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COMBATING ISIS PROPAGANDA NETWORKS

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PARTICIPANTS:

Moderator:

WILL McCANTS
Fellow and Director, Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World
The Brookings Institution

Featured Speaker:

ALBERTO FERNANDEZ
Vice President
Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI)

Discussant:

RICHARD LeBARON
Nonresident Senior Fellow
Atlantic Council

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. McCANTS: Hello, everyone; welcome. We are here today to roll out Ambassador Alberto Fernandez's new paper for us on countering ISIS propaganda, called, "Here to Stay and Growing: Combating ISIS propaganda networks". This is a paper that came out of our annual U.S.-Islamic World Forum which was held in June this year in Doha, and one of the working groups was devoted to countering Islamic state propaganda. Ambassador Fernandez was fresh off his stint at the State Department, leading its efforts in countering ISIS propaganda, so he had a good inside view into how the sausage is made. So we thought he was the perfect guy to run this working group. So this paper is an outgrowth of that working group.

Today's event will be using the hash tag #ISISpropaganda. And it is my pleasure, my real pleasure, to welcome both Ambassador Fernandez and Ambassador Richard LeBaron. To my knowledge this is the first time that both men will have been on the stage together to discuss their experiences running U.S. counter propaganda against jihadist organizations. Ambassador LeBaron was the first incumbent of the position of coordinator, the Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications. He is also a former Ambassador to Kuwait and is currently a Non Resident Fellow with the Atlantic Counsel. He was followed by Ambassador Alberto Fernandez, the author of the paper, who was there from 2012 to 2015. Ambassador Fernandez was the Chief of Mission to Sudan and to Equatorial Guinea and is currently a Vice President at the Middle East Media Research Institute, otherwise known as MEMRI.

Ambassador Fernandez is going to come up and present his major findings and policy recommendations in the paper. And then Ambassador LeBaron and I will join him on stage for a discussion of the paper, and then we'll open it up to Q & A.

Ambassador Fernandez.

AMBASSADOR FERNANDEZ: Thank you, Will, and thank you to Brookings and especially to the members of the working group that we had on ISIS

propaganda at the Brookings Doha Conference this year. This paper is very enriched by the dialogue of a wide range of scholars and experts and practitioners that we had at that event.

When I wrote the paper -- the best thing you do when you write papers is you write them for yourself, and there were four questions that I asked myself that I wanted to at least try to answer or try to begin to answer. Number one, how did ISIS propaganda become what it became, what it is? The second one, something which a lot of people have written about, is what is the nature of its appeal? The third one is something near and dear to the hearts of those especially who are now retired and can criticize people in the government, what is the state of play in anti ISIS messaging efforts? There have been a variety of efforts from a variety of governments. And the fourth one, what are the steps that a stronger response or a better response would include.

Becoming, right, the first one, the how did ISIS propaganda become what it is today. You know, the roots were always there. Abu Musab al-Zarqawi was a showman. You can call him many things, but he was a showman of violence, of blood, of language. So the roots were there. He spoke of Dabiq, he spoke of apocalyptic themes. The Islamic State of Iraq was a proto-caliphate. It had all the hint, hint, nudge, nudge, we're going to declare a caliphate, caliph is coming. All of that was there. But if you look at ISIS propaganda in 2011, 2012, it is different than what it is today. It is more inward looking, more amateurish, more domestic in 2011, moving into 2012. And it became over time more global, adventurous, and creative. You have only to look at, for example, Salil as-Sawarim Clanging of the Swords Part I appearing in June 2012, and compare it to the infamous or famous Salil as-Sawarim Number 4 in May of 2014 to see the graduation or the change. Salil as-Sawarim Part 1 was good, it was not that amateurish. Salil as-Sawarim Number 4 was great. Now it was partially great because it was about real events. What I mean is real substantial historical events. Of course one of the subjects

of Salil as-Sawarim Number 4 was the fall of Fallujah, an event that occurred at the same time that President Obama called ISIS a junior varsity team.

What changed was Syria. That's my contention. Syria, this first social media war, the war that attracted western Muslims in an unprecedented number, the first tweeted war. ISIS also at the time tapped into a growing Salafi subculture in the west, which has kind of become an alternative to the traditional religious leadership. This first tweeted war, it was about Syria. And it just happens that Syria is special. Syria and the apocalyptic world view of ISIS is extraordinarily important, it's extraordinarily consequential. We're not talking about Waziristan, we're not talking about Northern Mali, we're not talking about some ungoverned space in the middle of nowhere, we're talking about Bilad al-Sham, the special place, the extraordinary place. There is a reason why when the Nusra Front, which at the time of course had a connection with ISIS or became ISIS with the Islamic State of Iraq, right. In 2011 the Islamic State of Iraq sends people from Iraq to Syria to set up the Nusra Front. When the Nusra Front establishes its media outlet, what is it called, it's called al-Manarah al-Bayda, the White Minaret. What is the White Minaret? The White Minaret is the Minaret in Damascus where when Jesus returns in the second coming, that is where he appears. So Syria was special and it's that encounter of the Islamic State of Iraq with events in Syria, with people in Syria, with the way that events are covered in Syria which takes its media from good to great.

I focus particularly on one of many products that they put out, this one called (speaking in foreign language), windows in the land of epic battles which ran from 2013-14, because I wanted to look at events before everyone started talking about ISIS. You know, before June 2014 when Mosul fell, a Caliphate was declared and everyone was talking about that. So you see basically through windows on the land of epic battles, you this evolving. You see images from fighting in Iraq coupled with talk about Syria. And over time it's more about Syria and Iraq is still there, but at the beginning it's basically showing people being killed in Iraq, the Islamic State, killing people in Iraq, and

talking about Syria. It's kind of foreshadowing or foretelling a move toward Syria, a move toward that.

So that's the becoming, that's how it became what it was. The encounter with Syria, the encounter with Twitter, which also happens in 2013, the encounter with English, which also happens in 2013, you know, turbocharged ISIS propaganda.

The second part is I talked about the appeal. What is the appeal of what ISIS does? It is not necessarily about winning hearts and minds. There is some of that, but the idea that we're fighting a battle over hearts and minds with ISIS is not exactly true. What it seeks to present is a stark choice about the correct message. And of course ISIS talks about el menage, you know, the method of what it's doing. Highlighting certain things, number one, an emergency is happening. The Muslims are being slaughtered. The Sunni Arab Muslims of Syria are being slaughtered, right. This of course has the advantage for the Islamic State of being something which is true, or at least somewhat true. The best propaganda is obviously always connected with the real world and with the truth. So this element of emergency is coupled with the question, the element of agency. Not only are the people of Sham, this beloved place, this important place, being slaughtered, but you, John Q. Public, John Q. Muslim, in Manchester or Paris or wherever, you have a role to play with this, you have a responsibility. As one of the videos says in May 2014, in one of the English language videos, these are golden days and you don't want to be on the sidelines, do you? You want to be part of this. The third thing which is there of course is the whole question of authenticity. This organization, this austere, grim, savage organization, all of these elements enhance its authenticity. The fact that it's violent, the fact that it's ruthless, the fact that it's zealous for the law, that it has this extreme focus on utopianism, on bringing about the fulfillment of prophecy, the fulfillment of the Caliphate, all of these things accentuates its authenticity. The fact that these are men in black carrying a black flag that came out of a ninja movie or a video game is part of its attraction. It is about religion, but it's about lots of other

things as well. So you have emergency, you have agency, you have authenticity, and of course you have victory. (Speaking foreign language), here to stay and expanding and growing. And of course victory is proof of god's approval.

