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AFTER THE CALIPHATE: A GLOBAL APPROACH TO DEFEATING ISIS

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Introduction:

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Keynote Remarks:

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. SACHS: And two members of the diplomatic corps here with us and it's really a pleasure to have you here at Brookings. My name is Natan Sachs and I'm the director of the Center for Middle East Policy and on behalf of John Allen, the president of Brookings and Bruce Jones, the vice president and director of Foreign Policy, I'd like to welcome you and especially our guest of honor.

Five years ago, the fall of Mosul in Iraq to a little-known terrorist organization calling themselves the Islamic State stunned the world. ISIS, as it became known in some quarters, quickly gained territory throughout Iraq and Syria and international notoriety for their brutality, their ruthlessness and the social media capabilities that they brought to bear. After many years of fighting in those countries, ISIS territorial control today has largely been extinguished. But while the group no longer controls large portions of Iraq and Syria, their ideology persists and attacks like the one we saw recently a show that there's still tremendous work to be done. Our President John R. Allen was, in fact, special presidential envoy to the global coalition to counter ISIL, another name for it, and he recently wrote the Islamic state is not defeated until the idea of the caliphate has been defeated.

With that in mind, it's my special pleasure to welcome Ambassador Nathan Sales to Brookings. Ambassador Sales is the coordinator for counter terrorism at the US State Department. There he heads the Counter Terrorism Bureau serving as senior advisor to Secretary of State Pompeo. Ambassador Sales previously served as deputy assistant secretary of state at the Department of Homeland Security where he worked to strengthen and expand the visa waiver program among many other issues. Ambassador Sales also worked at Department of Justice in a very critical time. He worked on counter terrorism policy including what became known as the Patriot Act. Ambassador Sales' remarks this afternoon will touch on this critical question of how to sustainably counter this kind of phenomenon particular with ISIS and affiliates.

The rise and decline of ISIS is something that we've been tracking here at

the Center for Middle East Policy for a long time. And following the ambassador's remarks. Dan Byman, a senior fellow and a great colleague, will join him on stage for a discussion. Now, Dan is a renowned scholar in this space and I'm very excited to note that next week we will launch his book, “Road Warriors, Foreign Fighters in the Armies of Jihad.” That's our plug for the more, for the afternoon. Dan's book expands the scope to delve into continued threats of foreign fighters from multiple conflicts and to what threat they pose for their home countries.

With that in mind and this ongoing agenda, it's really a delight for us to welcome and to thank Ambassador Sales for coming today and to leave plenty of room for this vibrant conversation. I'm going to end it here and ask you only that if you are following us here in the hall or a via our webcast, you can use the counterISIS, one word, as a hashtag. So, hashtag counterISIS. So, now, if you would, please join me in welcoming Ambassador Nathan Sales. (Applause)

MR. SALES: Well, at the time, thanks very much for that warm introduction. It's a real pleasure for me to be here today with you at Brookings. I'd like to thank Brookings for hosting me today and I'd like to thank you all for joining today's presentation. Just thought I'd point out Dan's book is available for preorder on Amazon. He didn't put me up to that and I don't get royalties. It's the least I can do.

On March 23rd, the president announced the complete liberation of the last territory hell by ISIS in Syria and Iraq. This is an important milestone in our fight against global terrorism. And it was made possible by this administration's decision two years ago to take the gloves off. But this is not the end of the fight. ISIS is down, but it's not out. We need to prevent it from reconstituting itself as a fighting force in Iraq and Syria. And we also need to keep it from leveraging its international networks to recover from this crushing defeat because ISIS is evolving in order to stay alive.

We saw a horrific example of this last week on Easter Sunday in Sri Lanka. Let me pause here for a moment to give you an update on where things stand in that

investigation. A cell of ISIS inspired terrorists carried out a sophisticated series of bombings of churches and hotels around the country. They use backpacks ladened with explosives and shrapnel. Two of the attackers were sons of a wealthy Sri Lankan spice merchant and all, some 253 men, women and children lost their lives, including four Americans and hundreds more were injured. It was one of the deadliest terrorist attacks the world has seen since 911.

It's becoming clear that the terrorists behind this atrocity were inspired by ISIS's vile ideology. Last Tuesday, ISIS claimed responsibility for the bombings and just yesterday, the group's leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, apparently resurfaced in a video to say that the attack was retaliation for our victory in Syria. We're also aware of media reports today that one of the attackers may have trained with ISIS IN Syria and we're looking into it. The risk of follow on attacks remains significant. The Sri Lankan government has arrested over 100 suspects, but authorities are still on the lookout for dozens more. In recent days, they've recovered enough equipment for terrorists to conduct up to 10 more attacks, explosives, detonators, knives, binoculars and military style camouflage.

The United States is standing side-by-side with a Sri Lankan people and their governments. We already have an FBI team on the ground assisting with the investigation. So, back to the big picture. Today, I'll begin by telling you where we are in the battle against ISIS, then I'll explain how the terrorist threat is evolving; our next steps in the fight; and, what we must do to complete the defeat of ISIS globally. We've won great victories on the battlefield.

Now, we need to match them with victories in our courtrooms, at our borders, in our banks, and online. Let's start by considering what the global coalition to defeat ISIS and its partners have accomplished together. We've liberated all the territory ISIS once held in Iraq and Syria, nearly 42,000 square miles, a swath of land equal in size to England. We freed approximately 7.7 million men, women and children from ISIS' brutal rule and more than 4 million displaced people in Iraq have returned home. More than half of

these gains have come since January of 2017 reflecting the Trump Administration's strategic decision to accelerate the campaign. Together we've crushed ISIS is ability to raise significant funds through taxation, extortion, and exploiting oil and gas resources in the territory it controlled. We've also stopped ISIS is slaughter and enslavement of innocence; their genocide of religious minorities, including Christians and Yazidis; their exploitation of child soldiers and their use of rape as a weapon of war. Yet despite these successes in Iraq and Syria, ISIS remains a global threat capable of launching attacks against us and against our allies.

ISIS is battered and weakened, but it's not gone. Even as we defeat them on the battlefield, they've shown a dangerous ability to adapt. The group's leaders and followers see the loss of their false caliphate as a setback, not as a defeat and they're actively looking to continue the fight from branches and networks around the world. Let me give you a few examples of the trends we're seeing.

In Afghanistan, ISIS Khorasan has become one of the deadliest ISIS branches in the world. In the past year, they've carried out dozens of attacks, killing approximately 760 people and injuring another 1,400. In Africa, ISIS linked groups are on the rise. They've increased the lethality of their attacks; they've expanded into new areas; and, they've repeatedly targeted US interests. We assessed that Boko Haram and ISIS West Africa have been responsible for over 35,000 deaths since 2011 and the displacement of nearly two million people in the Lake Chad region, ISIS West Africa, likewise, has begun to impose Sharia Law in the areas it controls and it has killed hundreds of Nigerian forces in the past year and neighboring Niger, ISIS greater Sahara was responsible for the deaths of four American soldiers in an ambush and October of 2017. In Somalia, ISIS has conducted several small-scale attacks and assassinations.

