chairman Theodore E. Deutch

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TITLE OF HEARING:

The FY22 Budget: State Department Counterterrorism Bureau

SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

See Attached

NON-SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT: (Mark with an * if they are not members of full committee.)

Rep. Sara Jacobs

HEARING WITNESSES: Same as meeting notice attached? Yes ☒ No ☐

(If "no", please list below and include title, agency, department, or organization.)

STATEMENTS FOR THE RECORD: (List any statements submitted for the record.)

QFR - Rep. Sara Jacobs

IFR - Rep. Ted Deutch

TIME SCHEDULED TO RECONVENE _____

or

TIME ADJOURNED 11:34

Clear Form

Note: If listing additional witnesses not included on hearing notice, be sure to include title, agency, etc.

Subcommittee Staff Associate

WHEN COMPLETED: Please print for subcommittee staff director's signature and make at least one copy of the signed form. A signed copy is to be included with the hearing/markup transcript when ready for printing along with a copy of the final meeting notice (both will go into the appendix). The signed original, with a copy of the final meeting notice attached, goes to full committee. An electronic copy of this PDF file may be saved to your hearing folder, if desired.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING

SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE MIDDLE EAST, NORTH AFRICA, AND GLOBAL COUNTERTERRORISM

<i>PRESENT</i>	<i>MEMBER</i>
X	Theodore E. Deutch, FL
X	Gerald E. Connolly, VA
X	David Cicilline, RI
	Ted Lieu, CA
	Colin Allred, TX
	Tom Malinowski, NJ
X	Kathy Manning, NC
X	William Keating, MA
	Brad Sherman, CA
X	Juan Vargas, CA
X	Brad Schneider, IL

<i>PRESENT</i>	<i>MEMBER</i>
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X	Brian J. Mast, FL
X	Tim Burchett, TN
X	Greg Steube, FL
X	Ronny Jackson, TX
	Maria Elvira Salazar, FL

X	Sara Jacobs, CA
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RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Acting Principal Deputy Coordinator for Counterterrorism Chris Landberg by
Representative Ted Deutch (#1)
U.S. House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee
November 17, 2021**

Question 1:

How does the CT Bureau ensure that human rights protections are at the forefront of our policy and program implementation? Say a report emerged of a counterterrorism partner committing a human rights abuse. Walk me through step by step what would happen?

Answer 1:

Our partnerships are designed around the principle that effective counterterrorism must be carried out with respect for human rights and the rule of law. As such, the protection of human rights is integrated into and features prominently in all our assistance. When the Department determines there is credible information a gross violation of human rights (GVHR) has occurred, we immediately cease training or assistance to that individual(s) and unit. In accordance with the Leahy laws, when our assistance is withheld due to credible allegations of GVHRs, we inform the foreign government of our findings and, to the maximum extent practicable, assist the foreign government in taking effective measures to bring the responsible members of the security forces to justice.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Acting Principal Deputy Coordinator for Counterterrorism Chris Landberg by
Representative Ted Deutch (#2)
U.S. House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee
November 17, 2021**

Question 2:

What policy changes have been implemented because of past situations like these?

Answer 2:

As noted in Question 1, the Department takes allegations of human rights very seriously and will suspend or terminate our assistance if there is credible information regarding gross violations of human rights. Past situations have made it clear that it is vital we continue to: incorporate human rights throughout our training; observe how our foreign partners apply our assistance in carrying out their own counterterrorism activities; reinforce human rights messaging from our programming in our higher-level diplomatic engagement; and work in lockstep with post and the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor to keep all Leahy vetting records current and swiftly look into credible information about gross violations of human rights.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Acting Principal Deputy Coordinator for Counterterrorism Chris Landberg by
Representative Ted Deutch (#3)
U.S. House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee
November 17, 2021**

Question 3:

How does the CT Bureau decide who to train and what messages are shared during the training?

Answer 3:

CT considers numerous factors in assessing the suitability and selection of our foreign partners in close consultation with regional Bureaus and post. These factors include threat levels, gaps in technical capacity, overall absorptive capacity, and the political will to partner on counterterrorism cooperation. We also evaluate whether the potential partner would use our assistance for purposes that we do not condone, such as committing human rights violations or abuses. With respect to messaging, CT designs holistic programs that are based on respect for human rights and the rule of law; counterterrorism approaches that are not consistent with those principles can potentially stoke conflict and exacerbate grievances that fuel terrorism recruitment and radicalization.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Acting Principal Deputy Coordinator for Counterterrorism Chris Landberg by
Representative Ted Deutch (#4)
U.S. House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee
November 17, 2021**

Question 4:

When we vet personnel for training programs, who actually vets the individuals? What does that process look like? Are we relying on other countries to choose who participates or do we have our own internal processes?

Answer 4:

Vetting is an essential tool for ensuring that our assistance appropriately benefits partners who share our values for respecting human rights and upholding the rule of law. Once CT identifies the recipient, the host country will nominate individuals for vetting. The U.S. Embassy, the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, and the applicable Department regional bureau, in that order, vet those individuals and units for participation in our foreign assistance programming. CT will often consult with beneficiary countries and other donors, particularly when we need to deconflict ongoing or planned programming and/or when we may learn from others who are willing to share their experiences training specific security services and affiliated institutions on similar or related activities.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Acting Principal Deputy Coordinator for Counterterrorism Chris Landberg by
Representative Ted Deutch (#5)
U.S. House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee
November 17, 2021**

Question 5:

Your budget request includes \$10 million in stabilization funds to be set aside for the implementation of the Global Fragility Act (GFA), which I believe is an important step to promote stability as a tool to counter radicalization. What does the inter-agency and intra-agency consultation process look like in this area and how can these efforts be strengthened?