So that's the themes. Those are kind of a quick summary of the themes of it, the state of play. In the paper I talk about the many different approaches and many different agencies and entities that have tried and largely failed, although that's with a caveat. The United Kingdom, the United States, European Union, Arab government. And of course when we talk about failure we should always talk about -- always think about this, when the U.S. government talks about credible voices. There is no one more credible when it comes to Jihad than Al Qaeda. And of course Al Qaeda failed in its efforts to reign in the Islamic State. It largely failed in its efforts to stop its growing. So governments and even terrorist groups have not been successful in quelling the advance of the Islamic State, but that doesn't mean that there aren't valuable elements in all these approaches. Generally these approaches have been limited in scope. Many of them were of course created to fight Al Qaeda, not to fight the Islamic State. They were limited in scope, they were confused politically, and underfunded. I say confused politically because of course there's both kind of -- the kind of bread and butter work of bureaucracy in governments and the kind of not that great way that governments work, that's part of the political part. But also of course what is the message that you're going to have about a Utopian state and violence for the sake of god and the end of the world.

So there is a question of kind of what is the response, what is the answer that you can come up with. It is difficult for risk-averse governments to match the Islamic States advantages in -- as Charlie Winter said in his recent paper, volume and originality, which brings me to the response. One of the problems we face is that governments too often oscillate between triumphalism and despair. We're winning the battle against the extremists, we've got them on the run, or oh my god, they're everywhere, they're coming out of the woodwork, they're under the bed. The reality is that what we need is a

constant effort realizing that this is not an easy task, this is a difficult task. If it was easy somebody would have done it long ago and it would have been a simple thing. One of the reasons CSCC was created was a realization that the war of counter messaging, the war of propaganda against terrorist groups, against Al Qaeda, was not an easy one.

So there are several recommendations that I make. I'll go through them quickly. Number one, and this cannot be underemphasized because it's something that -- not at CSCC but in government in general I've encountered over and over, which is that the problem of the Islamic State is a political problem with a media dimension, not the other way around. All too often we think that these issues are issues of PR or propaganda or messaging. They're related to the real world. There is a real war in Syria and Iraq, there's real violence, there are real people being killed. Mosul did fall to the Islamic State, it wasn't imaginary. So we need to realize that when we talk about messaging, it is intrinsically linked to a political reality that you cannot divorce propaganda from the political reality on the ground.

Number two, volume. It takes a network to fight a network and still, despite some efforts, despite some baby steps in that direction, we still lack the volume necessary to at least be able to compete in this space. Volume has value. And the Islamic State either itself or with its networks of (speaking foreign language), the fan boys, the nights of the uploading, still has the advantage in numbers. And there is value in echo chamber. We all know it in our lives, we see it every day. Sometimes you see somebody, a politician or whoever, somebody say something really stupid. But if a lot of people applaud and cheer it on, it takes a life of its own, at adds oomph. So the echo chamber effect is important.

One thing that I've always wondered that government hasn't done yet and maybe the U.S. government or other governments are working on it, there is a wealth of credible voices of people who have firsthand knowledge of ISIS violence that have not been fully tapped. The Islamic State in August of 2014 killed almost 1000 male

members of the Sheitaat Tribe, a Sunni-Arab-Muslim Tribe in Syria. These are Syrian Arab Muslims being killed, Sunni Muslims being killed. We know that there are Sheitaat Tribesman as refugees in refugee camps, they are in places like al Hasakey and stuff like that. So there are people who have their own stories to tell, their own firsthand stories to tell. And that's true whether you talk about Iraqi tribes from Anbar Province, you know, Syrian IDPs and others. I would think that a good investment for a western government or a middle eastern government would be to hire -- I don't know, 500 Syrian refugees, or 500 Syrian IDPs, and teach them how to tweet -- they probably know how to tweet probably better than a lot of people -- and empower them to go on and challenge extremists and social media. That's actually an easy fix. It's also one that's not very expensive.

The third point of course is content. There is all too much emphasis on the search for the magic bullet. If we did only this thing, if we only had this video, whereas what you need is you need multifaceted content similar to the multifaceted content that the Islamic State produces. The Islamic State does not produce one type of thing, it produces many things. So you need to have a re-approach, you need to have different types of stuff, whether it be sarcasm, whether it be a fact based approach, whether it be an ideological approach, something, you know, perhaps is not best done by governments, or especially by the U.S. government. There is an ideological struggle, there is an ideological dimension to the ISIS battle, and that is something that someone needs to address in some way.

So those are kind of the outlines of at least some common sense steps that I think could not solve the problem, because I say this is essentially politically problem with deep roots in the region, but at the very least seek to challenge the extremists, challenge ISIS and its colleagues in the space that they're at. Even if ISIS is destroyed, it has energized extremist discourse in a way that we haven't seen before, not just on the Caliphate but on questions of prophecy, on different views of Salifism, on

concepts like (speaking in foreign language), what does it mean to be loyal, who are you loyal to, and things like slavery, like gisia and these other things.

The fourth point is something which is really important I think, and people are beginning to look at, is the question how are people radicalized. People are not radicalized in one way, and people are not radicalized only by social media. There is a personal dimension that often occurs in radicalization. Yes, I'm consuming stuff. I'm getting angry about the war in Syria. But then somebody, my cousin, my brother, my neighbor, my imam, the guy I play soccer with, there is an individual, personalized, tailored dimension that also can happen indirectly through social media, through Skype or through instant messaging. So this one to one dimension, the understanding that radicalization is not only digital need to be addressed. There are people already doing this as individuals. I often talk about Mubin Shaikh, who is this Canadian colleague who works in this field who has his kind of little sub-way of doing it which is effective for certain audiences. You don't need 1000 Mubin Shaikhs, you need people like him and people who are different from him and have different approaches or similar approaches. So you need to somehow find that individualized connection, whether it be social workers or trusted tweeters from communities that work with government. But you need to find a way to mimic or replicate the personal dimension, what Hegghammer calls the cultural, emotional dimension of radicalization. It's about feelings as well as other things.

Finally, greater policing of space. I strongly agree with J.M. Berger and Jessica Stern in their book on ISIS that there is value in taking this stuff down. There is value in making things more difficult for them. You're never going to get everything, and I'm certainly not in favor of curbing free speech, but there is value in making things more difficult for them in this ungoverned space with this social media.

So there are no magic bullets, there's no golden fleece or holy grail in doing this, but there are practical steps that can at the very least can begin to address this challenge that we face.