Meanwhile, local armed groups in places like the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mozambique are aligning themselves with ISIS. ISIS Sinai remains intent on attacking targets in mainland Egypt, including tourist sites and churches. Two years ago, on

Palm Sunday, ISIS Sinai suicide bombers attacked a pair of Coptic churches, killing dozens of worshipers. Using small arms and IEDs, the group carries out almost daily attacks against Egyptian security forces in the Sinai. In South and Southeast Asia, ISIS continues to carry out attacks and through propaganda campaigns inspire regional groups to commit acts of terror. I'm sorry to say that Sri Lanka is not alone in this regard. In the Philippines, ISIS claimed the horrific attack on a Catholic cathedral in January of this year. They claim 23 lives. Last May, in Indonesia, three families inspired by ISIS conducted suicide attacks with their children. Let me say that again, with their children. Meanwhile, homegrown terrorists who've never set foot on a battlefield, but have embraced ISIS as toxic ideology have planned and executed attacks against soft targets, including hotels, restaurants, stadiums, and other public places.

In December of 2018, an attack on a Christmas market in Strasbourg left five dead and 11 wounded. It's just one example of the ability of ISIS inspired terrorists to strike in the heart of Western Europe. In short, the war against ISIS is not over. It's just entering a new phase. As Secretary Pompeo has said recently, we're in an era of decentralized Jihad and as ISIS adapts, we'll have to adapt too.

So, let me explain how the United States will approach this next phase of the fight and our vision for the role that the 80 members strong defeat ISIS coalition can play going forward. And the next stage of the campaign will focus on confronting ISIS branches and networks around the world. While consolidating ISIS's territorial defeat in the core. To accomplish this, we must pivot from a strategy that relies largely on military force to one that includes a broader mix of instruments, especially civilian counterterrorism capabilities. Increasingly, the fight against ISIS will take place in courtrooms and prisons as we boost efforts to investigate, prosecute, and incarcerate ISIS fighters. We'll fight ISIS at our borders as we look to stop terrorist travel and eliminate facilitation routes. We'll fight ISIS in banks as we cut off the flow of money to its networks and deny them the resources they need to plot attacks and we'll fight ISIS online in the realm of ideas as we look to combat it's vile and

violent ideology.

The United States can't do this alone. We need our coalition partners to help share the burden of this fight and they're ready to do. So, let me read your part of the statement adopted at the coalition's ministerial meeting in Washington in February. Coalition said, "We acknowledge the coalition's collective responsibility and role in severing ISIS is trans regional efforts and forwarding it's global ambitions. We recognize that this will require us to continually evolve and adapt our efforts in order to deliver an enduring defeat to a pandemic enemy." So, in this new phase of a fight, we'll need to focus on four key areas.

First, across the coalition, we need to prosecute ISIS leaders, fighters and financiers for the crimes they've committed. Second, coalition members need to harden our collective borders against ISIS travel. Third, we need to combine our efforts to cut off the flow of money to ISIS networks around the world. And fourth, we need to deny ISIS fighters the ability to radicalize and recruit the next generation of fighters, especially online. Now, make no mistake, we're talking about supplementing military missions, not replacing them. The United States is prepared to use force to disrupt immediate ISIS threats to Americans or our partners in places like Libya, Somalia, and Afghanistan. And when I say military force, I mean action by, with, and through our local partners, an approach that is proven so successful in Iraq and Syria. Let me walk through those four lines of effort that will become increasingly important to the future of the defeat ISIS fight.

Law enforcement is a key counterterrorism tool and as ISIS networks grow more diffuse, civilian criminal justice finishes will grow more important. We'll need our partners to successfully respond to, investigate, and prosecute ISIS figures for the crimes they've committed no matter where they're found. Let me flesh out some of the things we've been doing to build law enforcement capacity and key frontline states. In Afghanistan, we trained and equipped Kabul's Premiere Police Crisis Response Unit CRU 222 to respond to terrorist attacks in real-time.

On April 20th, this unit countered an ISIS Khorasan attack on the Ministry of Communication, neutralizing for terrorists in safely evacuating over 1,250 civilians. In Tunisia, our work with the National Guard Special Unit has helped them conduct effective raids, detain suspects, confiscate weapons and prevent terrorist attacks. In October, they responded to a terrorist wearing a suicide belt who intended to carry out a large-scale attack in Tunis. In Somalia, our training of the joint investigative teams led to their successful investigation and prosecution of an ISIS bomber and his two accomplices in April of last year. In the Balkans, we've helped governments across the region update the up counter-terrorism laws to cover offenses related to foreign terrorist fighters or FTFs.

These governments have now successfully prosecuted more than 165 terrorists. In Kosovo alone, US resident legal advisors provided case-based mentoring to local prosecutors resulting in the indictment or trial of more than 33 FTFs. North Macedonia has become one of the first countries to repatriate its FTFs from Syria. Just last month, all seven of them pled guilty to terrorism related crimes and they receive sentences ranging from six to nine years in jail. Let me emphasize here, this is an example the rest of the world should follow. We need our coalition partners to repatriate their FTFs and prosecute them at home for the crimes they've committed.

The Syrian Democratic Forces are currently holding more than 1,000 ISIS foreign fighters. A number that is certain to grow after our successful campaign to liberate Baghuz. The United States calls on all countries and especially members of the coalition to take their citizens back; to prosecute them when possible; and, above all prevent them from ever returning to the battlefield. To help enable these prosecutions, the United States has launched an important new initiative on battlefield evidence. How to collect it; store it; analyze it; share it domestically at across borders; and, finally how to introduce it into civilian courts to obtain convictions. We've begun working with the United Nations and NATO to promote the use of battlefield evidence in other countries and we need our coalition partners to join us in this effort.

Second, we need to harden our borders to prevent terrorist travel and disrupt facilitation routes. ISIS seeks to exploit gaps in border security, particularly the FTFs who are fleeing the battlefield. Since 2015, we assessed that up to 1,200 ISIS fighters have gone home to Europe. Likewise, hundreds of FTFs have traveled back to Southeast Asia and other terrorists who'd never set foot on a battlefield but had been inspired by ISIS or likewise looking across international borders. In December of 2017, the UN Security Council adopted a tough new resolution on terrorist travel. UNSCR 2396, under this historic resolution, UN members are required to use tools to help them spot the terrorists who may be hiding in plain sight. Things like watch lists and biometrics and passenger name record data or PNR.

Here in the US, we've been using these tools for years Resolution 2396 internationalize these American policies and practices. It's the most important resolution on terrorist travel that the UN Security Council has ever adopted. Let me just elaborate briefly on PNR, which is an increasingly critical counterterrorism tool. PNR is the information you give to an airline when you book a ticket, it's your name, phone number and email address and so on. It sounds like fairly rudimentary data, but it's actually an intelligence treasure trove. PNR can help identify suspicious travel patterns, can also eliminate hidden connections between known terrorists and their yet unknown associates. If investigators had applied these kinds of techniques to PNR and related data before 911, it would have been possible for them to identify the connections between all 19 of the hijackers. We call on all nations to meet their UNSCR 2396 obligations swiftly and more than that, we're ready to help.