Answer 5:

The GFA's U.S. Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability establishes clear roles and responsibilities across U.S. departments and agencies. In Washington, Strategy implementation will be directed by an NSC-led, high-level, inter-agency Steering Committee. Country-level Strategy implementation will be led by the Chief of Mission, in coordination with the USAID Mission Directors and Combatant Commanders. Establishment of new working groups and building upon existing interagency platforms could be warranted to coordinate a joint approach. These new mechanisms are designed to strengthen inter-agency and intra-agency consultation.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Acting Principal Deputy Coordinator for Counterterrorism Chris Landberg by
Representative Ted Deutch (#6)
U.S. House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee
November 17, 2021**

Question 6:

What tools does the CT Bureau have at its disposal to address the root causes of terrorism and barriers to reintegration, and how do they fit into the Bureau's overarching strategy.

Answer 6:

CT uses a wide range of tools to address the drivers of terrorism and barriers to reintegration. CT consults within State and with partners across the U.S. interagency, foreign governments, international organizations, civil society, and academia about the latest research and analysis on the factors that contribute to terrorist radicalization and recruitment in particular contexts. CT has led multiple interagency planning and advisory team visits to Africa, the Middle East, South and Central Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Western Balkans to better understand local drivers – and to help shape programs to prevent radicalization to violence in vulnerable communities and to rehabilitate/reintegrate former terrorists and family members.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Acting Principal Deputy Coordinator for Counterterrorism Chris Landberg by
Representative Ted Deutch (#7)
U.S. House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee
November 17, 2021**

Question 7

In what ways do you think the GFA, or other similar tools, can be used to supplement and expand the work of the CT Bureau?

Answer 7:

The United States is advancing the goals of the Global Fragility Act of 2019 (GFA) by strengthening U.S. capacity to be an effective leader of international efforts to prevent extremism and violent conflict. Counterterrorism approaches that are not consistent with respect for human rights and the rule of law can fuel violent extremism, conflict, and fragility. The GFA, with its emphasis on governance and human rights, sends a vital message on the importance of a rule of law based approach to counterterrorism. The CT Bureau looks forward to continuing to support the full implementation of the GFA in priority countries and regions working with the White House, our Departmental colleagues, and interagency partners.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Acting Principal Deputy Coordinator for Counterterrorism Chris Landberg by
Representative Ted Deutch (#8)
U.S. House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee
November 17, 2021**

Question 8:

How would you characterize the changes between Iran and its proxies, particularly in Iraq after the assassination of General Soleimani? What does this mean for US CT efforts in the region?

Answer 8:

Iran continues to be the foremost state sponsor of terrorism and facilitates a wide range of terrorist activity that threatens U.S. forces, diplomatic personnel, and our partners in the region. This includes providing funding, training, weapons, and equipment to designated terrorist groups in Iraq, such as Kata'ib Hizballah, Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq, and Harakat al-Nujaba. The U.S. Government is committed to countering Iran's destabilizing activities while sustaining diplomatic and military efforts to disrupt terrorist plots, eliminate terrorist safe havens, sever terrorist groups' access to financing, materiel, and recruits, and counter terrorist radicalization in communities so that terrorist groups cannot further mobilize or inspire others to commit acts of violence.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Acting Principal Deputy Coordinator for Counterterrorism Chris Landberg by
Representative Ted Deutch (#9)
U.S. House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee
November 17, 2021**

Question 9:

We are increasingly seeing use of drones and UAVs which pose new challenges to both our broader CT strategy as well as our servicemembers and regional operating bases. How do you view this threat and what ways should we be working to confront the use of UAVs and other emerging technologies?”

Answer 9:

Unmanned aerial systems (UAS) pose an emerging threat to overseas personnel and facilities. The CT Bureau actively engages in domestic and international fora that highlight best practices for countering terrorist use of UAS. CT works with DoD and international partners to identify and prioritize interagency and international requirements for research and development to combat terrorism, coordinating and funding the development of novel Counter-UAS (C-UAS) solutions. Diplomatic Security (DS) works with interagency partners to coordinate testing of C-UAS equipment and DS has fielded systems to protect select overseas posts. DS contributes information on observed threat trends to the interagency UAS Threat Working Group.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Acting Principal Deputy Coordinator for Counterterrorism Chris Landberg by
Representative Ted Deutch (#10)
U.S. House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee
November 17, 2021**

Question 10:

As we witness a rise in cyber capabilities from both state and non-state actors to influence populations, damage physical and critical infrastructure, and steal information, both Congress and the Administration have placed a priority on enhancing and advancing our cyber capabilities within the US government. How does the CT Bureau plan to allocate resources to combat cyberterrorism and support partners efforts to do the same? How have you seen the role of cyberterrorism change and grow over time, and how does this change compare to what has happened to other threats over time?

Answer 10:

CT focuses our cyber efforts and resources on: 1) countering the use of the Internet for terrorist purposes, including to radicalize, recruit, and inspire to violence, raise funds, and conduct attacks; and 2) promoting critical infrastructure soft target security through the use of physical and cyber measures. Terrorists pursue and misuse the latest technologies to perpetrate acts of violence, and we continue to work with foreign governments and international organizations to build partnerships with the private sector and other stakeholders to counter these threats. For example, CT provides foreign assistance and programming to improve partner law enforcements' digital investigations capabilities and promote digital literacy in CVE programs.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Acting Principal Deputy Coordinator for Counterterrorism Chris Landberg by
Representative Ted Deutch (#11)
U.S. House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee
November 17, 2021**

Question 11

There are thousands of foreign terrorist fighters and ISIS-affiliated women and children held in prisons and camps in northeast Syria. Many of these individuals are from countries – particularly countries in Europe – where governments have resisted repatriating them. But neither the Syrian Democratic Forces in northeast Syria, the Assad government, nor the Iraqi government are equipped to absorb them safely. What is the status of cooperation on repatriation efforts with our allies and partners?