Thank you very much. (Applause)

MR. McCANTS: Ambassador LeBaron, I want to turn first to you for comment. Ambassador Fernandez has painted a pretty sweeping picture of the development of ISIS propaganda and U.S. government efforts to deal with it. You were the first incumbent of the position of Coordinator for this new institution that the State Department set up in 2011 to combat Jihadist propaganda. You were intimately involved with the creation of the organization's strategy and staffing it. Having done that, and then having been able to step outside of it for a few years, what do you make of the policy recommendations that Ambassador Fernandez has put forward?

AMBASSADOR LeBARON: The only thing I really learned and relearned was to surround yourself with smart people as I've done today. When I took on the job to be the first Coordinator, it was because nobody knew what to do and nobody really wanted to do it. It wasn't because I had any skill in social media or communications. I was a classic foreign policy generalist who accepted the job. There was nobody else who wanted it. (Laughter) So it wasn't the rigorous selection process to the find best. God, it was me or nobody else. And I was at the end of my career, I had planned to retire, and the recession hit and I figured well, I need another two years on my pension.

So I was highly motivated. (Laughter) But I did surround myself with very smart people. Will McCants was one of them who was an early advisor, very sharply critical of my early efforts, which I resented intensely (laughter) until I figured out that he was indeed right and we moved on from there. But I can't emphasize enough how you really need people like Alberto and the team that we both assembled with imagination, creativity, the ability, and the space to take some risk. And that space is very small in our government, but you need that space.

I want to make five general comments about Alberto's excellent paper. First, the paper as you heard provides an excellent understanding of the practices of the

ISIL information cadres and this history and evolution is invaluable in understanding just what this phenomenon is. Particularly important in this regard I would note is repeated statements about how the facts on the ground support the message. It's not the other way around. This has very broad implications. But one of the narrower ones is that propaganda alone does not produce results, either for terrorists or for those who work against them. And as Syria was a fortuitous event for the terrorists. I can relate a fortuitous event while I was in charge of CSCC. Along came the Arab Spring -- nobody wanted to see any Al Qaeda people on Jazeera after that. They were uninteresting. These little speeches by Zarqawi and others, they were boring compared to what was going on on the streets of Cairo and so forth. Now it's just, you know, they weren't newsworthy.

As Alberto said as well, there need to be a whole bunch of other factors that influence both individual and organizational decisions. And this goes to the debate about whether the internet and social media are independent radicalizers. So many people and so much of the conventional wisdom thinks that they are, that all you have to do if you're smart in ISIL is get on twitter and radicalize some guy in Wales. It doesn't happen that way as Alberto said. It also has very important implications for the notion of counter messaging. The message needs to be compelling. It has to somehow get beyond the policy difficulties that Alberto identified. If we have a lousy message on Syria in general, we're going to have a lousy message on twitter and nobody is going to be too interested in that lousy message. So the fact that it doesn't work shouldn't be a surprise.

Second set of observations. Alberto's identification of urgency, agency, authenticity, and victory, extremely important the way he framed that. The urge to do something. Another way of saying agency in the face of perceived injustice is strong. And counter propaganda has not really addressed this issue of doing something. ISIL says here's what you can do. We say here's what you can't do. But we don't really come up with anything to do. And some teenager, either in Jordan or Tunisia or Belgium wants

to know what he or she can do, not what he can't do. Any of you who are parents know that telling people what not to do often produces the exact opposite results.

I agree with Alberto that ISIS has managed to make some very effective propaganda. Where I might stray from his further analysis is in gaining an understanding of how effective it is. I agree that the message contains the key elements he identified, but for all the panicked headlines about the flow of fighters to Syria, I think the ISIS brand is a failure in many ways. I was in Belgium and the UK last week talking to authorities about recruits and returnees. Many of the people attracted and many who go and come back are seriously in capable people. Either emotionally disturbed or just not very able. So we need to first differentiate who is who in this target audience of people we want to influence. A former major in the Iraqi Army has a whole different set of motivations and capabilities than does a young, socially isolated kid in Antwerp. And we really need to differentiate between and among these people in the way that we not only message to them, but that we treat them in a variety of ways. And we need to ask ourselves if this media campaign by ISIL is so effective, why aren't there a whole lot of more Muslim adherence? According to Pure Research there are at least 800 million Muslims under 24. Why isn't there a huge swelling of support of the Islamic World? Why does such a tiny percentage of Muslim youth, even among those who absorb the propaganda, actually act on it? And you can be absolutely sure that the ISIL communicators are sitting around in little forums like this saying, what are we doing wrong. I mean we've got the agency, we've got agency, we got emergency, we got Syria, where are these people, why aren't they joining up by the thousands and thousands every day, why aren't there planes flying in every minute loaded with young Muslims from Malaysia and India and Pakistan, and wherever they are. So I think, you know, let's not overestimate the effectiveness of these crazies.

Third point. I think it's also helpful that Alberto noted the use of Islamic Clerics. He noted in his paper to rebut ISIS and AQ is nothing new. And he was right to

point out this doesn't always work, with clerics themselves sometimes providing very mixed messages and very sectarian messages that certainly the U.S. government doesn't want to be associated with. It also goes to the ongoing debate about who is a credible voice. Most outside experts sagely opine that the U.S. government cannot be a credible voice. We don't know how to talk to these people, we don't speak the same language, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. And they act as if people like Alberto and myself are so naive and stupid that we don't realize this, that we don't realize how incredible we are. Of course we do, of course we do. And that's why we try to get as close to the target as we possibly can, understand what motivates them, understand would it be more useful to have a counterpart tweet, to work through an NGO, a Somali NGO or a Pakistani NGO, both of which we did during our tenure, but only the tweets, and the videos get the publicity. But of course we know that you've got to get right up there close, either with your social media and your message, or with other means, family, peers, imams, et cetera. You've got to get close because these people are first, extremely difficult to identify because there are so few of them, and second, they have all kinds of different motivations that are not simply going to be addressed by political messages.

Related to this is Alberto's conclusion that current efforts have not been successful. And I think he made a good point that current efforts have been pitifully small, pitifully small. I mean I ran a little craft shop when I was there, and his wasn't much bigger by the time he left. What did we have, 30-40 people maybe at the most. So we're not -- you know, we really haven't tested the proposition of volume as he said. And it's important to realize that efforts directly focused on CVE issues are part of a big stream of information that has nothing to do with CVE. The news about Syria is enough for a lot of people, they don't need special messaging, they can read the *New York Times* or they can *Al-Ahram*. So, you know, it's a small element in a big flow of information.

Just a few brief comments to Alberto's suggestions. I really agree with most of everything he said. The idea of support for on line teams of Syrians, I think it's a great idea. That said, you're not going to control the message. I mean these guys, they're all going to have a different angle. And so if you think the U.S. government can hire them and say, you're going to say this, that would be probably the most ineffectual thing we could do. So we're going to have to find somebody else to take on the supervision. Also his observation that you need to emulate the close personal relationship that ISIS builds when it actually radicalizes people, that's just fundamental, it's just fundamental. It's something we haven't really internalized. We keep thinking that there's the magic tweet, there's the magic message. It's right up close and personal is where you have to be and the social media is just going to be one part of that. I agree with him on better placing of social media. I think, you know, there are things we can do now that don't have anything to do with freedom of speech, that are easily done and just take just about that much courage.

