

**WANTED: FOREIGN FIGHTERS—THE
ESCALATING THREAT OF ISIL
IN CENTRAL ASIA**

HEARING
BEFORE THE
**COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND
COOPERATION IN EUROPE**
ONE HUNDRED FOURTEENTH CONGRESS
FIRST SESSION

JUNE 10, 2015

Printed for the use of the
Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe

[CSCE 114-1-4]



Available via <http://www.csce.gov>

U.S. GOVERNMENT PUBLISHING OFFICE

95-333 PDF

WASHINGTON : 2015

For sale by the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Publishing Office
Internet: bookstore.gpo.gov Phone: toll free (866) 512-1800; DC area (202) 512-1800
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June 10, 2015

COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE
WASHINGTON, DC

The hearing was held at 2:33 p.m. in room 2175, Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, DC, Hon. Christopher H. Smith, Chairman, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, presiding.

Commissioners present: Hon. Christopher H. Smith, Chairman, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe; Hon. Joe Pitts, Commissioner, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe; Hon. Steve Cohen, Commissioner, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe; and Hon. Randy Hultgren, Commissioner, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe.

Witnesses present: Daniel N. Rosenblum, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Central Asia, U.S. Department of State; Frank J. Cilluffo, Associate Vice President and Director, Center for Cyber and Homeland Security, The George Washington University; and Jennifer Leonard, Deputy Director, International Crisis Group.

**HON. CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH, CHAIRMAN, COMMISSION ON
SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE**

Mr. SMITH. The Commission will come to order. And first of all, let me apologize for convening the Commission hearing late. We did have a series of votes, so again I apologize to our witnesses and to all of you for that lateness.

I want to express a very hearty welcome to our witnesses and to everyone joining us this afternoon for this hearing on foreign fighters and the escalating threat of ISIS in Central Asia. A year ago today the city of Mosul fell to the Islamic State of Iraq in Syria, or ISIS, during a wave of violence that swept brutally through northern Iraq. Many of those who took part in the offensive were foreign fighters.

In fact, the United Nations Security Council recently estimated that there are now at least 25,000 foreign terrorist fighters from more than 100 countries who have traveled internationally to join or fight for terrorist entities associated with ISIS and al-Qaida. According to the international crisis group, as many as 4,000 foreign fighters came from the five countries in Central Asia. Just last week, we learned that the chief of Tajikistan's counterterrorism

program—someone highly trained by the United States government—abandoned his post to join ISIS.

What does this say about the current efforts to stop terror-minded men and women from volunteering and traveling to the Middle East? Clearly our government, working with others and with organizations like the OSCE, must take stronger action to combat radicalization beyond our borders, as well as to ensure that returning foreign fighters do not bring jihad and murder back home. Central Asian governments face major challenges here. Many of these derive from their history as part of the Soviet Union, from wars in nearby Afghanistan, and from limited economic development which has led millions of their citizens to seek employment abroad, especially in Russia.

The discrimination and exploitation to which these workers are subjected, as well as the decline in the Russian economy and changes in the Russian visa regime, have reduced the remittances these workers can send home to support their families, and may have contributed to creating conditions that ISIS uses to recruit foreign fighters from among different Central Asian nationalities.

Some of the challenges the Central Asia governments face are of their own making, including widespread corruption, lack of the rule of law and their own human rights records. Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan have particularly terrible human rights records, among the worst in the world with respect to political prisoners and the use of torture. All of these factors are exploited by ISIS recruiters and other organizations promoting radicalization and violent extremism.

It should be the particular role of the U.S. to promote to the Central Asian governments our conviction that fighting terrorism is no excuse for violating human rights or the rule of law. I look forward to hearing about many of the issues here, including counteracting radicalization of potential foreign fighters, inhibiting the travel of recruits and volunteers to the Middle East, disrupting financial support to fighters and their families and preventing their return to their home countries.

This is in the first place the responsibility of the governments. And there is the question of what they are trying to do and how well they are doing it. There is a question of what our government and the OSCE is doing, and perhaps can do better, working with Central Asian governments. Here we need to talk about issues of document security, border security and law enforcement coordination. And I hope we can touch, during this hearing with our very distinguished witnesses, on all of these very pertinent issues and others.

I'd like to yield to Mr. Pitts—Commissioner Pitts for any opening comments he has.

**HON. JOSEPH R. PITTS, COMMISSIONER, COMMISSION ON
SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE**

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

And I'd also like to thank Mr. Rosenblum and the rest of our panelists for testifying here today.

The Islamic State, or ISIS, poses a direct and substantial threat to U.S. interest and security, as well as the security of the Middle East. Just a few months back, Islamic States spokespeople threatened to spread its brutality outward across the Mediterranean to Rome, one of the focal points of Western civilization. As the United States Government seeks to contain and even degrade and destroy the Islamic State, the contribution that foreign fighters offer inwardly to the terrorist organization is of vast significance.

It has been estimated that more than 20,000 foreign fighters from possibly up to 90 countries have traveled to Syria to take up arms since the Arab Spring. And this includes approximately 180 of our own citizens. The concern voiced by the State Department and other observers and analysts on this issue is very disturbing. One State Department official characterized it as formidable—an enormous threat.

To put it simply, the United States Government and its allies, and indeed all of those combating the Islamic State, cannot hope to destroy the terrorist organization without substantially cutting off or mitigating the number of foreign fighters that fill its ranks. As noted by many observers, the amount of foreign fighters stemming from Central Asia amounts to only a small fraction of the thousands of foreign Islamic State fighters. However, the region's significance in addressing the problem may prove to be pivotal.

While we haven't necessarily seen the amount of fighters originating from Central Asia as those from Europe, the potential for extremists to change this dynamic is great. I am encouraged by some of the actions from governments in the region, including attempts to punish participation with the terrorist group with penal codes. I believe the United States Government must do more, both in the short term and long term, to address this threat.

I've been in discussion with officials from the Republic of Kazakhstan, for instance, on the need to increase economic opportunities in the region through greater leverage of the use of trade and power of American competitiveness and markets. As WE observe this issue, it is my hope that we can find policy tools that can obstruct the flow of foreign fighters, but also give the people of this region greater exposure to freedoms, prosperity and, ultimately, spiritual identities that don't lead them to join the cult of death that the Islamic States represents.

Again, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you very much, Commissioner Pitts.
Commissioner Cohen.