Answer 11:

A number of our allies and partners are willing to repatriate their nationals still in northeast Syria and the U.S. government fully supports these efforts, including facilitating repatriation operations. In Central Asia, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan have repatriated foreign terrorist fighters and family members and enrolled many returnees in rehabilitation programs. In the Western Balkans, Kosovo and North Macedonia, among others, have also repatriated fighters and family members. Iraq is repatriating its nationals in tranches of fighters and family members. Lack of political will to repatriate foreign terrorist fighters remains the key obstacle in other nations, including several whose nationals comprise a disproportionate amount of the 2,000 FTFs in SDF custody. We consistently urge countries at senior levels, publicly and privately, to repatriate, rehabilitate, reintegrate and, where appropriate, prosecute foreign terrorist fighters and associated family members.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Acting Principal Deputy Coordinator for Counterterrorism Chris Landberg by
Representative Ted Deutch (#12)
U.S. House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee
November 17, 2021**

Question 12:

Specifically, what progress have we made with governments of countries like Tunisia and those in the Caucuses from where significant numbers of foreign terrorist fighters originated?

Answer 12:

We continue to encourage countries of origin—including Tunisia—to repatriate, rehabilitate, reintegrate, and prosecute, where appropriate, FTFs and associated family members. We have not pursued supporting repatriation to some countries given human rights concerns for the returnees once they are returned home.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Acting Principal Deputy Coordinator for Counterterrorism Chris Landberg by
Representative Ted Deutch (#13)
U.S. House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee
November 17, 2021**

Question 13:

How are you working with countries to convince them to repatriate foreign fighters?

Answer 13:

We encourage partner nations to repatriate, rehabilitate, reintegrate, and, as appropriate, prosecute foreign terrorist fighters. Repatriations are a critical step toward alleviating the strain on SDF detention facilities and displaced persons camps in northeast Syria—and a critical step toward preventing an ISIS resurgence in the region. In our engagements, we highlight that repatriating citizens to their countries of origin is the most effective way to improve humanitarian conditions in detention facilities and displacement camps, and to mitigate the risk that they will reengage in terrorism. We also work bilaterally with countries of origin and multilaterally via the UN and other fora to assist countries with rehabilitation and reintegration of fighters and families who have been repatriated.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Acting Principal Deputy Coordinator for Counterterrorism Chris Landberg by
Representative Ted Deutch (#14)
U.S. House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee
November 17, 2021**

Question 14:

What factors do you prioritize in dealing with foreign fighters, and what are the threats inherent in these options?

Answer 14:

The policy of the U.S. government is to support the repatriation of foreign terrorist fighters from northeast Syria to their countries of origin. We encourage our partners and allies to rehabilitate, reintegrate and, as appropriate, prosecute foreign terrorist fighters in their home countries. Each country has varied capacity within their prosecutorial and penal systems to accomplish this. We also take into consideration the country of origin's human rights record when it comes to detentions. Indefinitely leaving former ISIS members in makeshift detention facilities in northeast Syria as an unacceptable security risk for the region and the United States.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Acting Principal Deputy Coordinator for Counterterrorism Chris Landberg by
Representative Ted Deutch (#15)
U.S. House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee
November 17, 2021**

Question 15:

Many ISIS leaders became radicalized and regrouped while in prison during the end of the U.S. war in Iraq. What is the risk of ISIS fighters currently held in SDF prisons radicalizing others and organizing new cells and operations? How can the United States and our partners prevent these outcomes?

Answer 15:

The detained foreign terrorist fighters in northeast Syria constitute a potential threat to security in the region and beyond. We are absolutely concerned about this risk of radicalization within these detention facilities. With this risk in mind, we believe the most prudent course of action is to repatriate, rehabilitate, reintegrate and, as appropriate, prosecute these foreign terrorist fighters in their home countries, as well as to repatriate, rehabilitate, and reintegrate their associated family members. We are supporting our partners and allies in accomplishing these repatriations as well as providing programmatic rehabilitation and reintegration support.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Acting Principal Deputy Coordinator for Counterterrorism Chris Landberg by
Representative Ted Deutch (#16)
U.S. House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee
November 17, 2021**

Question 16:

Remaining ISIS elements have repeatedly attempted to breach SDF prisons where foreign terrorist fighters are being held and reconstitute – one plot foiled by SDF personnel as recently as early November revealed significant ISIS planning efforts and weapons caches involved. What level of confidence does the CT Bureau have in the security – both physical and personnel-wise – of such facilities? What more is needed via funding or other support to ensure the security of detention facilities?

Answer 16:

Most SDF detention facilities are makeshift, some having been refashioned from school-rooms, factories, and warehouses. We are grateful for the SDF for detaining these dangerous individuals. However, we remain concerned about our partners' capacity to detain this sizeable population indefinitely. The international community must act decisively to ensure these facilities do not become incubators for an ISIS resurgence by repatriating, rehabilitating, reintegrating and prosecuting, as appropriate, their foreign terrorist fighters. In parallel to urging repatriations, we are working to identify U.S. resources and D-ISIS Coalition members who may be able to contribute expertise or funding to bolster the security of the detention facilities.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Acting Principal Deputy Coordinator for Counterterrorism Chris Landberg by
Representative Ted Deutch (#17)
U.S. House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee
November 17, 2021**

Question 17:

How do you believe this move has gone so far? Are there any parts of the Special Envoy portfolio that have waived or fallen off in the move?