Finally, about my own general biases on this. We talk about counter narratives, and for me the counter narrative is us, it's us as a country, it's the west, what we do, how we behave, what we do in the Middle East, what our policies are. And what disappoints me is that we think we can take a little thing like CVE and that can substitute for what we really need, which is a broad multifaceted sustained engagement with the Muslim world. We talk about long-term change, we talk about we've got to be prepared for the long-term. Do we have any strategy for the long-term, for engaging the Muslim world? Does anybody know about one? I'd like to sign on, I'd like to participate in that strategy. You know, we have instruments, we have exchange programs. We have fabulous ways of bringing people here. We have high school students from the Muslim world who study here for a year every year, we have 100,000 Saudis, who most people don't even know about, studying in this country, who we don't even talk to, who ghetto-ize themselves in universities around this country. And, you know, this is an opportunity lost.

So we need an information and an outreach and an engagement strategy that includes countering violent extremism, but is not driven by it.

Thank you. (Applause)

MR. McCANTS: Thank you very much. So to begin with I just want to ask you both a very basic question. And it has to do with the reason why the U.S. government does this kind of activity to begin with. I remember when I stared at State Department in 2009 the general thinking was that the U.S. government should really not dignify terrorist propaganda with a response. And that made sense on a certain level if you're talking about someone like the President or the Secretary of State. Of course you would not want them elevating the propaganda. But it seemed to be a missed opportunity when it came to more day to day tactical exchanges. And this is why -- one reason why the CSCC was created was to do this kind of routine response and correcting of the lies that were being put out by U.S. enemies, particularly those like Al Qaeda and later the Islamic State. But I wanted to ask the basic question why does the U.S. government do this kind of thing? And wouldn't it be better if the U.S. -- given all of the problems that you've outlined, wouldn't it be better if it just didn't do it after all?

AMBASSADOR FERNANDEZ: Well, I mean I think first of all you have to put the story about CSCC or counter terrorism communications, you have to put it within the context of what the U.S. government tried to do in terms of communications after 9/11. There is a sense, I thinks, you know, is some accurate, some truth to it that there was a failure to communicate, that things were not being communicated as well as they could have. And so there were a variety of efforts after 9/11 by the Bush administration, and then it went over into the Obama administration, to come up with some kind of team. As you know, parts of actually what CSCC had date back from that period. So there was an effort, and I think it's a laudable one to say somebody needs to be out there correcting the record. Hey, I was on Al Jazeera last week and I was on with a guy that said Assad is an American dog, a Zionist, and a mason. And I was on telling

the public and Al Jazeera that this guy was a lunatic. So there is value in, you know, calling BS on your adversary. There is value in engaging, there's value in arguing. The problem is I think Richard is absolutely right is that, you know, counter messaging or responding to your opponent or getting in their face is not some kind of panacea, it's not some kind of magic bullet. Yes, you need to mix it up, yes, you need to fight the good fight and correct the record, but it's also not some kind of magic pixie dust as I called it in one interview.

MR. McCANTS: Richard?

AMBASSADOR LeBARON: Secretary Clinton was very interested in this project and it wouldn't have happened frankly if she hadn't gotten behind it in a serious way because there was a tremendous amount of skepticism in the bureaucracy about even doing it. And there was a tremendous skepticism about the State Department's ability to coordinate an inter-agency effort like this. But I betrayed Secretary Clinton because what she thought we were going to do was set up some sort of a 24 hour control room which would have all our operators there at their screens, and a message would come in from Al Qaeda, and -- boom, we would shoot back at Al Qaeda. And this was her vision. Now it's a sensible vision. That's what you want to do, that's how you -- especially if you're a politician and you've run one of these response teams that they've run for the last 20 years, you do that sort of work. What we found is basically logistically it wouldn't work, and frankly, you know, we would be setting ourselves up as an equal of Al Qaeda. I mean Al Qaeda is a terrorist group. You know, we're a super power. Give me a break. You know, we're not going to have a ping pong game with these guys every day. We need to deal with them in a strategic way. We need to figure out who's listening to them, talk to those people, understand the target, and go after those few people who are actually influenced by them. It was not for me ever a war of ideas. In previous administrations it was only a war of ideas, as if -- as if Al Qaeda had an idea that would compete with western liberal capitalism in any effective way. I mean what were we

thinking? It was ridiculous. And so my effort was narrow, narrow, narrow, to where the real problem is. I'm not saying we got there necessarily, but that was the effort.

MR. McCANTS: I got the feeling sometimes at State and after I left that messaging, talking about messaging, particularly at the higher levels of government almost became a way to avoid talking about the hard policy choices that had to be made. If a message wasn't being well received, well then the fix was to make a better message. But rarely did you hear discussion of the actual policy behind the messaging. And I think both of you hinted at that in your remarks.

And I want to get a sense, and I wonder if you could give the audience a sense of the political constraints that an organization like the CSCC labors under. I mean it's not an independent NGO, it is a servant of the American people first, but also they are elected representatives. And those folks are making decisions that don't always message very well. What kind of political constraints were there during your tenures?

AMBASSADOR FERNANDEZ: How long is this program? (Laughter) This is a huge problem. I remember when we began messaging on Syria in a serious way in summer of 2012. And I actually went to NEA and explained to them that we were going to do this and, you know, Syria was the issue in the Arab world in 2012. It still is, but maybe even more so in 2012-2013. And I told them right off, I said you know we're going to be messaging on an issue where we're losing. You know, you want us to basically tell people don't become terrorists, don't join Al Qaeda in Syria, and what the people we're interacting with want to know is are you going to do anything about Assad. Are you doing to do anything to stop the carnage? What's the U.S. position on this? So we're basically telling people we're not going to talk to you about what you want to talk about, let's talk about what we want to talk about over here. So we knew going in that we basically had a losing hand on Syria. There was absolutely no doubt in any of our minds that we were basically messaging in thing where we had not one hand but both hands tied behind our back.

This always continued to be the case. I think there's this emphasis, you know. Edward R. Murrow of course always had this line about, you know, if you want me to be in on the crash landings I'd better be in on the take offs. There is all too often in government the idea that public diplomacy or public affairs is some kind of Mr. Fix It that can kind of cover up for policy mistakes, for policy decisions. The policy decisions have no cost. So I often felt that we were held to a kind of unfair standard, you know. As I remember telling a colleague or a colleague told me, I forget which, we joked after we produced a video in June of -- one video that we did in June of 2014 and we said the Islamic State just took a city of 2 million people and we're countering them with a video. (Laughter) You know, propaganda is part of the real word.

MR. McCANTS: Richard, you mentioned that you were at the helm during the halcyon days during of the early Arab Spring. So one could imagine that the political constraints may have been less or may have been different.