**HON. STEVE COHEN, COMMISSIONER, COMMISSION ON
SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE**

Mr. COHEN. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

And I'm just looking forward to your testimony, although I think I've read it. I understand—you say recruiters employ a variety of narratives to attract adherents with the idea of a just war and defense of innocents, an Islamic caliphate as a utopia, and the opportunity to fight back against Western oppression. I think all those things are accurate and I can't question what you're saying here.

But I was at a conference recently on Middle East. And a fellow from Middle East suggested that a lot of the attraction was young

people not having opportunities at home and not having opportunities to have—he got pretty basic in terms of relationships and no opportunity to have a job and to be able to afford to get married and not having too much of an opportunity to have partners of the opposite sex, and that they made him kind of like a football player in America, or a rock star, and gave him some kind of special panache.

And I wondered what you thought about that theory. This was a Saudi who has been on boards X, Y and Z and pretty wired in. And this was his theory what attracted them, and that there's not much other opportunity for young males in those countries to do much, because no jobs, no money, no wife, nothing else going on. They don't have rock stars. They don't have—I guess they got a few soccer players, but they don't have LeBron and they don't have Tom Brady and whatever. I'm just curious what you thought about that theory.

And the other thing is social media, how we can use social media better to try to give them a different perspective of maybe what they should be doing with their lives, and to try to counterbalance the whole idea of jihadist suicide. Thank you.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you very much.

I'd like to now welcome our very distinguished witness from the administration, Mr. Daniel Rosenblum, Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Department of State's Bureau of South and Central Asia. Before his appointment as Deputy Assistant Secretary, Mr. Rosenblum served 17 years in the State Department's Office of the Coordinator of U.S. Assistance to Europe, Eurasia and Central Asia, including 6 as coordinator.

He was instrumental in designing and implementing large packages of assistance for Ukraine, Georgia and Kyrgyzstan following internal upheavals and for Kosovo, following its declaration of independence. Before coming to the State Department, Mr. Rosenblum spent six years as senior program coordinator at the Free Trade Union Institute, FTUI, of the AFL-CIO. And without objection, your full résumé will be made a part of the record.

But finally, Mr. Rosenblum has a B.A. in history from Yale and an M.A. in Soviet studies and international economics from Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies. Welcome, the floor is yours.

**DANIEL N. ROSENBLUM, DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR
CENTRAL ASIA, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE**

Sec. ROSENBLUM. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and members of the Commission who are here. Thank you for inviting me to testify today. I'd like to give some brief remarks and I ask that my full written statement be entered into the record.

Mr. SMITH. Without objection, so ordered.

Sec. ROSENBLUM. Mr. Chairman, disrupting the flow of foreign fighters to Syria and Iraq is a top priority for the U.S. Government. The United States is working with governments in Central Asia and with multilateral organizations who are operating in the region—including the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, which I know is of special interest to this Commission—

in ways that parallel the work we do with partners around the world.

Together with our international partners, we're committing significant resources to track and disrupt foreign terrorist fighter travel and recruitment. We're working together on information sharing and border security, legal reform and criminal justice responses, and countering violent extremism to prevent recruitment and radicalization to violence. And we're encouraging our key partners, including in Central Asia, to prioritize this threat.

While there are no reliable statistics, research suggests that the vast majority of Central Asia fighters in Syria and Iraq are recruited while outside their own countries, mostly while in Russia, where millions of them live as migrant workers. They are without the family, community and religious leaders that back home would all work to mitigate recruitment and radicalization. Furthermore, many Central Asians working in Russia are marginalized and experience discrimination and harassment.

This combination of factors creates fertile ground for extremist recruiters. The recruiters then employ a variety of narratives and methods, especially using social media, to attempt to attract adherents and radicalize recruits to violence. Similar tactics are used to attract the individuals who travel directly from Central Asia. The new recruits join not only ISIL, but other terrorist organizations as well, such as the al-Nusra Front.

Given the complex interplay of factors, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to counter this phenomenon, but one key long-term effort we are engaged in is to improve economic prospects to allow Central Asians to find employment at home, where radicalization to violence is less likely to take place than among migrant worker communities in Russia. We've also begun to engage the governments and people of Central Asia on how they can disrupt recruiting, prevent radicalization, hinder financing, prevent travel of recruits and also engage civil society and counter false narratives.

Let me turn for a moment from the conflict in Syria and Iraq to briefly address recent media reports on the presence of ISIL in Afghanistan, which borders three of the Central Asian countries. We have seen signs that ISIL is attempting to spread into Afghanistan, and that some Taliban groups have rebranded themselves as ISIL to attract funding and recruits. But ISIL's presence in Afghanistan is still a relatively new phenomenon and it will take time to evaluate its long-term prospects.

Let me now talk more specifically about some of the efforts we're undertaking at the global, the regional, and the national levels. Through the global coalition to counter ISIL, which we've been encouraging our partners in Central Asia to join, our key efforts include disrupting the flow of foreign fighters and countering the messaging of violent extremists. Counter-messaging is a critical element because so much of the radicalization of recruiting happens through social media.

Also, on the global level, President Obama chaired the U.N. Security Council session last fall that adopted Resolution 2178, which requires countries to take a range of steps to address the threat of foreign terrorist fighters and calls for improved international cooperation. This resolution resonated in Central Asia, and in August

the OSCE will hold a regional workshop in Kazakhstan on its implementation. Then in February of this year, the White House convened a summit on countering violent extremism that brought together governments, international organizations, civil society groups and the private sector to develop a comprehensive CVE action agenda—that's countering violent extremism, CVE.

Regionally, we're supporting a CVE summit that the government of Kazakhstan will host in Astana at the end of this month to follow on the White House meeting. The Astana summit will focus on eight priority areas, ranging from assessing the drivers and threats of violent extremism to counter messaging, to how governments and communities can work together. And we're also supporting this month a regional civil society CVE summit that will be held in Istanbul. And it will focus on nine priority areas ranging from the role of women and youth in the CVE efforts to rehabilitation and reintegration of violent extremists who return home.

Such gatherings not only enhance information sharing, but they also generate action. For example, as a follow up to the White House CVE summit, the OSCE has now developed a multiyear program to build the capacity of civil society, including youth and women, to counter violent extremism. We're also supporting the OSCE and other regional efforts. This past February, it organized a three-day workshop in Dushanbe on regional cooperation and response to foreign terrorist fighters, the first such meeting of its kind in Central Asia.

At the national level, our diplomats regularly engage on these issues and we encourage a comprehensive approach that includes security improvements that are in line with international human rights obligations, as well as community-level programs to address the root causes that may be making some Central Asians vulnerable to recruitment by extremist groups.