In November, the United States, call it on the International Civil Aviation Organization or ICAO, to adopt a PNR standard by the end of 2019 to establish a playbook for countries that wish to implement the systems. We're also willing to share the systems we use to collect and analyze PNR data with countries that request it. The UN, likewise, has tools to help countries use and analyze at airline reservation data. In addition, we need our

partners to use Interpol's capabilities more effectively. The United States provides a great deal of information through Interpol's I-24/7 system, but too often the data only goes to centralized hubs and national capitals. What we need to do is push it out to the front lines so customs officers and cops on the beat know who they're dealing with when someone presents themselves at a border crossing or stopped on the street.

This is why we're working with the G7 to expand Interpol conductivity at ports of entry in 60 key countries by 2021. Likewise, at the State Department, we recently launched a pilot program to help partners develop systems to screen travelers against national level watch lists. We call it WASP, the Watch Listing Assistance and Support Program.

Third, let's talk about money. The coalition has done a lot to stop the flow of money to ISIS core, but we need to do more to squeeze ISIS finances around the world. It isn't enough just to stop the gunman. We also need to stop the money men who pay for the guns. Now, one of our most effective financial weapons is terrorist designations. Designations, isolate and expose our adversaries, making it harder for them to raise money and move it through the international financial system. Responsible banks do a lot of this work for us as they want to keep terrorists from tainting their networks. Last year, the State Department completed 19 designation actions against ISIS-related individuals and organizations. That includes ISIS Greater Sahara, which was responsible for killing four American soldiers as well as ISIS Philippines, ISIS Somalia, and June, Al-calafa Tunisia. At the Treasury Department, there were another 14 ISIS-related designations last year. We'll be looking to add to those numbers.

In addition, last year, the United Nations listed 11 ISIS linked individuals at the so-called 1267 Committee. That's good progress, but for UN designations to be truly effective, they need to be matched by designations in individual countries and that means we need more of our partners to adopt and use domestic designations regimes that enable them to sanction known terrorists. We also want to proceed joint designations with our

partners to amplify the effect and impact of our own sanctions. For example, regional bodies like the terrorist financing targeting center in the Gulf can effectively target networks that operate across international borders and also deepen cooperation among counter terrorism partners.

In October of 2017, the United States and TFTC members and the Gulf jointly adopted a number of ISIS-related sanctions including leaders, financier's and facilitators of ISIS Yemen. In addition, we need to promote relationships between partner countries, financial intelligence units to increase the sharing of intelligence as well as best practices. The coalition has an important role to play here. It can help countries develop the necessary legal frameworks and capabilities as well as pushed for stronger enforcement of international counterterrorism financing standards.

Fourth and finally, ISIS' false caliphate has been destroyed, but the group's ability to inspire attacks persists because its ideology persists. Countering this ideology is both the near and long-term challenge. We need to collectively refute the hateful intolerant and supremacist messaging that helped give rise to ISIS in the first place. As we say in constitutional law, the remedy for harmful speech is more speech. That's why we're working with partners around the world to develop counter messages that can rebut the ISIS narrative. One example is an online graphic novel that shows the reality of ISIS' brutal rule. It reached 17 billion at risk youth in the Middle East in North Africa in a 40-day campaign and it produced real results. Readers showed 50 percent less support for extremist groups and a 30 percent reduction in extremist belief after encountering the content. Longer term targeted education-based initiatives are also key to countering terrorist ideology. Youth need critical thinking skills to recognize, reject and refute the ideology. That means working with schools to train teachers to recognize signs of radicalization. It also means training university students how to design their own peer messaging and other prevention projects. Religious and community leaders also play important roles in reaching youth as well as amplifying positive alternative narratives.

Let me wrap up. In conclusion, the evolving conflict with ISIS' global networks will take different forms in different parts of the world. Each region and every country will require unique approaches to confront their unique challenges, but we all together need to remain unified in our goal and that is ensuring the enduring defeat of ISIS. To achieve that goal, it's imperative that the coalition approach the effort to defeat ISIS globally with the same level of urgency and commitment that we saw in Iraq and Syria. We owe it to the past victims of ISIS to prevent future victims and we owe it to ourselves. With that, I'd like to thank you all for your time and I look forward to your questions. Thank you. (Applause)

MR. BYMAN: Thanks. Good afternoon. First of all, thank you, Ambassador Sales for really a fantastic set of remarks. There is a huge amount for us to discuss, driven both by the current threat today, but also as we think about where this organization is going to evolve in the long-term. Let me briefly, no, what I feel are a few successes, but also challenges.

The biggest success, of course, is the defeat of the caliphate. It's very tempting if you sit where I said to immediately go on to the next problem that ISIS has been defeated in its caliphate, but right, there are 2 million opinion pieces that have that initial topic sentence that immediately go onto problems. But the loss of a caliphate is a tremendous blow to this organization. It does not have the ability to train on a large scale. It doesn't have a secure headquarters and base from which to plan operations. The inspirational quality has plunged. It used to be they could say to young Muslims that to be a good Muslim, you must travel to the caliphate and live there under our rule and fight and defend it. And that was an incredibly inspired message three or four years ago. And that message now rings quite hollow. But I think I would say beyond all these immediate successes, the caliphates showed that the Islamic state was a winner. Five years ago, this organization could say to people, we are building a homeland. We are building a state. We are taking on enemies, whether it's the United States or the Iraqi government or the French,

whoever it is, and we're winning. And today, it's not an organization that's winning. And that doesn't mean that there won't be true believers who will join up. It doesn't mean that there won't be criminals or deranged people who support it. But the sheer volume of individuals who joined it in the past are far less likely to do so today. And the United States government, and I would say across the government deserves a lot of credit for that tremendous success.

There are a couple of problems though that I think we need to think about going forward. And part of this is a recognition of the enduring nature of many of these problems. This fall, there is likely to be a young Marine or soldier in Afghanistan who was not born on 911. Right and that's really a remarkable statement, right, that this conflict has been enduring for so long that it's become generational. And the biggest problem the United States has had in terms of fighting terrorism around the world concerns local governance. And my -- without knowing either man, my guess that President Trump and President Obama don't agree on too much. But the one thing they were both very skeptical of was that the United States should be playing an extensive role in local governance around the world. But there aren't good answers to this challenge.

So, if you look at parts of Syria today, if you look at parts of Iraq, if you look at Somalia, if you look at Yemen, you look at Afghanistan, you look Liberia, you see a host of actors involved at the local level with very little national government presence. Most of the local actors are predatory, right, they range from good warlords to bad warlords. In some places, there's dive in a warlord. It's just a very loose, if any, collection of thugs and it's one of the most enduring sources of appeal for groups like the Islamic state, is that they can claim to be providing law and order.

It's a brutal law and order, but when you have none, this is appealing to me of the people involved and the United States hasn't solved this from a policy point of view. Of what to do to ensure a degree of governance in much of the world. And that's a lack of local governance is not the same as having a massive caliphate, right. There's an order of

magnitude difference between those conditions, but at the same time it enables Jihadist groups and other nasty actors to flourish. Another big challenge has been in what the ambassador mentioned towards the end of his remarks, with this question of how to fight the Islamic state ideology. And this has been something that if again, you go back 15, 20 years, people have been asking since 911, is there a way to convince people around the world, not to hate the United States, to convince people around the world to turn away from Jihadist ideas. And although there have been individual efforts that have shown some success, on the whole, the United States is worse off than it was before 911. That more the world is hostile and that these organizations, the legitimacy of their ideas is more widespread.