AMBASSADOR LeBARON: Let me come at it from a little different approach, a more bureaucratic one. To put together an inter-agency group that does something a little bit edgy and a little bit different than the U.S. government requires the President and cabinet members to actually be involved to get it done. As pitiful as that sounds that's what it requires. I had that, after a year on the job got that, and with that I got another year to do what I wanted because they were tired of focusing on it at that point. And we did something else that Alberto didn't have the luxury to do, we only operated in Arabic and Urdu. Once CSCC started operating in English all the nitwits came out of the closet. Nitwits are known as terrorism experts in my vocabulary. (Laughter) Present company excluded. But everybody knows how to do this, everybody is an expert on how you counter terrorism. You know, you can see them on CNN, you can see them on Fox. They're a dime a dozen. Some of them have shaky CIA backgrounds (laughter), some of them don't. You know, some of them are just making a buck. But once you started doing this in English then people could nickel and dime you

to death. If they didn't know what we were doing and you had a little space to experiment, you could actually experiment. You could develop the tool, and the value of having these kinds of organizations is in the development of the instruments, so that you figure out what the hell you're doing. You know, this is not simple as Albert said. So you need some space and you need some leadership in the government to give you that political space.

AMBASSADOR FERNANDEZ But isn't it sad to think that to effectively accomplish something in government you have to basically deceive people that it's actually not actually taking place? (Laughter)

MR. McCANTS: Richard, I want to pick up on something that you said, and ask you, Alberto. I wonder if you can talk a little bit about how the U.S. government measures the success of these efforts versus how the media measures the success of these efforts. Because I know that the media take on products that the CSCC produces or the United States produces can have a big impact on how Congress views it, on how the NSC views it, which then can have a major impact on the CSCC views it.

That one is for you, Alberto.

AMBASSADOR FERNANDEZ: You know, this I think not unique to this administration, but maybe it's particularly pertinent in this area that we're talking about. You know, the language and the tribe that this administration cares about most in this space is not in Anbar Province but is the tribe that lives between northern Virginia and the Island of Manhattan. (Laughter) So, you know, John Oliver's opinion is more important than that of (inaudible) when it comes to this space. This is a political reality. So you're always going to face that challenge in that the way -- you know, we have one reporter who wrote that CSCC's budget was $1.3 billion. He basically took everything the U.S. government spends on public diplomacy and broadcasting and attributed it to our office of $5 million a year. So there's always going to be this kind of challenge that you're going to face.

You know, when you talk about metrics there's the metric in your target audience that you try -- your international, foreign target audience. Then there's the other target audience which is the bureaucracy, the western media, the pundits, real or imagined. That's just the way the word is. It's always a challenge.

MR. McCANTS: Ambassador LeBaron, I wonder if you can talk a little bit more about the bureaucracy. I think for people that haven't worked in the U.S. government, particularly in this space around messaging, you might assume that the messaging is very tight, it's very controlled, you know who all the players are. You start getting involved and you realize, the messaging bureaucracy is gigantic because the U.S. government is gigantic. The CSCC notionally was in charge coordinating messaging throughout the government. How did that work in practice?

AMBASSADOR LeBARON: Pretty well. Not that we coordinated all messaging, but that we learned who was doing what pretty much and we were able to deconflict that, and we didn't obsess over it, and we had pretty good inter agency cooperation. I think the people who were the most suspicious of us were the traditional public affairs people in the State Department who are driven by the press response. And that's a very controlled process within the State Department which consumes literally half the day on the 6th and 7th floors of the State Department, just doing the press guidance. You'd think they'd have other things to do, but press guidance is policy. And that's the optic through which they saw some of this stuff. And basically when members of my staff came up to me and said, you know, we've got this thing we want to say or this video we're going to put out, should we clear it, do we clear it with other offices in the State Department? And I said to them, why would we do that? Why would we do that, you know. And that was because of that system -- it isn't called a fudge factory for nothing. You know, it is, and we would have never experimented, would have never got the organization off the ground had we not had the space, the bureaucratic and political space to operate very independently.

MR. McCANTS: Thank you. I want to turn to ISIS propaganda itself before I open it up for questions. Alberto, the one shade of difference between you and Richard seems to be on the question of how effective Islamic State propaganda is. And this is always a very difficult question to answer too, but can you make the case that they have been more successful than say their predecessor Al Qaeda or is it that the bottom has just fallen out of the Middle East and now, you know, there are many more opportunities to go and join groups whereas there weren't in the past?

AMBASSADOR FERNANDEZ: Yes, I agree with that, it's both. If you look at ISIS crime as -- I'm not a crime novelist, but I like to read crime novels -- if you think of ISIS reality as a crime, right, you have motive and opportunity. The motive is the world view, is the ideology, it's the way that they see things. The opportunity is of course what developed, right. The implosion of regimes in the region, the loss of (inaudible), of the prestige and all of the state, these states and state systems and state speakers and, you know, basically all authority in the Middle East has been shaken by the Arab Spring and all of these things. So there is a tremendous opportunity that was created.

But I mean I would push back a little bit. I mean I agree with Richard completely is that if you're talking about 1.4 billion Muslims in the world, the fact that 30,000, 40,000, 50,000, whatever it is -- the number keeps going up -- a number of people went and left their homes to join the Islamic State, it's not that big of a number. On the other hand, compared to what other groups have done it's impressive. And you're talking about an organization that sees itself very much as a revolutionary vanguard, you know. It's not about the masses, it's about the masses maybe at some point in the future, but it's about a committed minority which has a clear view of what it wants, and is going to be ruthless about implementing it. So, yeah, I agree. I think you have to be really careful about, you know, making them 10 feet tall. One of the best examples that we saw is ISIS did just -- what, last month -- a whole range of pretty well done videos about what -- about don't go to Europe to be a refugee because that's bad, that's un-Islamic, they're

going to convert you to Christianity, they're going to humiliate you. It's awful, blah, blah, blah, blah , blah, blah, blah. You look at it objectively, those videos had absolutely no effect whatsoever as far as we could tell. So, yes, I mean I think you're right. You need to treat them seriously, need to treat the effectiveness of their outreach seriously without exaggerating it. Like I said it's neither despair nor triumphalism. And sometimes we seem to like those extremes.

MR. McCANTS: Ambassador LeBaron, a lot of Jihadist messaging is religious which can pose problems for the U.S. government in formulating a response. One, because of our own tradition of secularism and strictly separating church and state, but also that we have been painted as a Christian crusader nation that is meddling in the affairs of Muslims. Can you talk about some of the problems posed by the religious nature of say ISIS's messaging and how the U.S. has to respond do it?

AMBASSADOR LeBARON: Well, I think you can view this as a big problem or a little problem. I view it as a little problem. I think the U.S. government itself is not the right communicator on religion. The U.S. government however should talk about religion, you know, with people who know about it, people who should communicate about it, people who do communicate about it. We have an office of religious freedom in the State Department, we care about that. So it's not that we don't care about religious issues or don't need to understand them, I just think we have to find other ways of involving or not involving ourselves in the religious ferment, in the Islamic world. And that's one example of a long-term issue that's going to play out in that world. And we have an obligation in my sense to engage on the full range of issues, religious being one, political another, violent extremism another, economics another, human rights another. The whole range of those issues. So it's part of a package.