We have bilateral programs in each country that not only build law enforcement capacity, but also train in community policing techniques and how to increase the role of religious leaders in conflict resolution. We're working closely with the OSCE on several such programs and I'd refer you to my written testimony for more details on country-by-country.

The nations of Central Asia are taking up this challenge, Mr. Chairman. And the U.S. will continue to work with global institutions, with regional groups and national governments to reduce the threat. Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.

Mr. SMITH. Secretary Rosenblum, thank you very much for your very comprehensive testimony and, again, in your written submission you do go into great depth with each of the countries, and this Commission certainly appreciates it.

I have a couple of opening questions. You point out and you have listed in your bullets the topics that will be discussed at the CVEs, including at the Istanbul summit. Turkey has become a primary transit state for Central Asians traveling to Syria—low airfares, there's a whole number of reasons, plus a 500-mile border with Syria. I'm wondering if that will be a major focus of that Istanbul summit when you convene it.

Let me also ask you, Gulmurod Khalimov, the Tajik military officer who recently defected to ISIS, received extensive military train-

ing in the U.S. Can you tell us what kind of safeguards are in place to prevent defection by Central Asian military members participating in U.S. training?

Just a parallel, in a way, for years during the troubles in Northern Ireland, it was very disconcerting to me and a whole lot of other people that at the FBI academy some of the people involved with terrorism who were part of the Northern Irish police force there were actually terrorists. I actually wrote a law that said they all had to be vetted. I'm wondering if we're properly vetting people who get that training to ensure that inadvertently we don't train someone who's doing such horrific things.

Let me also ask you, as a Russia expert—as we all know, many of the recruiters very often can go into the migrant communities in Russia and play on the dissatisfaction and demoralization of those there. I know we're at pretty much loggerheads with Russia over Ukraine and, you know, things are not the way they could be—hopefully someday will be in terms of our relationship with Russia. But let me ask you, how are they doing and are we assisting them in any way? Are they aware of this problem—of this massive recruitment that appears to be happening?

And finally, in what ways do you think human rights violations by Central Asian states feed jihadist radicalization and ISIS recruitment? And how does that vary from state to state? Are the various Stans, different countries in the Central Asian region, are they receptive of that? This Commission has held multiple hearings, site visits, meetings with the presidents, prime ministers and parliamentarians for years. And human rights is always our first point of engagement with each of those countries. If you could, perhaps, address that.

Sec. ROSENBLUM. OK. Thank you for those questions, Mr. Chairman. Hopefully I'll cover all of them, but please remind me if I've left out something.

So, first of all, you asked about the upcoming conference in Istanbul and Turkey's role as a transit country. I don't believe, actually, that the agenda of that conference will focus on that question because the conference is a civil society meeting. I believe the focus will be on what civil society groups can do in their communities and in their countries to contribute to preventing the root causes, essentially. It's sort of local-level engagement to prevent the drivers of radicalization, as it's often referred to.

The issue of the transit through Turkey is something that comes up, for us, frequently in our dialogue with our Central Asian partners as well. And it is something that's of concern and we're working closely with Turkey on these issues, but I don't believe that it's going to be focused on in the conference.

Mr. SMITH. I understand going after systemic causes, but it would seem to me that if since it is a large transit area, country—has Ankara been responsive? Or are they really toeing the line to try to mitigate this transit?

Sec. ROSENBLUM. Yeah. Turkey co-chairs with the Netherlands the Foreign Terrorist Fighter Working Group of this counter-ISIL coalition that the U.S. has helped put together. We consult very frequently and with high intensity with Turkey on these issues, on the foreign terrorist fighter flow.

Turkey signed a letter of intent on March 12th to improve information sharing on foreign terrorist fighters and known and suspected terrorists. We also co-chaired the Global Counterterrorism Forum with Turkey. So there's a lot of engagement with Turkey on this issue now. And Turkey itself acknowledges the scope of the problem and that they need to do more. So we're encouraging that line.

Let me talk for a minute about Mr. Khalimov, the head of the interior ministry special forces who defected recently and has claimed in a video that he had joined ISIL. He was an important leader in the security forces in Tajikistan who came up through the ranks over about a 10-year period, during which he participated in five Department of State-sponsored antiterrorism assistance program trainings between 2003 and 2010.

The process for selecting for training, which goes to your question, involves first selection by the government—so in each case it was the government of Tajikistan that selected and recommended him to participate in training. And to be honest, it was appropriate given the positions that he held. And then we do vetting ourselves. We vet all participants in this training course through processes we have under the so-called Leahy amendment, to determine that there's no record of gross human rights violations.

Mr. Khalimov was vetted in each case and passed our standard vetting procedures. So I should emphasize here that we offer the training and the other government that we're working with identifies the students for training. The vetting is an additional measure after the students are identified for the program.

Now, your specific question, I think, at the end was whether there's some technique that could be used to sort of screen or identify people who are potentially recruits, so to speak. And I don't know the answer to that, to be honest with you, Mr. Chairman, today. It is something that we have to think long and hard about. Something tells me that it would be very difficult, because the motivations are so complex.

And that's something that I think Mr. Cohen actually referred to in the question he asked in the opening. We can talk more about that later. But the interplay of factors that go into someone ending up doing what Khalimov did are so complex that it might be difficult. But that doesn't mean we shouldn't look at whether there are things that could be done to screen out people.

Mr. SMITH. Now, was he a lone wolf? Or he's not part of a trend, as far as we know. Have there been others?

Sec. ROSENBLUM. We're following it closely. We're talking to the government of Tajikistan about it. We—

Mr. SMITH. Or any of the other countries, too.

Sec. ROSENBLUM. Yeah, we don't have any evidence that he's part of some larger network yet.

So that—

Mr. SMITH. But again, in terms of people we've trained, we have no evidence that there are other people who have followed the course of going into ISIS or al-Qaida?

Sec. ROSENBLUM. Right, no evidence that other people who are involved in the same training are going the same way.

You asked about Russia. And on Russia, I think it's fair to say that the Russian Government has acknowledged the problem. And there have been statements—public statements by senior officials both about the growth of foreign terrorist fighters in Syria and Iraq, and also about the fact that some of them are being recruited from within the territory of the Russian Federation. That concern has been expressed and also acted on through support, for example, for the U.N. Security Council resolution that I referred to earlier.

Russia did participate—they were invited and they participated in the summit in February on countering violent extremism that was held here. They sent a high-level delegation. Russia is also a founding member of the Global Counterterrorism Forum, this group, and has been invited to participate in this Astana meeting—regional meeting that will be held in Kazakhstan later this month.