It went from extremely marginal idea to one that certainly does not enjoy it and majority support but has greater receptivity in parts of the Muslim world. And this should be incredibly disturbing. And one of the things as we've watched different policy ideas, a rollout over the years, most of them have, I would say have been well intentioned, but they've usually failed at a times even backfire and they've strengthened the people we're very much trying to oppose. And the last challenge is one I want to begin by asking the Ambassador about, which is about institutionalization. If you go back to 2013, 2014, the effort against the Islamic state, what we saw was an incredibly uneven performance among many countries in the world where some US allies were incredibly engaged and committed to this fight. But on the other hand, many really seem to think this wasn't their problem. And the good news is that's changed, right, I think a very successful diplomatic effort and the Islamic state's own atrocities have led many governments to really take this very seriously, to step up their laws, to increase their security presence. But let me ask you Ambassador, you mentioned a number of initiatives. If we talk about, say Europe, just to pick a part of the world, what would you like to see realistically in say two years and then if we could fast forward five years beyond the time of maybe a second administration, but beyond this administration, what would you like to see in terms of achievements?

MR. SALES: So, I guess I'd point to two particular lines of efforts. The first

is terrorist travel and the second is terrorist prosecution. Let me hum a few bars on each of those. When it comes to terrorist travel, the United States has been a leader for more than a decade at using data to identify suspected terrorists, whether it's watch lists or API information, advanced passenger information, that's an airline manifest data or passenger name record data. That's something I talked about during my remarks. We stood alone in that regard for many years, but after the Europeans experienced the Paris attacks of 2015 and the Brussels attacks of 2016, there was a sense of urgency in Brussels and an EU member state capitols about the need to develop the same kinds of capabilities to detect and deter terrorist travel. So, our European allies are playing catch up, but they are now on the right track towards developing and deploying systems that can do what we have here in the United States to search for the terrorist hiding in plain sight. I'd like to see that happen as soon as possible, not just for the benefit of our European friends. But because what happens in Europe doesn't necessarily stay in Europe.

Terrorist threats on the continent have a way of affecting the United States homeland as well. Second thing I'd like to see happen is a renewed focus on the use of law enforcement as a critical counterterrorism tool. Again, this is an area where the United States has been a world leader for several decades. Our statute books include a law known as the Material Support Law, which makes it a federal crime to knowingly provide material support or resources to a designated foreign terrorist organization. What's material support or resources? Basically anything of value. If you're raising money, that's material support. If you're recruiting people, that's material support. If you're providing weapons to ISIS, that's material support and the penalties are really quite stringent. A single conviction on a single count could earn you up to 20 years in jail. So, we have very capable and useful laws on our books. Unfortunately, not every country around the world has a comparable set of legal capabilities. Some countries in Western Europe, struggle to demonstrate that a suspect has actually committed a crime because of the way the crimes are defined and if they're convicted, the penalties tend to be considerably wider than what we face in the United

States. So, if you put a terrorist and wait for 20 years, you've taken somebody off the battlefield for a good long stretch of time. If somebody is going to be back on the battlefield in two years, three years, as is sometimes the case in Europe, that's a very, very different proposition. So, I guess I'd like to see progress on terrorist travel and prosecution.

MR. BYMAN: So, in your view, what would be, I would say reasonable jail times for returning fighters from Syria, given that in a number of European states, it might be if convicted, only a couple of years, they might be exposed to radicals in jail that the near term could be quite dangerous.

MR. SALES: Yeah. Well, I can answer it for the United States. If you've joined ISIS, that is considered the provision of personnel, you're the personnel. Therefore, that's a violation of our Material Support Statute, if done knowingly. Although it would be difficult to imagine a scenario where somebody inadvertently joined ISIS, but I'm a former law professor, so, the mens rea is in the statute for a reason. We have to observe it. So, in the US the answers fairly straightforward, you join ISIS. If you're convicted, you face a maximum penalty of up to 20 years. Other countries that don't have that kind of a legal framework are going to be returning convicted terrorists to the streets in two years, three years, five years and that's going to pose additional challenges because you're going to have to devote law enforcement and investigative resources to that person once released. You need to track them in real time, perhaps. Put a body on them to track their physical movements, perhaps. You might need a subject him to electronic surveillance to make sure that they're not in communication with other terrorist associates or a centralized terrorist clearinghouse like Raqqa was for the ISIS Caliphate.

You also need the softer power tools as well. And that's the radicalization, or demobilization. There's a difference, right? Deradicalization means people are persuaded to renounce their views. That's a very difficult problem. Some countries are capable of achieving outright deradicalization for former prisoners. Other countries try and make the best they can and simply get folks to disengage. They may still hold the views, the

radical views, but they're no longer willing to act upon them and commit acts of violence. So, the shorter the term of incarceration, the more you're going to have to rely on some of those alternative techniques, law enforcement, and I'm a psychosocial.

MR. BYMAN: I know the goal the United States is to encourage countries to take back their nationals to face justice, through law enforcement process, but as you know better than anyone, a number of our countries are not encouraging their nationals to return. In fact, quite the opposite. They're trying to keep them stuck in camps in Syria or in a different sense of facing justice in Iraq. How is the United States trying to affect the conditions of those held in Iraq and Syria? How are we dealing with the governments or the local forces there?

MR. SALES: Yeah, it's an important problem and it's one that we're spending a great deal of time and energy on. Our position, the United States' position is that countries of origin should repatriate their citizens and prosecute them for any crimes they've committed. As I mentioned a moment ago, there's currently about a thousand confirmed foreign terrorist fighters in custody in Syria. That number is going to jump probably dramatically as our coalition partner forces complete the processing of the prisoners taken into custody during the last phases of the campaign against the caliphate. Why do we want people to take, why do we want countries to take their citizens back? It's fairly straightforward, we assess the criminal prosecution, even with some of the limitations we've discussed, we assess the criminal prosecution is the most effective way to prevent these fighters from returning to the battlefield, right. That's what we want to prevent above all else. And from an American perspective, the key here is they can never be allowed to travel to the United States. That's why we're doing things like collecting biometrics such as fingerprints, such as facial scans, collecting as much information as we can about these 1,000 plus fighters. We want them to be prosecuted, but we're also mindful of the fact that some of them are going to see the outside of a jail in the foreseeable future and when they get out, it's important for us to prevent them from ever traveling here.

MR. BYMAN: Shifting gears a little bit, one of the biggest changes in the world has been the development of social media as really the norm of how people communicate. And especially the younger generation. After the Christchurch attacks in New Zealand, we saw the government there be very critical of social media companies. In that case, for a right wing, a terrorist attack, but then right after Sri Lanka, they simply shut down the companies altogether. Many of these are American companies and these are also companies that are global. What should our policy be towards these companies with regard to terrorism and counterterrorism?

MR. SALES: Oh, it should be a cooperative relationship. We want social media companies to be responsible corporate citizens and we want them to take down content that violates terms of service that those social media companies provide to their customers or that is illegal. So, we also want them to provide alternative content such that somebody who's searching for, let's say an ISIS beheading video, instead gets redirected to content produced by partners who can explain actually Islam does not require the beheading of infidels. Rather, Islam is a faith that prioritizes compassion and mercy and pluralism and respect for difference.