MR. McCANTS: Ambassador Fernandez, last question for you and then I'll open it up the audience. You in your paper talk about the trajectory of Islamic State propaganda and how it has changed and how those changes if you're paying attention

can be meaningful and give you hints of where things are headed. I wonder if you had any thoughts based on recent Islamic State propaganda about where you think they might be headed as an organization?

AMBASSADOR FERNANDEZ: Well, that's a really good question. I've talked several times, I talked here and I talked in the remarks on the podium about the connection between the real world and propaganda. And I don't think the Islamic State is going away that quickly soon. I think it's quite a challenge. But it is facing a situation where there is a possibility of a greater disconnect between the propaganda and the reality on the ground. There's a possibility of it in the sense that so much of what they've put out is predicated on the concept of victory, of expansion, of growth, of state building. It's not easy, but it should not be impossible to kind of, you know, curb their enthusiasm, you know, clip their wings in that sense, and create space, you know, where there's a big space between reality and the propaganda. I mean right now you could say there is a space, but the bigger the space gets, you know, the more ridiculous, the less credible your propaganda is. You think about, you know, any dictatorship -- what's his name Baghdad Bob, right -- Baghdad Bob saying the Americans -- there's an American tank driving by as he's saying the Americans are being defeated and stuff like that. So you want to kind of create this space. So I think we're at a point where they can be a mess. What happens with this triumphalist propaganda for example if Raqqa is taken in the next few months from them? This is a challenge for them. As we discussed last night, I mean I think there's a weakness in the state. If you killed the leader, you kill the leader; okay there will be another leader. There can be another Caliph, there will be another representative. But if the state project itself is seen as failing, that does weaken the propaganda.

MR. McCANTS: Thank you. Okay, let's open it up to the audience.

MR. MITCHELL: Thanks very much; fascinating discussion. I'm Garrett Mitchell, I write the Mitchell Report. I want to come back to the first question I think that

Will posed that has to do with whether or not the U.S. government ought to be in this business in the first place, and put a slightly different perspective on the question this way. I spent a considerable chunk of time working for two of the large global advertising agencies on two of their largest brands, consumer product brands. And among the things that I became fully aware of during that time was that the power of advertising and public relations and merchandising is really operative at the margins. It does not make people use mouthwash, have condensed soup, and other products. It's when they are ready for purchase this aims them at a particular brand for a particular set of reasons that market research has been able to ferret out. It seems to me that the United States government lacks both the -- any government -- lacks both the competency chops and the cultural chops to be in the business of messaging when I think I've heard from this group, and I think we would agree, that no amount, no volume of activity can counteract a drone strike, a hospital that's blown up. And so as a consequence I would love to have you just say a little bit more about why you think, as I gather you do, there really is a role for government in this space.

And thanks.

MR. McCANTS: Richard, you want to take a shot first?

AMBASSADOR LeBARON: Yes, I think there is a role for government. I think it's a small role. I think it's a role in partnership with a lot of other efforts. But let me give you an example. I think in that advertising there's a parallel in your description of the effect on advertising that we pursued vigorously. We said to ourselves, where we want to get with our communications is into the head of the people who are thinking about not just extreme ideas, but about acting on them. We want to get to those people, the consumer who is about to make a decision, and we want to just nudge that decision. We just want to push it a little bit. Now the question is did we do that, can we do that, are we able to do that? In my view, it's worth trying to find out. I mean either we're in a war with these terrorists or we're not. Either this is serious or it's not. And if we don't use all the

tools, in addition to drone strikes and special ops, we will securitize this issue, we will only thing that the only way we can stop these people is killing them. And so why would we not spend a modest amount of money experimenting and to see if we can get to the source of the terror before those individuals join it.

So that's my justification. It's money well spent if it's spent with an intelligent plan that is cognizant of the difficulties, has no illusions about how easy it is to get to that consumer, or to change that consumer's mind, but tries to get closer and closer. And it's not just with advertising; it's through his peers, her mother, her associates. You know, it's a lot of different methods and it is not all about just a message in a video.

MR. McCANTS: Alberto, you want to weigh in on that?

AMBASSADOR FERNANDEZ: You know, I was a public diplomacy officer for 32 years so I believe strongly in the job of reaching out and engaging people and trying to convince them and trying to talk to them. So, yeah, I think there's a value to it. You know, three years of CSCC's budget equals the cost of one drone by the way. So I don't think -- you know, there are rounding errors in the U.S. government that are greater than the money that was spent on this. So I think it's money that was well spent.

MR. McCANTS: Let me take a few questions now.

QUESTIONER: Thank you. My name is (inaudible); I'm a German-American-Turkish columnist. I come from the diversity and inclusion perspective towards national security. So my question is, talking about ISIS we are taking responsibility of how we with our policies over decades and decades and decades contributed to this phenomenon, or let me call it symptom, is a little insensitive in my opinion. So I think we have to be really aware of that. So I'm wondering if you can comment on that, whether we have anything to do with the fact that ISIS came up in the first place. And also ISIS is -- so I think that's it.

MR. McCANTS: All right. Let me take two more please. There in the back; yes.

QUESTIONER: Hi. So I'm just curious, you know, the State Department put out the anti-propaganda messages highlighting the barbery of ISIS, I'm curious what your feeling is that this was aimed at a population that thrives on barbery and what you think the reasoning was behind that, because it seems like it was a big mess.

AMBASSADOR LeBARON: That's going to be for you, Alberto.

MR. McCANTS: All right. One more over here. Yes, the gentleman in the light blue tie right there.

MR. PASHAM: Thank you. Rubine Pasham, I'm former USG as well, I was a USAID Middle East Bureau and now I am founder of Rebuild Kurdistan which works with the youth engagement and employment as a way to bring stability to the region. So I just go got back from Erbil and I know, Ambassadors, you're both familiar with that region, and one thing that I would love to hear from you about is how we can leverage some of the resources and stakeholders and allies of the region, and that local story. And one of the cases being that Iraqi-Kurdistan region which stands up against ISIS effectively, but is also under threat because of the refugee populations that are fledging to the area, and it's becoming economically and politically vulnerable.

But another thing that I'd love to hear from you about is -- and echoing what you said about how the propaganda itself is also building on things that ISIS is offering to the people and how we're sort of lacking that counter narrative locally. What about the younger generation? And what could be done in terms of engaging and providing the services and employment opportunities that would prevent them from going to that place, that threshold in which they could turn one way or another towards extremism. What can we be doing about that more? Both civil society and USG.

MR. McCANTS: Thank you. Ambassador LeBaron, the contention that the U.S. has had a major role in creating a lot of the radicalism that we're seeing today, I

imagine you would agree with a small part of that, but also I'd like to hear your thoughts on how the United States can engage the younger generation because following your work at the Atlantic Council, I know it's a theme you talk about a lot, how the role of U.S. diplomacy and reaching out to the next generation of Muslim youth.