So we work together where possible to find ways of disrupting the travel of foreign fighters, and we'll continue to do so. I think it is fair to say, as you characterized it too, that the level of our engagement on a lot of issues with Russia these days is not as robust as it has been in the past. But nonetheless, this is an issue where we clearly have shared concerns.

And then I think your last question was about human rights and in what ways do human rights violations and so on fuel recruitment. I'd start out by saying that we are concerned that lack of respect for human rights, limitations on freedom of religion specifically could potentially be used by extremist groups in their efforts to recruit individuals and to radicalize them to commit acts of violence. And these things could also contribute to what people refer to as self-radicalization, where people through social media and other means become inspired.

But at the same time, the recruitment process and this radicalization process are complex phenomena. And we don't have evidence of a direct causal link between restrictions on rights and radicalization. The lack of evidence of a direct link doesn't mean that we don't take the issues of human rights and religious freedom and other related issues less seriously, and we engage regularly with the governments in Central Asia on these issues and raise them in many fora and many opportunities. But I guess I would just come back to the main point that there's a potential there, but we have not seen the evidence—no one has brought to us the evidence of a direct causal link.

Mr. SMITH. Mr. Cohen.

Mr. COHEN. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

You mentioned some of the questions I asked earlier, and I guess—I presume you were referring to the incentives or the reasons why. I mean, I know you're not—because he's passed—Dr. Freud, but can you help us with the 2015 Freud analysis of the ISIS fighter and their desires? Easy question right?

Sec. ROSENBLUM. So, Congressman, it is a complex issue, as I said before, and the motivations are complicated. Often the people who study this—and I had to talk to the experts because I confess I'm not an expert on radicalization and the recruitment issue. But they talk about there being three types of motivation, and sort of divide them into three categories: the ideological motivations, which could be political or could be religious. So for example, we

have to get rid of Assad, so I want to go to Syria to fight to overthrow the Assad regime.

Then you have the psychological motivations, which will vary from individual to individual, even to the level of somebody being a sociopath being inclined to violence and being drawn to it, not necessarily for ideological reasons.

And then there's the situational category of motivations—which is a big basket, a broad range of things. But it could be anything from my community that says it's OK to go fight and to commit acts of terrorism, or lack of opportunities, economic opportunities, a feeling of hopelessness, a feeling of drifting.

So all of those things could be possible explanations in any given case. And they're probably not all going to play the same role in any country. So as we're focused here on Central Asia, it's hard to say what's the primary driver to those Central Asians who are joining, except that the one interesting piece of evidence we have, that I presented in my testimony, is that it does seem that the majority—even some say the vast majority—of those Central Asians going to fight in these conflicts are coming from outside of Central Asia. So that's suggestive of something, and I presented some possible explanations related to the situation faced by migrant workers in Russia. But a lot of it is conjecture at this point.

Mr. COHEN. You probably can't answer my question, and you haven't, and maybe it can't be answered and it was just a suggestion this man made and is fairly simplistic and I don't have any answer, but part of it's the disparity in wealth in all those nations. And then we have a terrible disparity here, but compared to what it is in the Middle East, we're Nirvana. And they have very little hope. And it seems like these nations—a lot of people at the top making—or taking, I don't know if they make it, they take it—lots of money. And they're living beyond the Kardashians.

And then the rest of the people have got nothing. And so the idea of going off and fighting and putting a Kalashnikov over your shoulder and having some women that think you're great that come over there to be your bride is a pretty attractive life for somebody who has no life whatsoever where they are. Now, maybe the migrant workers in Russia, but I don't know how we're going to stop that until there's more of a democratization in those nations and throughout the Middle East.

And it's part of the whole problem, I think, that we're seeing in terms of revolution and failed states and chaos, which we have in the Middle East, is the disparity in wealth that's gone on. And the Saudis, you see it there. It's all throughout. I guess USAID can help, other opportunities like that. Social media can help. And from what I understand, this conference I went to recently with quite a few folks from the United States and from around the world, everybody was in agreement that our social media campaign is inadequate.

And we don't do a very good job of reaching the young or influencing the young, and that we could do it better with some cultural-type icons and trying to find ways that we can reach them. I don't know who's doing our social media programs, but we got the best social media people in the world in the United States. And why our State Department or government isn't trying to incor-

porate some of the ideas they can get and help us is beyond me, because we don't seem to be doing it. Do you know if we've reached out to any of these companies in Silicon Valley or wherever? Have we?

Sec. ROSENBLUM. Yes, we have collaborated with some companies. I will defer to colleagues who know more about this, and we can get back to you with a more detailed answer to your question on social media specifically. But I know that there's been exchange with private companies in the past and collaboration on this issue.

There is also an interagency body housed at the State Department, the Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications, which was established specifically to counter recruitment online through counter-messaging. And it is engaged now in a sustained campaign against the ISIL and other groups online messaging to combat their ability to recruit new fighters. So there is an effort being made. It can always be better.

Mr. COHEN. Is Russia doing anything in the same capacity? I mean, I know they've got problems in Chechnya and Dagestan and all the Stans. But they're very concerned about radical Islam. Are they—if you say that most of these foreign fighters are—I think that's what you said—they're coming from being migrant workers in Russia. Are they not concerned that they're going to return to Russia? I mean, we seem to be concerned that some of these folks are going to return to the United States. Isn't Russia concerned? And are they doing anything about it?

Sec. ROSENBLUM. They are concerned. And the details of what they're doing about it, to be honest, I don't know. We can get back to you about what we do know. I know that they have supported the international efforts that I referred to earlier—the U.N. Security Council, participating in our CVE summit. But what they're doing domestically to address the root causes and so on, I'll have to come back to you with a more detailed answer on that.

Mr. COHEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back the balance.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you, Mr. Cohen.

Commissioner Pitts.

Mr. PITTS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, Mr. Secretary, for your testimony and for coming today.

Let me explore a little bit more—you're talking about root causes and the economic aspect of this attraction. Could you explore or explain a little bit about the religious dimension of this attraction? Is it true that this brand of Islamic—radical Islam that believes in this caliphate being established—if they're of that brand, they are compelled to go and defend the caliphate, just like others in Islam believe they have to take a trip to Mecca once in a lifetime? Can you explore a little bit of the religious dimension or motivation that you understand here?

Sec. ROSENBLUM. Sir, as I understand it, that religious message—the message of establishing the caliphate does have appeal for some, but it's a minority. It's not something that is part of the religious traditions of Central Asia, of the mainstream Islam that's established in Central Asia.