So, some social media companies are doing some innovative things in this space to quickly identify content and ensure that it can be taken down as quickly as possible and to redirect queries from radicalizing content to counter-messages. Could they do more? Yeah, I think they probably could. I also think that we need to tread very lightly when you consider the possibility of regulatory mandates because I'm not sure that the regulatory or statutory policymaking cycle can keep pace with technological developments in the field.

MR. BYMAN: Thank you. We've talked a lot about the foreign terrorist fighter, but as you said your remarks, some of the problems just simply going to be inspiration. And in the United States, the attacks have been inspired attacks rather than returned fighters in the post-911 era and largely because of a policy success in my view, because of very effective a counterterrorism efforts. Even in Europe we've seen a dramatic

shift in recent years where it's been more inspired as opposed to the return fighters. What our policy steps one takes against domestic inspiration even though it can affect the world, really?

MR. SALES: Yeah, that's a great question. And it's a different problem set than the ones that we had to confront in the immediate aftermath of 911 or in the aftermath of the rise of the caliphate. In those environments, we were concerned primarily with hierarchically organized terrorist organizations that issued commands to agents operating on their behalf. We're dealing with a different world now. Secretary Pompeo calls a decentralized Jihad. You don't need to go to a terrorist training camp now. All you need to do is rent a truck and plow into a crowd of people and that presents a number of challenges. For a centrally organized terrorist plot, you have to move money across borders. You have to move fighters across borders. You have to communicate across borders. And each of those transits, right, presents an opportunity to collect on the plot and detect it perhaps and thereby foil at in advance. How do foil a plot where somebody just rents a truck and drives it into a crowd of 4th of July revelers? It's a much more difficult problem. So, one of the things you have to do is address the radicalizing content online and elsewhere that drives people to commit these kinds of terrorist attacks.

Another thing you need to do is, to partner with the private sector owners of soft targets, hotels, public squares, stadiums, concert venues and so on. So, the information can be shared between authorities who may be in a position to know about potential plots and the operators of private infrastructure who may know something about the weaknesses and vulnerabilities that their facilities experience. So, those are two basic answers, but it's a very complex problem set that requires a good deal of attention.

MR. BYMAN: So, a last question before I throw it up to the audience. One thing that the initial reports from the Sri Lanka attack have indicated is that some of the people involved may have become more radical at a mosque that is a teaching a very different form of Islam than what is traditional in Sri Lanka. And that mosque has funding

and support from charities in Saudi Arabia, among others. And even regardless of that truth in Sri Lanka, we've seen that in the Balkans, we've seen that in parts of Europe where, mosques, religious institutions in general, educational institutions are funded by US allies are creating very difficult conditions on the ground that have led to a greater flow of fighters, have led to greater radicalization. Yet at the same time, these governments are very important US allies for a host of things, including counter-terrorism. How do we think about this problem space?

MR. SALES: So, with respect to the Sri Lanka dimension of this, we're aware of the reports we're looking into it. It's early during the investigation, so, can't really offer anything more conclusive than that. On the broader point, there is no question that ideology, propagated by those who profess an intolerant and supremacists strand of Islam. There's no question that that kind of hateful ideology has been responsible for radicalizing people and inspiring them to commit violence on their own or to join terrorist organizations. We have been very clear with our Gulf allies that this needs to stop. The textbooks need to be cleaned up that are used in schools. If there are e-moms who are preaching messages of hatred on your dime, if you're subsidizing that, you need to cut it out. If there are schools that you are operating in your countries to which foreign preachers can attend and they're imbibing messages of intolerance and hatred, you need to stop that too. Limited in what I can say about the content of our diplomatic engagements, but there can be anybody who's paying attention to the United States can be under no mis-apprehension that this is a top priority for the President, for the Secretary and all the way down.

MR. BYMAN: Thank you very much. So, I'm going to ask you to raise your hand. When we call on you, please identify yourself and do we have microphones? And I think we have on microphones as well. So, please wait for the microphone, but I may walk that one back. Yes, on the aisle please. Is there -- then I would just say our project please. Oh, I apologize. The microphone is coming now.

MR. PAGANO: My name is Jack Pagano. I'm a COO of a TV station

attacked by ISIS November 2017. And we still think about that. My question to the ambassador about rehabilitation. I know of a country that has rehabilitated 12 ISIS terrorists. We haven't talked about, I didn't hear anything about rehabilitation. Is that something that you, think could work?

MR. SALES: Yeah. So, there are different countries have different capabilities when it comes to rehabilitation. Saudi Arabia in particular has a center known as the Mohammed Bin Nayef that has been fairly effective at reducing re-engagement by terrorists who have stood trial in Saudi courts, and then been sent into the rehabilitation center upon the completion of their sentences.

One question is whether that model is portable to other countries that may not have the same resources or that may not have the same complex internal loyalty arrangements, and tribal balances of power, that have enabled it to be successful. Rehabilitation is critical because many terrorists after serving a sentence are going to be returning to the street. Once that happens, you cannot afford, many countries simply cannot afford to subject those people to 24-7 physical monitoring and electronic surveillance. And so, you have to try and separate those convicted terrorists from their ideology, either persuade them of the error of their ways through the interventions of religious leaders, community figures and so on, or at a minimum, except that the ideology they've embraced is durable for the time being but persuade them to disengage. That is to say, to refrain from acting on the ideas that are venomous and poisonous.

MR. PAGANO: Thank you.

MR. BYMAN: Yes.

MR. NISSENBAUM: Hi, I'm DiON Nissenbaum Wall Street Journal. Thanks for your time. I have two quick questions. One is about the Baghdadi video. How important is it -- how important you think Baghdadi is, is to maintaining the ability to recruit? Is he like a Bin Laden figure that getting rid of him, we'll really take some of the power out of it? Or do you think that ISIS is broader and Baghdadi himself isn't such up a galvanizing figure? And

secondly, you haven't talked that much about the military aspect of this. You worked for a president that has tried to pull all the troops out of Syria that has an instinct to pull all the troops out of Afghanistan. He's been pushed back on that a couple of times for obvious reasons. Where do you stand on that? How important do you think the military component is to defeating ISIS and how important is it for it to have a US presence in Syria and Afghanistan?

MR. SALES: Well, thanks for the questions on Baghdadi, obviously, we're aware of the video. Our intelligence is taking a look at it now and I'll defer it to their assessment as to whether it's authentic or the timing under which it was under which it was produced. Look, whether Baghdadi retains operational control of ISIS or whether he is merely a figurehead, the fact remains that the organization and its global network remains a threat and we're going to continue to use all instruments of national power, military included, but also law enforcement and border security and financial and counter-messaging to address the threat that that it represents.

As far as the future of a military role in the fight against ISIS, I'm going to have to defer to the Pentagon on this, but what the president has said is that we are willing in the context of Syria to keep a residual force in the country along with residual forces by members of the defeat ISIS coalition in order to consolidate our victory against ISIS. We can't allow them to reconstitute themselves as a fighting force in Syria or Iraq. We can't allow them to achieve something like the safe haven that they once held. Once a terrorist group as a safe haven, they began to plot external attacks. And that's what we're trying to avoid at all costs. Thanks.