Answer 17:

On February 9, 2021, Secretary Blinken designated Acting CT Coordinator John Godfrey as the Acting Special Envoy for the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS. Following a positive response by Congress and approval of the Congressional notification on June 2, 2021, the Department of State re-aligned the Office of the Special Envoy functions, personnel and resources to the Bureau for Counterterrorism, consolidating D-ISIS efforts within an enduring institutional framework and ensuring that the Department has a unified and integrated approach to this vital mission going forward. This realignment reflects the current reality of the D-ISIS campaign, including the transition of the fight against ISIS in Iraq and Syria and the need to counter the increasingly global operations of ISIS and ISIS affiliates, especially in Africa and Afghanistan.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Acting Principal Deputy Coordinator for Counterterrorism Chris Landberg by
Representative Ted Deutch (#18)
U.S. House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee
November 17, 2021**

Question 18:

What ways is the Bureau working to ensure that coalition efforts to defeat ISIS are still prioritized within the Department and to the Secretary specifically now that the special envoy no longer reports directly to the Secretary?

Answer 18:

The Special Envoy still reports directly to the Secretary on counterterrorism strategy, threats, and operations, including those encompassed by the Defeat ISIS campaign. The realignment now grants full competency for D-ISIS efforts to a single organizational entity, the CT Bureau, which had already been leading the Department's D-ISIS efforts outside of Iraq and Syria. The Office of the Special Envoy (SECI) now functions as a "pillar" under a DAS-equivalent Deputy Special Envoy reporting to the CT Coordinator, and retaining a structure readily identifiable to Coalition and U.S. interagency partners. The Special Envoy actively and regularly engages senior Coalition partner counterparts on a range of issues; recent examples include the end of U.S. combat forces' presence in Iraq, coordination on Coalition responses to the ISIS-Khorasan threat and finalization of a new Coalition Africa Focus Group.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Acting Principal Deputy Coordinator for Counterterrorism Chris Landberg by
Representative Ted Deutch (#19)
U.S. House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee
November 17, 2021**

Question 19:

What are examples of multilateral engagement with Global Coalition partners continuing since the re-alignment of the SECI function into the CT Bureau?"

Answer 19:

Since SECI's merger into the Bureau of Counterterrorism there have two successful foreign ministerial meetings of the 84-member Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS. In addition, the Coalition's four functional working groups – focused on countering ISIS messaging, countering ISIS financing, deterring Foreign Terrorist Fighter flows, and monitoring stabilization programming for liberated areas in Iraq and Syria have each met twice. CT/SECI led discussions resulting in foreign ministers' support for expanding the Coalition's focus beyond Iraq/Syria to Africa, and partnered with Italy in developing the new Africa Focus Group that was formally launched at the Coalition Political Director meeting in Brussels on December 3. The Africa Focus Group, co-led by Italy, Morocco, Niger, and the United States, will coordinate Coalition initiatives to counter ISIS on the African continent.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Acting Principal Deputy Coordinator for Counterterrorism Chris Landberg by
Representative Ted Deutch (#20)
U.S. House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee
November 17, 2021**

Question 20:

What is the CT Bureau's role in countering PMF influence and capabilities?

Answer 20:

The U.S. Government is committed to countering the threat posed by Iranian-backed militia groups using the array of tools at our disposal. This includes CT Bureau's programs to build the capacity of the Iraqi government and its democratic institutions as well as the use of terrorist designations. In February 2020, State designated Ahmad al-Hamidawi, the Secretary General of Kata'ib Hizballah, as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist (SDGT) pursuant to Executive Order 13224. In January 2020, State designated Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq, as a Foreign Terrorist Organization, and its leaders Qays and Laith al-Khazali, as SDGTs. And in March 2019, State designated Harakat al-Nujaba and its leader, Akram 'Abbas al-Kabi, as SDGTs.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Acting Principal Deputy Coordinator for Counterterrorism Chris Landberg by
Representative Ted Deutch (#21)
U.S. House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee
November 17, 2021**

Question 21:

Has the drawdown of diplomats from the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad impacted the State Department's CT programs?

Answer 21:

The Department assesses that we have adequate personnel in Iraq to pursue our vital national security interests, including daily engagement with Government of Iraq and Kurdistan Regional Government on counterterrorism issues. Safety and security of our personnel is the Administration's highest priority. Staffing numbers fluctuate due to regular permanent change of station and rest and recuperation travel, but internal coordination and staggered departure/arrival times ensure all sections are appropriately staffed. The Department routinely reviews and adjusts staffing levels at embassies to ensure proper resources meet our national security goals and will continue to do so in consultation with relevant Congressional committees.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Acting Principal Deputy Coordinator for Counterterrorism Chris Landberg by
Representative Ted Deutch (#22)
U.S. House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee
November 17, 2021**

Question 22:

What further actions – either with Coalition partners or unilaterally such as via targeted sanctions – can the U.S. take to address the threat posed by militias in the PMF to U.S. personnel and facilities in Iraq or to Iraqi civilians and peaceful protestors?”