AMBASSADOR LeBARON: I think it's no, you know, no secret that the adventure in Iraq had some unintended consequences and set back the image of the United States for decades. This verges on the obvious. So what do you do with that? If you're a professional diplomat, you work with it and you find out how you can work around it and work through it. You also have a set of conspiracy theories in the Middle East, everywhere in the Middle East, everybody in the Middle East, from the most senior professionals, the academics and leaders, to the most junior clerks in the post office, who may believe that we are engaging with Iran so that we can limit the power of Sunni Muslims around the world, who may believe that we are supporting Assad actively. So you have to work through a lot of filters to get to the audience that you're dealing with in the Middle East and in the Islamic world, partly because of biases about U.S. behavior, partly because of a brand of conspiracy theory that is very difficult to deal with. So you just have to work with it. It's part of public diplomacy.

My point on dealing with Muslim youth is a fairly simple one. Now if we think we've got a long-term problem in the Muslim world, then we better deal with it as a long-term issue. And if we think it's a big problem, we better deal with it in a big way. You know, in a big way is engaging and trying to help people who are trying to create their own change, which everybody in the Middle East is trying to do. They're trying to change the place. There are very few people who are not interested in changing the place because they're not happy. It's not a happy place for the most part. And so we need to be supportive, we need to be engaging, we need to be non-prescriptive. We don't need to sell the way we do things; we need to sell the idea that we were behind people who are trying to improve their own societies. And if we do that through

scholarship programs, if we do that through exchange visitor programs, through engaging more fully in our Fulbright Program, sending more Fulbright scholars to the region, bringing more here. We have all these instruments and we use them in such a small measure. That's what distresses me. We have instruments that we know that work, that change people's lives, that help them change their societies. And that's exactly what we need to do in the Middle East, but we don't have any strategy to do it.

MR. McCANTS: Thank you. Ambassador Fernandez, you were at the CSCC at a really interesting time because when you came in it was still early days of the Arab Spring. And the organization's mandate was still really to message against Al Qaeda writ large. And Al Qaeda was a different creature than the Islamic State, at least its leadership. And its goals that it set for itself, particularly in its own messaging were in some ways different. As you said in your remarks, Al Qaeda central really focused on winning over a broad segment of the Muslim population. And the Islamic State in contrast focuses on winning over a very narrow segment of the Muslim population. You don't light a fellow Sunni Muslim on fire and hope that you're going to win over the masses by doing so.

Can you talk about some of the challenges in messaging against that kind of enemy vice, Al Qaeda central?

AMBASSADOR FERNANDEZ: I mean first of all, of course the majority of what we did of course was in Arabic not in English. So I mean I need to correct that perception because sometimes people for some reason are obsessed with one video that CSCC produced in English. And whereas we produced hundreds of videos, most of them in Arabic. And so people kind of get spun up about one thing. But look, it is about that narrow casing. And so what you're trying to do in the temple of the work is you're trying to find something, anything that you can hang your hat on. You look for any hook, any advantage, any space that you can find and you try to seize it. So, you know, I think people don't quite understand that when you're dealing in this kind of free-wheeling world

of what they're putting out, you see is there something that I can take a hold of. For example, we never messaged very much -- we did a little bit, but not very much against -- about ISIS depredations against Shia, Christians, Yazidis. Why? Not because those are not horrible, horrible things that need to be condemned, they do need to be condemned, but because our target audience was a certain target audience, a certain Sunni-Arab-Muslim target audience, which is ISIS's target audience. So for us we would look for -- for example, when you talk about the barbarism or the brutality, yes, that's a feature not a bug of what ISIS does, but even given the way that they work, that is a weakness of theirs. And you do see some returnees and recanters. They say I thought -- I went to Syria, I joined the Islamic State, I thought I was going to be killing (speaking foreign language), the filthy Shia, and what happened, I wound up killing other Sunni-Arab-Muslims. So that message, even with ISIS supporters, does resonate. So seizing upon their brutality against the people that they're supposed to be defending is a kind of common sense way to at least, you know, land a counter punch at them. Again, not a panacea, but a kind of -- you take the opportunities that are given to you by the propaganda, whatever they are.

MR. McCANTS: All right. Let's take some more questions. Yes.

QUESTIONER: We have some twitter questions for you.

MR. McCANTS: Yes, please.

QUESTIONER: So first, can you speak a little bit about inter country efforts to more effectively confront ISIS propaganda? For example, U.S.-Russia cooperation and whether that would be more effective. And also how can local forces be credibly empowered without tainting them through U.S. government funding or support?

AMBASSADOR LeBARON: What was that?

MR. McCANTS: What was the first one?

AMBASSADOR LeBARON: It was the second one I didn't get.

MR. McCANTS: All right. Let me get a few more from the room. Yes, gentleman in the front. Wait for the mic please.

QUESTIONER: The word reality came up late in the discussion about messaging, and reality has a lot to do with intelligence on the ground. So how good is our intelligence on the ground?

MR. McCANTS: All right. Back here in the white shirt. Yes.

QUESTIONER: Hello. There's been a lot of discussion about how we need to include the Muslim nations in dialogue and everything. But my question is when we have politicians in the west, like for example the Hungarian Prime Minister, Viktor Orbán, who said Muslims shouldn't be allowed to be refugees in his country because they are a threat to Christians. And we also have politicians back here in the United States, like Mike Huckabee, Bobby Jindal, who speak against the Muslim community and against Islamic nations and against Islam religion. Don't you think this alienates the Muslim population?

MR. McCANTS: Okay. All right. So we've got a question about international cooperation in working on messaging between governments, I take the question to mean. We also have a question about our intelligence on the ground, how much we actually know about our adversary. And then also the final question about who controls the message basically. If you've got the U.S. government giving its own official response, but you have members of different parts of the government giving their own thoughts, or prominent politicians, how do we keep control of the message then?

And, Alberto, I'll start with you and you can take any of those that you want.

(Laughter)

AMBASSADOR LeBARON: You can take all of them.

AMBASSADOR FERNANDEZ: I'm kind of fuzzy, I'm trying to think. Well, I mean on the intelligence one, you know, I think this actually goes into the local

forces too. As I said there are not enough partners, there are not enough local players. There are more than there were a year ago and that's a good thing. You know, it's important to highlight for example the heroic efforts that are being done by local citizen journalists and citizen activists like the Raqqa being slaughtered silently, collective in Raqqa or Mosul I (phonetic for example. And there are others in Arabic as well. These are heroic people reporting from the ground, reporting, giving factual, you know, truth about things which is incredibly valuable. You know, it's powerful. So that's good. And there needs to be more of that. I guess that's an answer to that intelligence one.

MR. McCANTS: Okay. And, Richard, this question about who controls the message. I mean you've worked in public diplomacy a long time. How does the United States put its best foot forward or represent itself with one voice given that we are a very rowdy democracy with a lot of voices seeking to represent the United States to the world?

AMBASSADOR LeBARON: Let me answer that in a couple of ways. My last posting overseas was in London. I worked with a republican appointee and a democratic appointee. And the republican appointee's main job was to defend the Bush policy in Iraq because that's what the Brit's cared about. And they hated it; they really hated the Bush policy in Iraq. Bob Tuttle, car dealer from California, did a pretty damn good job. And it wasn't because he was loud, it wasn't because he was, you know, obstreperous, it wasn't because he was neocon, it was because he was a guy who listened and responded as openly as he could and defended the policies that he was sent there to defend. Simple.