MR. BYMAN: Sir.

MR. EMBRY: I'm Will Embry from DynCorp International. Prisons are a breeding ground for terrorists. We've seen with a Baghdadi, in addition to the thousand foreign fighters who were in Syria, I understand that there are tens of thousands of non-foreign fighters that there and in Iraq. What's the US doing to try to figure out what to do

with those people who were locked up?

MR. SALES: Do you mean in Syria or back home?

MR. EMBRY: In Syria especially, but also Iraq and, and other places where they may become training grounds for the next generation.

MR. SALES: Right, right. Well, there's no question that prisons have long been an incubator for terrorism. We have to make sure that people who are in custody and who have succumbed to radical ideology are not able to contaminate the environment, right. We have to quarantine the ideology and prevent it from infecting other prisoners. One of the ways we do that in the United States is to segregate convicted terrorists from the general prison population. If you're the Unabomber you're not sharing a cell with some tax cheats, for instance. And so we would encourage other countries to use similar countermeasures to prevent prisoners who are already committed to ISIS Al Qaeda or other ideologies from proselytizing and infecting their fellow inmates. Another thing that's important to do is to have alternative and positive content being delivered to those prison populations, so that there's -- it's not just a feedback loop where the only voices you are hearing are those of the radicalizing co-inmates. It's important to have other channels for information into those prisons so that prisoners at risk of radicalization are hearing alternative accounts. Islam does not require beheading of infidels. Instead, it requires you to show mercy and compassion and various other positive narratives that we need to be doing a better job of getting into the prison. Thanks.

MR. EMBRY: Thank you.

MR. BYMAN: Yes. Yes, sir. One's coming your way.

MR. HUMPHREY: I'm a Peter Humphrey, Intel analyst and a former diplomat. I felt the most important item was missing from your list of countering ISIS. We chat up a lot of these guys who are caught in the various battlefields and we find very often, maybe even more often than not, that each operation is signed off by some cleric. And so, I've got to ask you, isn't it time to make up a target list of these clerics? Isn't it time to put out

red notices on these clerics, and doesn't the greater Jooma have an obligation to clean house?

MR. SALES: Yeah. So, if there are operational leaders, the fact that they claim to be a cleric doesn't exempt them from criminal liability, or from sanctions pressure, or from measures to prevent them from traveling, or to deny them a voice on social media platforms. So, I think we're prepared to use all of the tools of national power that I sketched out to address the full spectrum of ISIS threats. And that includes not just the operatives who detonate the S-vest, but those who enabled them too.

MR. BYMAN: Yes, in the back, please.

MR. SALIDO: Hi, my name is Rafael Salido from FM News. I was wondering if you could give us some details, regarding how many foreign fighters from the US do you currently, or the Syrian democratic forces have currently in custody? And I would also like to know if you are considering sending them to Guantanamo? Thank you.

MR. SALES: Yeah. So, the United States has been leading by example on the question of foreign terrorist fighters. We have repatriated four American citizens and charge them with a number of terrorism related crimes. Three of them are men; one of them is a woman. One of the four has already been convicted and the other three charges are currently pending in US courts. Those numbers are fairly small and that's not an accident. Part of the reason why the United States has experienced a relatively lower incidents of foreign terrorist fighter outflows to Syria, one is geography. Candidly, it's a lot harder to get there from here than it is to get there from Europe. But just as importantly, we have a legal framework on the books that allows us to prosecute folks for attempt or conspiracy. So, we're stopping and convicting a number of would be terrorist fighters on the outbound leg before they're even able to leave the United States.

As far as the possibility of additional US citizens in custody in Syria. So, we're aware of media reports that there are a couple of additional citizens. We take those reports seriously. We're looking into it. It's very difficult for us to verify citizenship in a war

zone, particularly where we do not have consular access. And that's the case in Syria. So, it's something we're looking into.

And your question about Guantanamo Bay, the president has made clear that Guantanamo Bay is remaining open for business and that we reserve the right in appropriate circumstances to send terrorists there.

MR. BYMAN: I want to take advantage of having a gas who is not only the lead counterterrorism official at the State Department, but also a very distinguished lawyer and ask you a quick follow-up on Guantanamo. Is there any thinking on clarifying the status of the individuals there that there were attempts under Bush and under Obama to try and consider different ways to handle a population that the New York Times reported a couple of days ago, is now having all the problems of an aging population with questions of how to deal with hospice care, things like that, that were not originally envisioned in, when this was stood up. And so, is there any thinking about institutionalizing this in either a legal way or simply in a facilities way and then, related, this was a very controversial issue 10 years ago. And, at least, from the outside, I primarily hear crickets right now. Has the controversial gone away from what you've -- what you're able to share it?

MR. SALES: I think it's a lot less radioactive of an issue now than it was a decade ago. And I think, part of the reason for that is because the international community has come to understand, as the United States has come to understand, that there's just a certain irreducible core of fighters who can -- who simply are too dangerous to release. Now, as far as our overall policy towards Guantanamo Bay is concerned, the president, issued an executive order that makes plain that the two things are on the table. One, as I said a moment ago, we're not going to close Guantanamo Bay and we reserve the right to send fighters there in appropriate circumstances. At the same time, the president made clear that existing mechanisms, review mechanisms to assess whether a particular detainee needs to remain in custody, those review mechanisms remain fully operational.

MR. BYMAN: Thank you. Yes, with the piece of paper.

MR. WEINTRAUB: Thank you, I'm Leon Weintraub, retired foreign service. I'd like to follow up on a question that was asked earlier. You mentioned four areas you're working on: prosecution; protecting the borders; the supply of money; and stopping the ability to recruit. I'm wondering about, these all seem to be reactive or defensive. Have you thought about more offensively within the Islamic world some kind of a movement? I know it's not a monolithic world, but somehow to spread the message that the ISIS represents a false messiah. It's -- these guys are -- it's possible to be a good Muslim within the nation state system. It seems that there are enough influential wisdoms around this, this might be worth an effort.

MR. SALES: Well, I agree with that. I agree with it very strongly and that that insight really is the core of the fourth line of effort that I laid out, counter messaging. It's actually a bit of a misnomer to call it as counter messaging. I've had a number of conversations with Muslim scholars, clerics, community leaders, and I was struck by how frequently they say things to me, like the following, this is not the counter message, this is the message. It's ISIS that has the counter message, right? It's the ISIS message. It's the ISIS narrative that is the perversion or corruption or response. So, I think this is a really critical part. The hearts and minds campaign is a really critical part and it's one, I'm sorry to say, it's one in which the United States really is not equipped to play the leading role. I think our role here is to magnify and amplify the voices that are delivering this content, but it's not something that we really have any credibility on and put my law professor hat back on constitutionally, we're not allowed to say like, this is authentic Islam and this is false Islam. But what we can do is to amplify the voices of scholars and influential leaders in the Middle East and elsewhere and say this guy's got it right.

MR. BYMAN: Yes, in the very back.

MR. SCHMIDT: Hi, Eric Schmidt was the New York Times. Ambassador, you mentioned the State Department's role in foreign terrorist designations. This morning, Sarah Sanders, the White House spokeswoman, told The Times that the Administration is

now in the internal working process of designating the Muslim Brotherhood for foreign terrorist status. What would be the purpose of that? What do you hope to achieve from that designation? Thank you.