And one often hears that those who are attracted to the messaging and the ideal picture of this caliphate that they will join are

those who are probably not well-educated in their religion, that they may be ignorant of it. And so actually one of the efforts that we've been making in some countries in Central Asia is working with local governments, working with community groups to get religious leaders more involved in community education, both about the dangers of the messages that are coming out and also trying to fill in some of the gaps that exist.

So in fact I just learned yesterday of a program that we're doing in Kyrgyzstan which involves the religious establishment—that is the deputy mufti who's the head of the religious council there—local law enforcement in communities in Kyrgyzstan and community groups talking about how religious leaders can play a more active role in seeing the danger signs that some of this messaging is resonating and providing information that might help to counter it, they hope. And so we actually supported this through a grant from our U.S. embassy in Kyrgyzstan, this program.

And OSCE in addition is doing programming like this, working at the community level. So it's about not having information, not having multiple sources of information. It's also—I think also about not really understanding their own religious traditions completely, and therefore being more prone to believe what they're reading on-line.

Mr. PITTS. If I can shift to another issue, due to the relatively cheap flights, ease of visa restrictions and a growing market aimed at aiding foreign fighters along their journey, Turkey has become a primary transit state from—for Central Asians traveling to Syria. Are the Turkish authorities currently doing enough to prevent foreign extremist entry into Turkey and departure to Syria? And what can the United States do to help our NATO ally more effectively clamp down on their 500-mile border with Syria?

Sec. ROSENBLUM. Congressman, as I said in my earlier answer to the Chairman, there is a major problem of the transit through Turkey. It's something that comes up frequently in our dialogue with our Central Asian partners as well, because everyone's aware that that's the route that people take. And it is something that the government of Turkey recognizes and is taking seriously. The President just a couple days ago at the G7 summit referred to this as one of a number of elements of combating ISIL and said that Turkey can do more. And we're working with them to help to take stronger action.

Mr. PITTS. The five Central Asian states that we're talking about here have fragile governance structures and lack the ability to adequately provide jobs and education and health care to the citizens. And some reports argue that this lack of social stability and structure tempts individuals to turn to ISIL/ISIS, in the belief that it can provide better opportunity, perhaps a better future for their families. How have we, or can we or might we, encourage the Central Asian governments to address these issues in order to create more inclusive and appealing societies? What aid can the U.S. provide in order to help build government institutions and strengthen the rule of law?

Sec. ROSENBLUM. So that's a very good question, Congressman. And the answer is a complicated one, as it often is on this issue. First of all, we always stress in our dialogue with our Central

Asian partners that in the long term stability and security is best ensured in countries where the citizens can provide for themselves economically and where government is responsive and accountable. And so that is definitely part of our message about the long term. And that's something that we say all over the world when we're engaging with other countries on these issues of internal governance.

At the same time, on the specific issue of recruitment by ISIL and foreign fighters going to Syria and Iraq, as I said earlier, the motivations for those individuals to go are very complex and it's hard to untangle the multiple possibilities of why they're going. There may be cases where the economic circumstances or frustration that somebody's feeling in their local community toward local authorities or whatever it is could be a factor, but it may be one among many. And we just don't have evidence of that causal link. The question is, though, what can we do to help address some of these issues, which are important even if they're not a cause of foreign fighter recruitment?

And the answer is that we've been working for the past 20 to 25 years in all these countries to try to improve economic systems, to try to improve the performance by, for example, helping small business buildup, improving government policies, investment climate and all those sorts of issues, and also by working with governments and with civil society to improve how government delivers for its citizens. Part of that is fighting corruption. That's a major issue in the region, and in many countries, of course, around the world. And part of it is also just how to deliver services to citizens in a way that they deserve.

And we have a number of programs—USAID, which I think the congressman referred to earlier, our State Department itself works in many of these areas. So I guess I would characterize that almost as a generational effort to make a difference.

Mr. PITTS. Thank you very much. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. SMITH. Commissioner Hultgren.

HON. RANDY HULTGREN, COMMISSIONER, COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

Mr. HULTGREN. Thank you so much. Thank you for being here today and your work.

Couple questions, I know recently the U.S. has been pulling troops out of Afghanistan and Iraq. I wonder what does this mean for foreign fighters coming to or from this region. With the lessening U.S. military presence, can the number of foreign fighters be expected to increase in these areas?

Sec. ROSENBLUM. So I had a fairly brief reference in my testimony to Afghanistan and the appearance of ISIL there. And I would say, first of all, that to the extent that we understand what's happening there now is that former Taliban forces are essentially rebranding themselves as ISIL, whether in order to get more funding or in order to get support from outside. And the estimates of the numbers vary quite a bit. It's not clear how big of a phenomenon it is.

But we also—what we don't see, in the case of ISIL appearing in Afghanistan, is it being a foreign fighter issue. That is, it's not coming about because of an influx of people coming from outside.

Very frankly, the magnet for the foreign fighters today is Syria and Iraq. It's not Afghanistan. So it's sort of a homegrown issue within Afghanistan. There's a broader issue of security in Afghanistan, which I'm not the expert on and can't really speak to in detail today, but I don't think that we've been able to draw a connection between the appearance of ISIL in Afghanistan and our drawdown. So—

Mr. HULTGREN. Let me go back to this idea of the magnet of Syria drawing these people and get more focused on Central Asia. With the Central Asian countries, are they effective in preventing Syria-bound violent extremists from exiting their borders? If not, how can the United States be helpful to assist or exert pressure on them in a way that will diminish the flow of foreign fighters into these regions?

Sec. ROSENBLUM. So it's a good question. I think that the countries themselves are making efforts and trying to deal with a relatively new challenge. And I think they would acknowledge themselves—although they should really speak for themselves—that they can be more effective, that they need to improve. And that's why, for example, they're participating in these global meetings that we're helping to convene to learn from others, to learn how it's done and also to improve information sharing.

So there's a number of things that we are doing and can do more of that relate to helping them to be more effective. One thing that we encourage all the governments of Central Asia to do is to approach the issue in a comprehensive way that doesn't just involve law enforcement, as important as that is, but also involves civil society, religious groups, private organizations. The response needs to deal with issues that belong to law enforcement and security, like sharing information about passengers who are traveling, traveler screening, border security, things like that, but that it also needs to address the root causes, the stuff we were talking about a minute ago, the local, community-level issues.

And so we've offered our support. Ultimately they recognize that they need—they're going to need to step up themselves. But there are a number of ways in which our assistance programs, through these conferences where people can exchange information and ideas, and through belonging to a more global network, that they can become more effective.