Let me give you another example that I think is more timely. Tomorrow you're going to hear a lot of crap about Benghazi and it's going to feed into this narrative that you mentioned, this anti-Islamic narrative in some ways. And you'll hear a lot of stuff about this. And what I want you to have in the back of your mind tomorrow when you hear that is that Chris Stevens' family, in a tribute to him, is setting up an exchange

program with young people from the Middle East to engage those people over the long-term. I want you to think about that, not the nonsense you'll hear from your politicians tomorrow morning.

MR. McCANTS: Thank you. Okay, let's take some more questions. Yes, please.

MR. KRAVITZ: Thank you very much. Alexander Kravitz. Ambassador LeBaron, you spoke about the freedom that you had, you know, from the President to the cabinet level, to act. And you mentioned that the Ambassador Fernandez had less of that. And I wonder of your successor might even have less of that, and if that's the case how is that going to impact the effectiveness of the Center's work?

AMBASSADOR LeBARON: I don't want to speak for Alberto on that but, you know, I was there at a special time and special set of circumstances. And that freedom was hard fought. It took us a year to get to that point and a year to use it. And Alberto when I was briefing him, the main thing I said to him is you're losing Hillary Clinton and I don't think you're going to get John Kerry because it's not his project. But Alberto could speak about the political forces that he faced.

AMBASSADOR FERNANDEZ: I'm not a democrat, but I think Secretary Clinton was a huge supporter of the initiative. She protected it, she encouraged it, and I do think things changed once she left. I'll leave it as that and be as diplomatic as possible.

AMBASSADOR LeBARON: He hasn't been out as long as I have. (Laughter)

MR. McCANTS: More questions? Yes, please, in the back.

QUESTIONER: I'd like to take you back to something that was touched on very briefly and that is how you measure success. Our success and ISIS's success as you look at the messaging, what are the techniques for doing it. Because as long as

we're messaging we need -- it seems to me we need constantly to measure what we're saying in terms of the results it achieves.

AMBASSADOR FERNANDEZ: Well, I mean, there's always a challenge when you're dealing with sentiment. You know, how do measure what goes on between a person's ears, right. In my public diplomacy career I remember telling someone, you know, if I succeed in taking a person who is 100% anti American and making them 60 percent anti American, how in the world are you going to measure that, right. And when you talk about counter terrorism communications, how do you measure what doesn't happen, you know. I was going to become a terrorist, I saw your video, I loved it. (Laughter) I decided not to become a terrorist. You're not going to get that, right. So what you need are -- what you rely on are secondary and tertiary measures of effectiveness. You measure performance. X video was seen how many times, how many times was it reposted, what was the reaction to it, what was the adversary's reaction. We had videos we did at CSCC that caused ISIS -- or was it Al Qaeda -- I forget, one or the other; I forget which one -- which caused them to produce their own video. I think it was Nusra Front. We did a video on Nusra Front and Nusra Front did a video back to what we were doing. That's a measure of effectiveness. The fact that they would try to block certain videos or try to take some things down or try to block twitter handles. That's something. Wilma Katz wrote a piece in foreign policy which was about in 2013 not 2014 when people are not talking about the Islamic State, in summer of 2013 the Islamic State set something up on twitter called the al-Battar Media Battalion, the Sharp Sword Media Battalion, to go after its enemies on twitter. And the first enemy it went after was CSCC on twitter. That's something. It's not, you know, it's Miller Time, you know, we've won, but it's something. It shows that you are provoking a response from the adversary. But I agree with you, the metric issue is, you know, a big challenge. But I always ask myself, people were always asking me about metrics, and they never asked the guy who spent $500 million in Syria to train six guys about metrics. (Laughter)

MR. McCANTS: Yes, the gentleman in the orange shirt I think it is.

QUESTIONER: How are you? I want to know what the U.S. is doing to I guess empower the Arab states to be a more active player in countering the Islamic State.

MR. McCANTS: In the messaging realm. Okay.

AMBASSADOR FERNANDEZ: Well, there's a promising development. To be frank, and I'll be brutally frank, it's extraordinarily weak and not very good, but the U.S. government worked with the government of the United Arab Emirates to set up a counter messaging office, which is called the SAWAB Center. And it received some PR when it was rolled out in July of 2015. So it's early days, it's very new. It's a weak effort, but it's the right effort, it's the right type of thing we need to see. The problem is it seems to be kind of like CSCC, small, not very active, not very prolific. But the idea of creating partners, of creating proxies, of creating networks, is the right idea. And so that is something definitely that you -- you basically -- anybody who is part of our coalition or who is working with us against ISIS should have their own messaging capacity. They should have it for their own reasons, not because we want them to.

AMBASSADOR LeBARON: One of the things I want to add here is that we get trapped in the notion that the only thing we should be doing is the messaging thing. And that, we do a lot of countering violent extremism work around the world. I saw it in Europe last week. That has nothing to do with messaging, it has to do with helping local NGOs empower themselves, comparing notes, bringing them together, talking about, you know, how you get at these issues, working with law enforcement. I mean in Belgium I saw policeman and social workers and political leaders sitting at a table with a dialogue that I have never witnessed in the U.S. government. A dialogue that they all were starting from the same base, and they all knew where their boundaries were, they all knew when to call in the other person to intervene in a case of a person who is considering doing this. So don't get trapped in the notion that it's all about social media,

and that the only effort the U.S. government is doing is this communications effort. Embassies around the world are focuses on this. They're organizing exchange programs, they're sending people here. So it's a big effort. Messaging is just a tiny part of it.

MR. McCANTS: I'm going to close with a final question of my own. We have an election coming up and a new administration will be put in place, republican or democrat. What one thing would you advise the income administration to do if given the opportunity? Would it be to increase the budget, stop tweeting in English, one thing.

AMBASSADOR LeBARON: You go first. (Laughter)

AMBASSADOR FERNANDEZ: Me go first? One thing?

MR. McCANTS: One.

AMBASSADOR FERNANDEZ: I would prioritize the creation of proxies in the region who can do some of the heavy lifting that we can't do. And I don't think it's -- by the way, the fact that Uncle Sam is paying for people to do stuff in the Middle East, I don't think that discredits their message.

MR. McCANTS: Okay.

AMBASSADOR LeBARON: Engage, engage, engage, engage, in social media, in exchanges, in scholarships. Act as if this is a long-term problem, treat it as a long-term problem, and act like a super power.

MR. McCANTS: All right. Please join me in thanking our panelists. (Applause)

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CERTIFICATE OF NOTARY PUBLIC

I, Carleton J. Anderson, III do hereby certify that the forgoing electronic file when originally transmitted was reduced to text at my direction; that said transcript is a true record of the proceedings therein referenced; that I am neither counsel for, related to, nor employed by any of the parties to the action in which these proceedings were taken; and, furthermore, that I am neither a relative or employee of any attorney or counsel employed by the parties hereto, nor financially or otherwise interested in the outcome of this action.

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