MR. SALES: Yes, unfortunately, not going to be able to comment on any internal deliberations.

MR. BYMAN: Yes, sir.

MR. PETERSON: All right. Fred Peterson. I worked for the House and the Senate previously served in the Marines in OIF 1 and OIF 2, Operation Phantom Fury. My question would be what are some steps we're taking to ensure we don't do another premature withdrawal? Like we saw what happened when we withdrew from Iraq in 2011, a lot of our gains were erased and were reversed. And it looked like we're going to do that again in 2018 hasn't happened. How effective do you think legislation would be in ensuring we don't withdraw before the job's done?

MR. SALES: Yeah. Well, I think, we need to make sure the job is done. And the job is to make sure that ISIS cannot reform, as a force that can threaten the Iraqi government, and a force that is capable of projecting power externally and plotting external attacks here on the homeland. I think that the United States and Iraq share a common interest in this respect. We want to ensure that continued to defeat of ISIS. The government in Iraq likewise once to ensure that continued defeat of ISIS. And So, our hope is that we will be able to maintain a presence on the ground in order to achieve that shared objective. I would further add the US and the government of Iraq share another important interest here and that is in ensuring that the people of Iraq and the government of Iraq, are not subject to malign foreign influence, but rather are able to function as the sovereign and proud state that it is. Thanks.

MR. BYMAN: Sorry, did you have a question? Yeah.

MS. KATAGIC: Thank you. Ira Kurtagic, DODIG. Kind of related to the question that proceeded mine is this notion of enduring defeats. And my question is very

simple. How do you achieve enduring defeat of an ideology and whether the lines of efforts that are in place such as hardening borders, increasing prosecution which seem to be more aimed containment than defeat? Could you just elaborate on how that aligns?

MR. SALES: Well, I guess I'd question, I dispute the premise of your question. I don't think that the four lines of effort are about containment. I think they're offense, not defense. Prosecuting people takes them off the battlefield. If they're not on the battlefield, they're not in a position to commit terrorist attacks. Designations and sanctions, it deprives them of resources. If they don't have resources, they can't commit terrorist attacks. Hardening the borders, you may have me there. On counter messaging and countering ideology, that is an affirmative case to be made because the point is not simply ISIS is ideology is wrong, but rather here is an alternative understanding that prioritizes a number of values with which we're all familiar. Pluralism, tolerance, respect for difference and so on. That is also an area where the metrics are harder to come by, right.

Candidly, we can point to the number of groups that have been designated; the number of convictions obtained in civilian courts; the number of entries on a terrorist watch list. We know how to measure all of those things. How do you measure somebody who doesn't become radicalized, right? That's a more difficult problem. That is not to say that the problem is insurmountable and that we, therefore, shouldn't undertake these efforts, but it is to say we have to respect the fact that it may be more difficult for us to measure the progress we're making on deradicalization because we want to measure not just inputs but outputs, right, we don't just want to measure number of online videos that responsible and moderate voices posted. We also can't really measure like the consumption of that. What we need to measure is the impact that that content has had on people's choices. That's harder to do, but that doesn't mean that the effort is not worth it.

MR. BYMAN: On the front, okay.

QUESTIONER: Ambassador, thanks so much. Two related questions. The first is what can be learned from this very broad coalition and fight against ISIS for other

counter terrorism efforts? Some of them less sensational, obviously, perhaps all of them less sensational, but also some of them less easy perhaps to galvanize a broad coalition because of the lack of sensation and perhaps more broadly, taking a step back, what are the criticisms against the war on terror as it's more commonly called in the past is that terrorism is a phenomenon. It's not a concrete group. It's not a concrete thing and it's hard to have a war against a phenomenon that, in theory, could always exist. What does this tell us about that sort of fundamental question? What kind of fight or war is this really?

MR. SALES: So, in the first one, I think I would draw two lessons from, the defeat ISIS coalition experience. The first lesson is that American leadership is indispensable. Leading from behind doesn't work. You got to be out front. And the other thing that I would take from this series of victories is that burden sharing is essential. The United States can't do this alone. We need to amplify our efforts with the resources and capabilities of likeminded countries that are likewise committed to defeating this adversary. As far as the nomenclature, do we call it a war on terrorism? Do we call it a war on ISIS? I'm going to sidestep that and simply say, our objective is to ensure the defeat of terrorist organizations that threatened the homeland or that threatened American interests are allies abroad. And whether you call that by one label or another that's the strategic vision here.

QUESTIONER: Okay.

MR. BYMAN: Yes, sir.

MR. MUJTABA: Thank you very much. Mujtaba with Center for Deradicalization. Ambassador, why do they call an entity Islamic state? If we know they're not Islamic. The Muslims say they're not Islamic and you mentioned they're not the correct narrative of what a Muslim is. And two is, us as the United States or our allies calling them an Islamic state, does that alienate the 99 percent of Muslims who do not agree with ISIS? Thank you.

MR. SALES: So, another nomenclature question. So, we've been very careful in describing the so-called caliphates and I'm using scare quotes, as a false caliphate

or fraudulent cut caliphate or so-called caliphate for precisely that reason. We do not want to suggest that the terrorist organization that Baghdadi created and spread across the Middle East actually is entitled to respect or legitimacy as a caliphate. The other nomenclature stuff, at some point you simply have for the sake of linguistic simplicity you sort of have to use certain agreed upon common terms. So, should we not call Hezbollah, Hezbollah because that means army of God and we're conceding that it actually is acting on behalf of God. I mean, there's this sort of reductio ad absurdum problem here. So, where we draw the line, yeah, we'll call it ISIS, other people will call it Daesh. The one thing we won't do is say that their caliphate was actually a caliphate.

MR. BYMAN: Okay. Can I ask you a, not quite a nomenclature question, but somebody comes to mind with that, which is about what the Islamic state would call its provinces? And as the so-called caliphate has suffered. People talk a lot about the whether the provinces pose a threat; how seriously to take these; where they should be at the center of policy. Can I ask you, are there particular provinces that you feel stand out as US policy priorities?

MR. SALES: Yeah, so, let me, quibble with the way you framed it. I don't want to use the word province because that implies a particular relationship between core and periphery that may or may not be warranted under the circumstances. So, let me say network or affiliate or branch instead. It's kind of a debater's point, but you asked, so, there it is. Which of the various ISIS affiliates around the world are the most worrying ISIS Khorasan in Afghanistan is very worrying because of the sheer number of attacks that that group is committed just in the past year, the number of casualties. ISIS Sinai is very troubling because it is not, their operations are not contained in Sinai. They rather aspire to committing attacks in mainland Egypt as well, including on security forces, including on tourist sites, including on churches. In west Africa, there are a number of ISIS affiliates that are on the rise. ISIS Greater Sahara, ISIS west Africa, they are operating in environments where states do not have the full resources that say the United States enjoys or Australia or

Western European partners. And it's also an environment where you have a porous borders that have been exploited for centuries by smuggling networks, narcotics traffickers, and now are capable of being exploited by ISIS terrorists as well.