Mr. HULTGREN. One last question, and I apologize if you've already covered this, I've got a couple different meetings going on at the same time so I missed a good part of your testimony and I apologize for that—but I know according to a report the lure of the Islamic State for Central Asians—there was a report by Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty—that said marginalized people, especially entire families in the Central Asia area, are joining ISIL because they believe it to be a better option for their families than the dismal economic prospects, restrictive governments and oppressive social circumstances of their home countries.

I wonder, do you agree with that assessment of the reason why—for ISIL's allure, especially for entire families? And if so, what kind of approach, comprehensive or otherwise, that the U.S. and its allies and partners and organizations such as OSCE offer to help di-

minish the sort of allure towards ISIL from Central Asian countries?

Sec. ROSENBLUM. Congressman, this goes back to the discussion about the motivations and what makes people join. And as I said earlier, there's a complex mix of motivations or potential motivations that people look at. Because of the nature of the conflict in Syria, and because the recruitment obviously happens in a sort of clandestine way, it's very hard for us—it's rare to get the chance, for example, to interview someone and ask them the question.

There are some returnees, and so there's a handful of people—I mean, returnees—who have gotten disillusioned with their membership in these extremist groups. But there aren't many opportunities to ask people why they join these groups. So clearly the economic circumstances or other frustrations people feel could be a factor in some cases. And in terms of what we can do to address it, or the governments of the region can do to address it, it's really about providing economic opportunity. But again, even if we did that, it's not clear that that's going to address the problem.

And just one last data point to throw on the table as we think about these matters: If you look at the numbers—and as you know, my focus is only Central Asia, not the whole world—but if you look around the world at where the foreign fighters are coming from to join ISIL, I've been told that probably about 20 percent are coming from Western countries—from Europe, the United States and other places. So it becomes harder to say that economic circumstances must be the main cause, when you look at the origin of other people.

Mr. HULTGREN. Right. I've talked with some other European countries, like Sweden, and very concerned of what's happening there. And again, these are very affluent communities with strong social structures. And yet, people are still choosing to leave to go fight. So this is complex and deep.

Mr. Chairman, can I ask one last question, is that all right? I'm sorry. You just sparked another question I had where you mentioned some are returning because they're disillusioned and going back to their home country because it wasn't what they expected it to be. My guess is some are returning and haven't been disillusioned yet. They're returning maybe because they were injured or they're just coming back home for a while. What kind of potential instability in those countries might we see or are we already seeing? Or is there a threat to some of these existing countries and governments as fighters come back who still are committed to the cause?

Sec. ROSENBLUM. Well, the issue of returning fighters from Syria is definitely of great concern to the countries of the region. And they are watching very closely when these people come back. We don't know of any cases or evidence yet of attacks originating from those returned people. But it's something that obviously the countries of the region first and foremost will look at very closely. And we, to the extent that we can be helpful to them in that, we stand ready to do so.

Mr. HULTGREN. Well, thank you very much for your testimony. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

Mr. SMITH. Just if I could ask one final question, Mr. Secretary. Again, paralleling with what Mr. Pitts was talking about with regard to the radical Islamic allure, the magnet, if you will. When Boko Haram was emerging as a clear and compelling threat, I held four hearings in my Subcommittee on Human Rights, Africa and Global Health. Assistant Secretary Johnnie Carson testified and said that they're just unhappy with the infrastructure in the northern counties that were under assault, not enough roads and bridges. And to which I said, well, so they can blow them up?

There seemed to have been a Boko Haram misperception about what the core radical Islamic belief really was causing these individuals to do. And again, we're now at the 14th month of the Chibok girls having been kidnapped, and so many others since. I've actually met some of the ones who escaped when I was in Jos and Abuja on two trips to Nigeria. My question really goes to do we really understand the importance that the imams play?

In Bosnia, we've had a great grand mufti, and I'm good personal friends with him—Reis Ceric, and we're coming up to the 20th anniversary of the slaughter—the genocide in Srebrenica. And he has been eloquent in his defense of human rights, but also strictly adhering to his deeply held convictions about his faith, but rejects radical Islam. General al-Sisi—President al-Sisi in Egypt gave a powerful statement on January 1st to a group of clerics about the need for a reformation.

And I'm wondering in the Central Asian countries, you did mention that religious believers—leaders are included—how much emphasis are we putting on bringing the imams in to speak out, to talk to those who attend their mosque? Sometimes it makes them a target. I'll never forget in Jos I met with the Archbishop Kaigama and the grand imam there. He said that when certain clerics speak out, the next day they're murdered by Boko Haram.

So there's a huge risk. But it would seem to me that in the Central Asian countries that risk would be far less and could have a preventive effect if they were to be very robust in their stressing of the importance of the tenets of their faith, but it doesn't include radical Islamic and murder and mass atrocities. Are they really being brought into the fold in Central Asia?

Sec. ROSENBLUM. Mr. Chairman, it's a very good point. And it is something that we emphasize strongly in our engagement. We also talk about civil society organizations and private organizations. But I think there's an especial emphasis in our recommendations and also events that we organize, on religious leaders being involved, for exactly the reason that you cited. I mentioned earlier in passing, and I'll just repeat it again because I thought it was such an interesting example of how this can work, that our embassy grants program in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan is supporting workshops for imams on conflict resolution.

And there was an event that was just held two days ago where the deputy mufti of Kyrgyzstan, together with the head of the counterterrorism department under the Ministry of Internal Affairs, led a training that was organized by an NGO, actually, called The Foundation for Tolerance International. The focus of this was on giving imams training in mediation and negotiation in factors

conducive to the spread of violent extremism. So, sensitizing them, but also getting them involved in the preventive aspect.

Mr. SMITH. That's great. Thank you.

Sec. ROSENBLUM. That's the sort of thing, I think, that's a good initiative—

Mr. SMITH. Thank you. We look forward to working with you. Thank you so very, very much for your testimony, for your expertise and for your leadership. We deeply appreciate it.

Sec. ROSENBLUM. Thank you.

Mr. SMITH. I'd like to now welcome our second panel to the witness table, beginning first with Frank Cilluffo, who is the vice president of the George Washington University. Mr. Cilluffo directs the Center for Cyber and Homeland Security, is co-director of the George Washington University Cyber Center for National and Economic Security. Before his university appointment he served as special assistant to George W. Bush's Department of Homeland Security. As a matter of fact, he was principle adviser to Governor Tom Ridge and directed the president's advisory council for homeland security.

He is routinely called upon to advise senior officials in the executive branch, U.S. armed services, state and local governments on an array of national homeland security and strategy policy matters. He frequently briefs congressional committees and their staffs. And he has testified before Congress over 25 times at high-profile hearings on counterterrorism, cyber threats, security—I guess this is 26—and deterrence, weapons proliferation, organized crime, intelligence and threat assessment, border and transportation security and emergency management.