Answer 22:

The U.S. Government and key partners support a strategic partnership with a stable, democratic Iraq. We continue to back the Government of Iraq’s efforts to rein in Iranian-aligned militias that are responsible for the threats against our personnel, but many of these groups still operate outside government control. The U.S. Government continues to maintain and impose sanctions on entities supporting terrorist activity or perpetrating human rights abuses, and we will work with our allies to hold Iran accountable for its support to its proxies in Iraq.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Acting Principal Deputy Coordinator for Counterterrorism Chris Landberg by
Representative Ted Deutch (#23)
U.S. House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee
November 17, 2021**

Question 23:

We are increasingly seeing countries misuse the terrorism label to stifle dissent and oppress their populations. What is the role of the CT Bureau in mitigating these risks and working with countries to strengthen rule of law and democratic reforms?

Answer 23:

CT works closely with regional bureaus and overseas missions to ensure our policy and programming to countering violent extremism (P/CVE) is aligned with broader U.S. government priorities – such as rule of law; international law obligations, including those on human rights; freedom of expression; whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches safeguarding members of religious, ethnic, and racial minority groups; and accountable governance that leads to democratic reforms. Further, CT works through the United Nations and other multilateral organizations to develop and promote good counter-terrorism practices which advance the rule of law and human rights-respecting, civil society-oriented solutions to terrorism-related challenges.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Acting Principal Deputy Coordinator for Counterterrorism Chris Landberg by
Representative Ted Deutch (#24)
U.S. House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee
November 17, 2021**

Question 24:

What is your approach to countries that do not actively support terrorism, but continue to enable terrorist organizations by allowing them to fundraise, recruit, and transit within their borders, or by promoting an ideology that provides a foundation for these organizations?

Answer 24:

The U.S. is confronting an increasingly diffuse and decentralized terrorism threat. In this environment, the U.S. needs strong international cooperation to succeed. The State Department is at the forefront of U.S. diplomatic campaigns to build international coalitions to strengthen global counterterrorism capabilities. Department outreach to mobilize the international community is focused not only on like-minded partners, but critically on those governments who may be less supportive of our counterterrorism efforts. We raise awareness and political will to tackle these threats, emphasizing how terrorist groups pose a threat not only to the U.S. and our interests, but to their countries as well.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Acting Principal Deputy Coordinator for Counterterrorism Chris Landberg by
Representative Ted Deutch (#25)
U.S. House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee
November 17, 2021**

Question 25:

“In July, Secretary Austin and French Defense Minister Florence Parly signed and announced an agreement that French and American special operators will work together more closely on counterterrorism operations in Africa. Can you tell us more about this agreement and how it will materialize on the ground?”

Answer 25:

We look forward to continuation of our robust defense, development, and diplomatic engagement with our French allies across Africa and refer specific questions regarding U.S. forces to the Department of Defense.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Acting Principal Deputy Coordinator for Counterterrorism Chris Landberg by
Representative Ted Deutch (#26)
U.S. House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee
November 17, 2021**

Question 26:

The Administration has reiterated its efforts to prioritize existing and emerging terrorist threats in Africa. Groups like al-Shabaab, described as one of the most well-funded AQ affiliates in the world, continue to raise funds that could rival those of regional governments. How is the Administration addressing the issue of terrorist financing in Africa, where informal economies and limited integration with global markets has limited the efficacy of certain tools like sanctions?

Answer 26:

The Department remains dedicated to employing sanctions and other tools to combat the threat of terrorist financing in Africa. The Department has designated numerous African terrorist groups and leaders, both domestically and at the UN, and continues to collaborate with partner nations to designate these entities under their own sanctions regimes. In addition to sanctions, the Department is focused on building the capacity of African partner nations to combat terrorist financing threats. For example, the Department played a key role in establishing Somalia's Financial Reporting Center, its first financial intelligence unit, and continues to provide training, equipment, and mentorship to investigate and prosecute terrorism financing cases.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Acting Principal Deputy Coordinator for Counterterrorism Chris Landberg by
Representative Ted Deutch (#27)
U.S. House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee
November 17, 2021**

Question 27:

During the hearing, we spoke about the cooperative efforts your bureau is taking to engage with large technology platforms on countering violent extremism online, and especially on social media. We can no longer just hope, prod, push, and wish that companies like Facebook are going to prevent their platforms from being used to facilitate violence, radicalization, and real harm in our country and around the world. So, in addition to working with them to enforce their own terms of service agreements, what other possibilities for cooperative engagement exist to reduce violent extremism on these companies' platforms? What other tools could the CT Bureau use to keep America safe? What do you need from Congress to implement this?

Answer 27:

While voluntary collaboration with tech companies to enforce their terms of service has produced results, more can be done. CT continues to encourage companies to: 1) improve uneven content moderation through moderator training to identify and act upon online content; 2) employ more expertise in different languages in which terrorists communicate; 3) focus more on terrorism prevention efforts such as counter-messaging; 4) address algorithmic amplification of content that can create "echo chambers" of terrorist content; 5) improve transparency reporting regarding content moderation on their platforms; and 6) improve coordination and communications after terrorist attacks. Additional funding would allow us to increase our partnership companies on these efforts.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Acting Principal Deputy Coordinator for Counterterrorism Chris Landberg by
Representative Ted Deutch (#28)
U.S. House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee
November 17, 2021**

Question 28:

There are lots of groups and NGOs who have their own various forms of expertise and who also work provide information to social media companies. Do you interact with those groups? Is there a coordinated effort among your Bureau and among the NGOs who are focused on these issues to provide as much information as possible to these companies about what's happening?