MR. BYMAN: Do you feel the West African groups in particular are at all global or are they primarily local and thus of concern to a region that historically has not been a US priority, in general.

MR. SALES: So, I wouldn't say that they're purely local because, what happens in Africa, it doesn't stay in Africa. If terrorist groups are able to operate with relative impunity in West Africa and North Africa, that the stabilizes the governments of the countries in which they operate that tends to produce migrant flows out and into the Mediterranean basin, into Europe, into the countries of, into our Western European allies. Why is that a problem? It's a problem because of the instability, but it's also a problem because we know that ISIS fighters have successfully exploited migrant flows in the past. Hiding operatives among legitimate refugees and legitimate migrants trying to escape for a better life. That's the story of Paris, right, that's the story of the Brussels attacks in 2016. And so, the objective of our policy is to confront and attack these terrorist groups. And I'm using that metaphorically, not militarily, but to attack these groups at their root so, that they're not able to be stabilized the countries and regions in which they are active and not able to precipitate those outward flows.

MR. BYMAN: Thank you very much. Yes, in the very back.

MR. MANSOUR: Thank you. Fadi Mansour with Al-Jazeera. I'd like to follow up on the New York Times story and the Muslim Brotherhood because Kellyanne Conway today confirmed that the report basically that the Administration is considering this move to enlist the Muslim Brotherhood, which is a step that many in the region and even in the US would say might destabilize the Middle East. So, I think you owe it to us to shed some light on this issue, or at least from your own point of view or from a policy point of view, do you think such a move, would benefit or harm American national security?

MR. SALES: Yeah. Again, I'm just not going to be able to get into internal deliberations. Thanks.

MR. BYMAN: In the very back.

MR. HANFLIG: Hi, Eyal Hanfling. How do the Administration's Muslim ban and reduction in the number of refugees fit into the counter ISIS policy? And how will this impact us sent a feeling towards the United States, and trust in the US moving forward?

MR. SALES: Yeah, there is no Muslim ban. What there is, is enhanced vetting to make sure that every traveler who wants to come to the United States is not a risk and is not going to do us harm.

MR. BYMAN: Yes, sir.

MR. CUBUKCU: Suat Cubukcu, American University. I would like to ask about Turkey. And Turkey has become a very important destination for those who are joining to ISIS and who are leading ISIS territory. And you mentioned some countries like Somalia, Tunisia and Belkin countries like cooperation to be a kind of stronghold for against ISIS. Do you have a kind of strong support from Turkey in cooperation with, I mean, to deal with ISIS threat?

MR. SALES: Thanks for the question. Turkey is a NATO ally. They've been a close partner of ours for decades in confronting a wide range of geopolitical challenges and threats. Whether we're talking about the Cold War, Al Qaeda after 911 or, or today, the threat posed by ISIS. We share an interest with Turkey in ensuring that ISIS remains defeated. No country wants to have a terror proto state on its borders. And that is why we were working very closely with our Turkish allies to make sure that the defeat of ISIS remains permanent.

MR. BYMAN: Can I follow up on that a little bit? You mentioned in your remarks about -- when we talked about the Syrian democratic forces and in general, the challenge the United States faces in Syria itself in terms of ISIS remnants. Turkey, of course, is very concerned about the Islamic state, but it's also very concerned about what it

feels is a terrorist and (inaudible) rest from its own Kurdish population and has been in opposition to the United States on the STF issue to put it gently. How is US policy going forward trying to respect Turkey's importance to the United States as a relationship. But at the same time, make sure it's not militarily destroying perhaps the most important US counter terrorism partner in Syria.

MR. SALES: Yeah. So, the Turks have long been concerned and this is a concern that we share about terrorism committed by the PKK. The United States' position on this is clear and has been for decades the PKK is a terrorist organization, full stop. In fact, the PKK was one of the first groups that the United States ever designated as a foreign terrorist organization after Congress enacted the applicable statute back in the mid-1990s. So, our position on this is clear and it's more than just the symbolic gesture of saying that the PKK is a terrorist group. We are actively working to dismantle PKK fundraising networks around the world and in particular, in Europe. And we've encouraged our European allies to do more to cut off the flow of money the PKK fundraisers use to funnel resources to the terrorist organization. As far as the SDF is concerned, they have been a very important part of the effort to defeat ISIS in Syria. they had been on the front lines and have borne the brunt of much of the battle. We are grateful to them for all that they have done to bring us to victory in defeating the physical caliphate in Syria.

MR. BYMAN: Yes, please, sir. One second. Hold on for the microphone.

MR. ISKENDER: Thank you. My name is Iskender and I'm Turkish too. So, my question is about Turkey's acquisition through United States. Turkey's saying that this, Syrian PKK or its coalition with other groups and there is terrorists and they accuse America is sending them thousands of truckloads of arms and they're accusing American like trader. And do you think this is a terrorist organization by Turkey says?

MR. SALES: Well, I don't really have much more to add to what I already said, but less there be any possible can't of confusion, the United States regards the PKK as a terrorist organization and we're doing everything we can to dismantle that group in

partnership with our Turkish allies.

MR. BYMAN: I want to take advantage of my presence here to ask a last question. We've appropriately devoted our time today to the Islamic state; to what happens next with US policy towards it. As we look at other international terrorist actors, what are the ones that you would consider likely emergent threats or likely dangerous in the years to come? Are there ones that you would want to single out that even though the US has focused on the Islamic state, these were other concerns as well?

MR. SALES: Yeah, so, that's a fast ball right over the center of the plate, isn't it? I promise I didn't prompt that question backstage, but I'm grateful for the chance to answer it. Look, we're entering on a terrorist threat environment that is much more diffuse and complex than had been the case in the past. We have to worry about Al Qaeda and its affiliates around the world. It's been patient, but that's a strategic choice that is not evidence that Al Qaeda has given up. It's fight. They haven't. We have to worry about ISIS affiliates around the world. We've defeated them in Syria, but they remain active elsewhere around the world. And to those two threats, we must also add the photo of Iran back terrorism. Just last year we saw Iranian operatives plot a pair of assassination attacks in the heart of Western Europe. One in Paris, they were going to bomb a political rally and one in Denmark where they were going to assassinate an opposition figure. That is why the Trump Administration has been historically strict with Iran in terms of imposing new sanctions on Iran back to terrorism. This is the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism. It provides north of a billion dollars a year to its various terrorist proxies and instruments of the Iranian state themselves directly engage in terrorism, right, they've crossed that threshold from simply supporting terrorism to actively engaging in terrorism. And that's why a Secretary Pompeo designated Iran's IRGC as a foreign terrorist organization several weeks ago. This is the first time the United States has ever used it's FTO designation authority against a state actor. And I can think of no better candidate for that then Iran's IRGC. The regime uses terrorism as a tool of state craft, unlike any other state in the world. And that's why we

announced that designation.

MR. BYMAN: I would like to thank everyone for coming out on a beautiful afternoon. I would also like to thank those who are joining us online or watching, as well. It is a beautiful afternoon and I want you to enjoy it. However, the Ambassador does have to leave promptly. So, he's going to leave right after our talk and won't be available for follow-up questions afterward. But before we all go, I'd like you to join me in thanking the Ambassador for an excellent talk. (Applause)

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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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