Similarly, he works with U.S. allies and organizations such as NATO and Europol. He has presented at a number of bilateral and multilateral summits on cyber security and countering Islamic terrorism, including the U.N. Security Council. Without objection, your full resume will be made part of the record.

And then secondly we'll hear from Jennifer Leonard, who joined the Crisis Group's Washington office in June of 2002. As Washington advocacy director, she works across the spectrum of Washington's foreign policy actors, including the administration, Congress, media, think tanks and NGOs to design and implement strategies that impact the process of policy. She's also the primary responsibility in advocacy for the Crisis Group's Central Asia, Southeast Asia, Northeast Asia and the Caucasus projects.

Jen came to the Crisis Group after three years with the U.S. Department of Energy, where she worked for the assistant secretary for nuclear nonproliferation, then a special assistant to the administrator of the National Nuclear Security Administration. At the Department of Energy, she oversaw aspects of a new nonproliferation initiative, helped establish the Russia task force, international organizations and foreign governments on national security matters. She received her M.A. from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy and B.A. from Connecticut College.

Two very highly credentialed experts and we welcome you to the Commission. Please begin if you would, Frank.

FRANK J. CILLUFFO, ASSOCIATE VICE PRESIDENT AND DIRECTOR, CENTER FOR CYBER AND HOMELAND SECURITY, THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

Mr. CILLUFFO. Chairman Smith, Commissioner Pitts, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. As you can probably already surmise, I've never had an unspoken thought, but I will try to be brief and summarize my comments and hopefully submit the complete testimony.

Mr. SMITH. Without objection your full statement and anything you want to attach to it will be made a part of the record.

Mr. CILLUFFO. Terrific, thank you. And I also thank you for your leadership in examining this challenge. It is an important issue because the threat not only affects U.S. interests at home and abroad, but also to our allies and it is pressing. At the same time, we can't go it alone, and I think that's emblematic of the Helsinki Commission's overall mission. This threat spans borders, to include cyberspace in some of the discussions that were brought up earlier, and will demand international cooperation and transnational solutions.

The foreign fighter challenge is a matter of serious concern for the U.S. and our allies. While the foreign fighter phenomena is nothing new, its present scale and scope is unprecedented. By comparison—and Mr. Pitts, I think you brought this up in one of your questions—questions earlier, whether or not it's a religious duty. That was first popularized during the first Afghan-Soviet war in the 1970s, when Abdullah Azzam made that argument in that case. At that time, which was a very significant yet, you had about 5,000 Muslims from around the world join up the banner to fight the Soviets. You've had similar scenarios in terms of Chechnya, in terms of their war in the Balkans and in Bosnia, and then again of course in the FATA region more recently. But those numbers are dwarfed compared to what we're seeing today.

So during the Soviet-Afghan war, you had 5,000 foreign fighters. That was over a decade of fighting. Here you've seen over 20,000, up to 25,000, and we're still early, unfortunately, in the situation in terms of what we're addressing here. So scale and scope you really can't compare. When you look at the foreign fighter phenomena today in Syria and Iraq, you're talking 90 different countries. You're talking thousands of Westerners, including up to 150 Americans who have either attempted to travel or successfully did travel to fight alongside ISIL.

It's also worth noting that just this past April there was a big arrest in the United States: four Brooklyn men, including an Uzbek American who radicalized three other Americans from Central Asia to go fight alongside ISIS or ISIL. The good news is obviously we were able to prevent that before they were successful. But I think it's a harbinger and an indicator of what we're dealing with here.

And I think it's also worth noting that terrorism is a small numbers business. You don't need big numbers from a national security standpoint. This is why I think these numbers are so significant. It's not just that you can put X number of thousands behind it, but unfortunately it only takes small numbers to cause mass harm.

And I've been meeting with the security services of all our allied countries recently, and quite honestly they're overwhelmed. They can't keep up with the flow, both in terms of people attempting to

travel and also returnees. There have been quite a few returnees. And actually, I would disagree with the previous witness in one little incident. There have been some incidents, including in France, an attack on a synagogue, in terms of someone who had fought overseas in Syria and Iraq. So I think that there's enough there to be aware of in terms of what we need to be worrying about.

The phenomena itself I think is becoming difficult to detect. Obviously you want to get there left of boom, before an incident occurs, and that requires enhanced law enforcement capabilities as well as intelligence cooperation. That's where transnational solutions come in and are so important. And I think from a U.S. perspective, and the same for the Stans or for the region in Central Asia, all real solutions here are going to be local at the end of the day. They're the ones closest to the action, they're the ones who know their communities, and they're the ones who are ultimately going to either detect and/or prevent or respond to an incident. So I think that has to be part of our solution set.

There's been some discussion in terms of Afghanistan, and I think this is a dilemma and I think it's a significant challenge to U.S. interest. This conflict zone, as well as others such as the Maghreb and the Sahel—you've had a number of Americans fight alongside Al-Shabaab in Somalia and alongside al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula in Yemen. You've had French fighters fighting alongside Ansar al-Dine in Mali. So the Maghreb and the Sahel have been front and center for a while.

Afghanistan was not only as we discussed earlier the first major situation in terms of foreign fighters, but you are starting to see that undergoverned space be filled and that vacuum be filled, whether it's for fundraising purposes or whether it's for training in terms of conflating different organizations. So in addition to the ISIL direct threat, another concern is they're interacting with other foreign terrorist organizations. Some of those organizations have stronger international reach and capability, which obviously from a homeland perspective poses a high threat perspective. So that is a concern when they come back to Afghanistan, and I think the reason you saw the numbers drop in recent years in terms of foreign fighters going into Afghanistan was because of the pressure we were asserting then. I'd rather them look over their shoulder than have the time and space to maneuver, to plan, train, and ultimately execute attacks. And when our presence is diminished, that vacuum will be filled. And nature abhors a vacuum, and unfortunately I think a lot of bad actors will do that.

In terms of Central Asia itself, you heard the numbers: 2,000 to 4,000. I think that's, again, early stages. I am quite concerned about Colonel Khalimov's defection. I think that one of the key indicators, if you look at any foreign fighter flow historically, is what I refer to as bridge figures. These are people who have feet in both communities. Think Anwar al-Awlaki in terms of the role that he played to get Americans to fight alongside AQAP; or Eric Breininger, who was a German who brought over thousands of people to fight alongside the IJU in the FATA region. These bridge figures are important, and I do think that his role in terms of serving as a communicator to spread propaganda should not be underesti-

mated. Not only does he have operational capability, he's got street creds with the folks he's trying to influence.