Answer 28:

CT is committed to a whole-of society approach, including open dialogue and consultation with civil society organizations, academia, community leaders, the private sector, and others. For example, CT works with these stakeholders in the industry-led NGO Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism on issues such as addressing algorithmic amplification of content that can create "echo chambers." CT engages regularly with UN-affiliated NGO Tech Against Terrorism, which assists smaller tech companies with addressing terrorist exploitation of their platforms, including through a Knowledge Sharing Platform and a Terrorist Content Analytics Platform, which notifies platforms of the presence of verified terrorist content.

**Questions for the Record submitted to
Acting Principal Deputy Coordinator (Bureau of Counterterrorism) Chris Landberg, by
Congresswoman Sara Jacobs (No. 1 to 11)
U. S. House of Representatives, Foreign Affairs Committee;
Middle East, North Africa and Global Counterterrorism Subcommittee,
November 17, 2021**

Question 1:

I worked on a study at the CSO Bureau that studied factors that drive violent extremism, and it found that much of the conventional wisdom on what causes violent extremism (poverty, income inequality, madrassa education) is not actually validated by empirical studies. Rather, we found that there is empirical evidence of a link between VE and factors like state repression and an absence of civil liberties. There have been numerous other studies that have similar findings, including UNDP, Chatham House, and International Alert: Given these findings, how does the Bureau incorporate lessons learned and the latest research and analysis on preventing and countering violent extremism in its policies and programs?

Answer 1:

A range of factors can drive and contribute to violent extremism – including repression and human rights abuses. The Bureau of Counterterrorism (CT) consults within State and with partners across the U.S. interagency, foreign governments, international organizations, civil society, and academia about the latest research and analysis on the factors that contribute to radicalization and recruitment to violence in particular contexts. CT has led multiple interagency planning and advisory team visits to Africa, the Middle East, South and Central Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Western Balkans to better understand local radicalization and recruitment to violence factors – as well as help shape preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) approaches.

**Questions for the Record submitted to
Acting Principal Deputy Coordinator (Bureau of Counterterrorism) Chris Landberg, by
Congresswoman Sara Jacobs (No. 1 to 11)
U. S. House of Representatives, Foreign Affairs Committee;
Middle East, North Africa and Global Counterterrorism Subcommittee,
November 17, 2021**

Question 2:

To what degree is the Bureau seriously looking at abuses or perceptions of abuses as key drivers of violent extremism and terrorism?

Answer 2:

The Bureau of Counterterrorism (CT) works closely with other bureaus and overseas missions to ensure all preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) programming is aligned with broader U.S. government priorities – such as promotion of human rights; whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches including members of religious, ethnic, and racial minorities; rule of law; and accountable governance. P/CVE programs are also monitored and evaluated to ensure that they are achieving their intended objectives and following the “do no harm” principle. Further, CT has worked through UN, regional, and other multilateral fora to develop and promote evidence-based P/CVE good practices among their member states – including rights-respecting, rule of law-based, and civil society-oriented solutions to problems of radicalization and recruitment to violence.

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Congresswoman Sara Jacobs (No. 1 to 11)
U. S. House of Representatives, Foreign Affairs Committee;
Middle East, North Africa and Global Counterterrorism Subcommittee,
November 17, 2021**

Question 3:

If it is, how has that impacted program design and overall strategy?

Answer 3:

The Bureau of Counterterrorism (CT) consults within State and with partners across the U.S. interagency, foreign governments, international organizations, civil society, and academia to understand the role that abuses or perceptions of abuses of human rights play in the radicalization and recruitment to violence process in particular contexts. Any concerns about abuses or perceptions of abuses of human rights are factored into program design and our overall strategy for preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE). Following a “do not harm” principle, P/CVE programs are intended to encourage whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches which are rights-respecting, rule of law-based, and civil society-oriented.

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Question 4

Last year was the deadliest year for civilians in the region, claiming nearly 2,400 victims in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, despite huge investments from the United States and the international community.

When was the last time the Bureau did a long-term review of the effectiveness of its counterterrorism support and other preventing/countering violent extremism work in Sahel?

Answer 4:

CT's programming in West Africa focuses largely on improving the capabilities of civilian law enforcement organizations and the judicial sector with some focus on community engagement. CT dedicated significant resources to West Africa in 2017-2018 with the creation of the Counterterrorism Partnerships Fund (CTPF). Through an interagency planning process, we identified first Mali, then subsequently Niger and Senegal, as key partner countries for CTPF assistance. Our investments in Burkina Faso are more nascent, and we anticipate that this year it will be a primary beneficiary of CT's Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership funds. Given this, a long-term review of the effectiveness of our programs has not been conducted.

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Question 5

Could you describe those findings?

Answer 5:

While CT has not conducted a long-term review of these programs, our M&E efforts, including 3rd party evaluations, have indicated our programming has enhanced the capabilities of beneficiaries. To further bolster our M&E efforts, we have created full-time advisor positions in Burkina Faso, Niger, and Senegal to provide additional support on the ground and ensure the effectiveness of our assistance.

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Question 6

What concrete changes came from those findings?

Answer 6:

The 3rd party evaluations mentioned above have had wide-ranging impacts, from refining projects and replicating or expanding successful approaches, to revising both internal and external processes that have informed program design, implementation, and strategy.

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Question 7 to 11

A 2020 State OIG report on the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership Program found that due to the mismanagement and inadequate oversight, the OIG considers \$201.6 million in program funds, spent on six different contracts, as “wasteful spending.” Clearly there are challenges with evaluating the use of equipment and weapons in conflict-affected environments. But figuring out how to do this, particularly in countries that have a history of egregious human rights abuses, is critical in making sure that our support is not exacerbating the very challenge (violent extremism and terrorism) we are looking to address.

Question 7:

I understand a lot of these recommendations were made to the AF Bureau, but given the CT Bureau’s role in coordinating this specific program, and the fact that the report seemed to suggest these challenges are endemic to M&E in conflict-affected environments where we don’t have a strong U.S. presence, could you explain what progress has been made in improving monitoring and evaluation of TSCTP and other counterterrorism and counter violent extremism program funds?

Answer 7:

CT’s program managers in Washington and the field continually monitor our program portfolio by reviewing regular reporting and conducting site visits. These efforts, combined with our annual program review, help us ensure taxpayer resources are well-spent and assistance is used properly; they also offer CT important insights into the efficacy of our assistance. CT also has three independent teams conducting program evaluations: one team is evaluating four major programs per year; the second uses practical exercises to demonstrate the hands-on acquisition of counterterrorism skills; and the third is focused on prison programming. These evaluations help us refine programs, replicate successful approaches, and enhance efficiency.

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Question 8:

How does the Bureau measure effectiveness of their programs? And not just by measuring outputs such as number of forces trained, but on outcomes?

Answer 8:

CT adheres to established practices and tools for the design and oversight of our foreign assistance, as mandated by Department policy and law, to ensure programming is effective. Outputs help us validate what has taken place, who participated, and what the immediate results were. Anecdotal successes – arrests, airport seizures of explosive materials, or information sharing agreements signed – also play a significant role in measuring effectiveness. CT employs objective, external evaluators to rigorously examine to what extent CT programming is meeting stated objectives and in some cases introducing real-world scenarios to test the abilities of our partners.

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Question 9:

And how does the Bureau measure that - surveys, key indicators?

Answer 9:

Every project designed and managed by CT has achievable objectives and tailored, measurable indicators to measure progress towards those objectives. Implementers report against those objectives and indicators at least on a quarterly basis, allowing CT to gauge in relative real-time the effects of our assistance. CT collects success stories relating to our programming. Ranging from driving up calls to a terrorist defection program or disrupting active terrorist plotting, to securing convictions of terrorist attackers or seizing terrorist recruitment materials in prisons, these regular, real-world examples further demonstrate the tangible results of CT's assistance.

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Question 10:

What kind of feedback loops exist between local civil society and the ones designing programs in Washington?

Answer 10:

For CT, program design is a collaborative endeavor involving both Washington and the field. CT maintains consistent communication with implementing partners, deployed CT program advisors, and embassy personnel, the primary interlocutors with local civil societies. Field visits allow our team to engage directly with local partners; on these visits they meet with local civil society organizations to obtain their perspectives. In addition, our third-party evaluators seek feedback on programming from civil society members in locations where the programs are active, through regular consultations and also sub-contracted surveys and evaluations.

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Question 11:

Mr. Chris Landberg said the Bureau could share with my office examples of summaries of evaluations. Could we please see those?

Answer 11:

Yes. We have included examples of evaluation executive summaries with our response.

IFR DEUTCH

What a staggering gun cache discovered in one suspected neo-Nazi's house says about far-right extremism in Europe*CNN*

November 17, 2021

Last month, Austrian police made a remarkable discovery. In a raid on a house in the town of Baden, they found an arsenal of weapons and 1,200 kilograms of ammunition -- as well as Nazi paraphernalia and a large amount of gunpowder.

Altogether some 50 weapons, including submachine guns and pump-action rifles, were seized. According to a police statement, the house belonged to a 53-year-old man who is "suspected of national socialist Nazi activities," including sharing numerous files on Internet forums.

Interior Minister Karl Nehammer said of the raid: "The consistent action against right-wing extremism is not only part of the historical responsibility, but also a clear advocacy of our democratic coexistence in Austria."

It wasn't the first action against alleged neo-Nazis in Austria this year. In July, police seized automatic weapons and hand grenades in coordinated raids against a biker gang whose leader planned to establish a "militia of the respectable" that would "overturn the system."

Support for Nazism is a criminal offense in Austria. The most prominent neo-Nazi figure is Gottfried Kuessel, who was sentenced to a nine-year jail term in 2013 for propagating Nazism online. It was his second conviction.

Bernhard Weidinger, who studies the far right at the Documentation Archive of the Austrian Resistance in Vienna, says that the criminalization of Nazi ideology has ensured that it is neither particularly strong nor organized.

"But what we do have is a very high frequency of weapons finds," he told CNN.

Neo-Nazi activity in Europe is frequently associated with biker gangs, organized crime and football fans. In Austria, a group called the Immortal follow the club Rapid Vienna, sometimes displaying the Reich War flag at matches. In Italy, fan groups known as Ultras adopt fascist slogans and monikers.

Austrian neo-Nazi activists frequently connect with similar groups in Germany, according to authorities, because they perceive themselves as part of a greater German Reich. After the seizure of another arsenal of weapons late in 2020, Interior Minister Nehammer spoke of links between the five arrested individuals and far right cells in Germany, as well as connections with organized crime and drug trafficking.

In Austria, as elsewhere in Europe, the neo-Nazi scene includes virulent strains of both anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim racism.

In January this year, an Austrian rapper by the name of Mr Bond was arrested and charged with "producing and broadcasting Nazi ideas and incitement to hatred." One of his neo-Nazi songs was used by a man as he live streamed a deadly attack on a synagogue in Germany in 2019.

That attack came a year after a third (35%) of Austrians told CNN that Jewish people were at risk of racist violence in their country. Nearly half (45%) said anti-Semitism was a growing problem in their country. The findings were part of a ComRes/CNN survey exploring anti-Semitism in seven European countries.

In Austria, 12% of people aged 18 to 34 said they had never heard of the Holocaust. Austria also had the highest number of people in the survey -- four out of 10 adults -- who said they knew "just a little" about the Holocaust. And a third of Austrians (32%) said Jewish people have too much influence on business and finance around the world, echoing a long-standing anti-Semitic trope.

The findings came from a ComRes survey for CNN of 7,092 adults online in seven countries between September 7 and September 20, 2018. Data was weighted to be representative of each country based on age, gender and region.

Austria is grappling with the legacy of anti-Semitism in other ways. For almost a decade, a statue in Vienna has been at the center of that troubled history. It is of Karl Lueger, the city's mayor at the beginning of the 20th century. Lueger exploited anti-Jewish feeling in his bid for office, emphasizing Christian and Germanic supremacy, and was much admired by Adolf Hitler.

The bronze statue, four meters high, has been defaced but still stands in a prominent position in a Vienna square. City authorities decided this month that it would remain in place but be set in context.

One group that took up the cause of protecting the statue was the Identitäre Bewegung Österreich (IBO) -- the Austrian branch of a European movement that describes itself as Identitarian. Its leader, Martin Sellner, visited the statue after it was daubed with the word "Shame."

Sellner has become a leading light in the Identitarian movement which opposes mass migration and wants Europe to have a homogenic white and Christian identity. They see this identity being sold out by political elites committed to multiculturalism.

Austrian authorities prosecuted him and 16 others using anti-Mafia laws in 2018, accusing them of hate speech and criminal association. After a high-profile trial they were acquitted.

More damaging for the Identitarians in Austria was the revelation that they had received a donation from the man who carried out the attacks on mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, in 2019, and that Sellner had been in touch with him.

Sellner said in a video statement that he had nothing to do with the attack and said the money would be given to charity. Even so, Bernhard Weidinger told CNN, the connection seriously damaged the IBO in the eyes of much of the public.

Analysts make a distinction between traditional neo-Nazis --- whose activities are based on violence and crime --- and the emerging Identitarian groups, which are political. Besides Sellner and the IBO in Austria, they include Génération Identitaire in France and the Neue Rechte (New Right) in Germany.

However, both the Identitarians and neo-Nazi ideologists have taken advantage of the conspiracy theories that flourished with the QAnon movement and protests against vaccination policies during the Covid-19 pandemic. Sellner has said that such movements should be exploited for the only issue that truly matters: resisting mass migration.

In Vienna, Gottfried Kuessel -- now out of jail -- and others previously associated with neo-Nazism joined marches against lockdown.

Weidinger says it's notable that they also appear to have attracted a younger generation -- people in their twenties -- to join them. They have also begun to organize their own protest for the first time in many years, he told CNN.

Nearly 40,000 people attended a Berlin rally in August last year to protest against lockdown but also against the "deep state." The event was notable for the number of far-right groups that joined in (such as the German Reichsbürger movement) and for its adulation of then US President Donald Trump.

In a video message, Sellner told the protesters they could mobilize a "broad, patriotic mass" to fight the "grand strategy" of global elites. Members of the Reichsbürger group tried to force their way into the parliament, a symbolic act meant to recall the Nazis' burning of the Reichstag.

In both Germany and Austria, the more extreme factions speak of "Day X" -- an apocalyptic fantasy when democratic institutions will collapse in a tide of violence and a neo-Nazi state will be born.

It was a persistent theme on the Telegram channel of Nordkreuz, a German group of far-right extremists that included police officers and former soldiers. Another such group was Revolution Chemnitz, which planned an attack designed to accelerate "a turning point in history."

The 'mainstream' right

There is some ideological overlap between Identitarian groups and Europe's established right-wing parties, such as the Freedom Party in Austria, the National Rally (formerly the National Front) in France, and Matteo Salvini's Northern League in Italy.

In July, 16 far-right parties signed up to a statement on the future of Europe, warning that "European nations should be based on tradition, respect for the culture and history of European states, respect for Europe's Judeo-Christian heritage and the common values that unite our nations."

"In a time when Europe is facing a serious demographic crisis with low birth rates and ageing population, pro-family policy making should be an answer instead of mass immigration," they said.

Sellner and other Identitarians have used almost exactly the same language, warning of the "Great Replacement" in which white Europeans are swamped by a tide of migration.

Bernhard Weidinger says that the Identitarians offer what he describes as "critical solidarity" to the Freedom Party (FPÖ), which dominates the right in Austria. He says that now the Freedom Party is in opposition in Austria after a spell in a government coalition it has tilted further right, depriving the IBO of territory of its own.

Indeed, some FPÖ members have had an ambivalent relationship with the neo-Nazi fringe in Austria. In 2018, a senior official, Udo Landbauer, resigned his position because of a previous association with a group accused of being neo-Nazis. Landbauer denied knowing about anti-Semitic and neo-Nazi content in a book published by the group.

The European far-right is a fractured environment, where political activism and calls to violence overlap, and groups grow and morph quickly. Much of it is online or underground, but it has been given new impetus -- in both Europe and America -- by lockdowns, vaccination mandates and an epidemic of conspiracy theories.

Where it coalesces -- at least in spirit -- is on the issues of cultural identity and migration, which groups such as the Austrian IBO regard as an imminent existential threat.

In June this year, the Austrian parliament passed a law banning the symbols of the IBO and another group, "The Austrians," essentially conflating them with terror groups.

The IBO responded on its website that: "Austria is thus partially and purposefully abolishing democracy for two patriotic groups. The autocratic censors will not get rid of us."