It also recognizes the fact that, unfortunately, to paraphrase Bill Clinton, in this case it's not "the economy, stupid," but it is the ideology. And we need to do more to expose, unpack, undermine and hit back at the Islamist ideology. I think that's been our greatest missing tool in our counterterrorism toolkit and statecraft since 9/11, and something we ought to be doing an awful lot more to be able to combat their lifeblood, to be blunt.

Operationally, obviously we're doing a lot with our Five Eyes partners, and that should still be the number one relationship the U.S. has in terms of counterterrorism. But we're seeing that expand to our transatlantic partners in Europe, and obviously we need to expand that even beyond into the region.

In terms of working directly with the countries of Central Asia, I really do feel there's more that can be done in terms of border security. It had come up in the previous panel, questioning whether or not Turkey's doing all that they can do. The reality is, is bluntly speaking, they're not. And there's an awful lot more we should be able to do, which will in turn help the countries in the region of Central Asia get their arms around this issue. And there's no travel restrictions between Central Asian countries and Turkey, so maybe we ought to be looking to that as well.

So a long-winded way of saying that the threat that we're facing today obviously has implications to the region, but that's one part of a much broader set of issues that I think does directly impact U.S. national security. So thank you, sir.

Mr. PITTS. The Chair thanks the gentleman.

Ms. Leonard, you're recognized for your statement.

**JENNIFER LEONARD, DEPUTY DIRECTOR, INTERNATIONAL
CRISIS GROUP**

Ms. LEONARD. Well, thank you very much, Congressman Pitts, for inviting us to present our findings and research before the Helsinki Commission. We appreciate the Commission's sustained attention to the region over these long years. It's been going on for a while. We have appeared before the Commission before, and we appreciate today's opportunity.

International Crisis Group is an international conflict prevention organization, and our approach is grounded in field research that we conduct. We've got teams of political analysts who are based in or near countries vulnerable to violent conflict, and based on that research and analysis we try to come up with prescriptions to prevent and resolve it. And we've covered Central Asia for over 15 years. Right now, our current base is in Bishkek, and we conduct frequent visits throughout the region exploring the challenges and opportunities facing Central Asia, with a particular focus on the interplay of democratic repression, the threat of radicalization, and the decay and decline of the economy as well as infrastructure over the years.

And in January of this year, we published "Syria Calling: Radicalisation in Central Asia," a copy of which I'd like to submit

for the record.¹ But it addresses the very topic that we're here to discuss. And over the course of the research that we conducted over last fall and preserved in the report, indeed we see—and I don't think anyone here debates—that Islamic State is attracting a coalition of Central Asian jihadis and sympathizers, and it's fostering a network of links within the region. Now, it's prompted in part by the political marginalization and the bleak economic prospects that my fellow panelists have addressed, and it's beckoned roughly 2,000 to 4,000 Central Asian citizens so far.

And while the phenomenon has a disproportionate impact on security perceptions at home, the region supplies only a small fraction of the IS fighters in Syria. But if enough of them return, it does present a serious risk to regional security and stability, which—yes—presents a complex problem to each of the five Central Asian governments, which each suffer from their own brand of political repression, poverty, corruption, and all of them have really struggled over the years to accommodate space for expression of conscience, religious freedom, and the religious organizations that would be involved in that expression. Meantime, the belief that Syrian-trained jihadis plan to establish a caliphate in the region has shaped the security debate and the response in each. That's created an increased use of surveillance, harassment and detentions, and provided additional justification for ever-stricter laws on religious practice and expression that, in fact, may be counter-productive.

So against that backdrop, you've got the call of IS, which says not only does it want fighters but it wants facilitators. They want nurses, engineers, teachers to support the effort. And that can appear to offer an attractive alternative for those who are feeling alienated, discriminated, marginalized, et cetera, and who find some inspiration in the belief that the Islamic State is a meaningful alternative to the challenges of their post-Soviet life.

I'd like to talk about the profile because I think our take on this differs a little bit from what we've heard. I think Commissioner Cohen alluded to the sort of young, disenfranchised male. In fact, there is no single one-size-fits-all profile for IS supporters in Central Asia. We're seeing rich, poor, young, old, men, women, educated, non-educated. We've talked to 17-year-old hairdressers, established businessmen, women who've been basically abandoned by husbands who, yes, have pursued migrant opportunities in Russia, and they've started another family and left their first one behind. There are families who believe their children have better prospects in a caliphate.

The largest single group are Uzbeks, both citizens of Uzbekistan and ethnic Uzbeks from the region—notably, the Fergana Valley and the city of Osh, which is in Kyrgyzstan. And the risk has amplified since violence claimed the lives of about 400 ethnic Uzbeks back in 2010. That has gone unaccounted for. Meanwhile, Tashkent puts their number at about 500. We think that's conservative. The number may go up to about 2,500 of their citizens.

¹ <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/asia/central-asia/b072-syria-calling-radicalisation-in-central-asia.aspx>

In northern Kyrgyzstan, there may be up to 300 cases unreported of recruitment.

In Kazakhstan, IS supporters tend to come from the west and south, but that's not exclusive. And about 150 made headlines in fall of 2013 when they appeared in a YouTube video that surfaced.

And then, of course, there's Tajikistan and the alarming revelations of this recent defection, which has rattled the regime and the region. Clearly, you can hear from our own discussion that the U.S. government is seized with it and wondering how did somebody who darkened West Point's doorstep end up where he is today.

In terms of how the recruitment of these individuals occurs, it's happening at local levels. It's happening by word of mouth. Some are recruited at home in mosques and prayer groups, others abroad. We discussed the vulnerability of migrant workers. And the Internet and social media do play a critical role, but it's not a decisive or definitive one.

Groups that the Commission is familiar with, and in particular Hizb ut-Tahrir, play a peripheral role insofar as they—the folks who gravitate towards them could be radicalized to a degree, but these groups don't yet appear to be directly involved in recruiting to Syria. But they may be an unwitting waystation on the way to that fight.

More worrying for the regional security climate is where IMU—the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan—and its offshoots fit into this picture. Up until earlier this year they'd sort of kept a respective distance, but in March IMU released a sort of IS-style beheading video shot in Afghanistan in which they declared their allegiance and support to IS.

So in terms of the motivations, we talked about the economic disenfranchisement and the lack of opportunities. Indeed, economic reward is not a motivation here. Rather, it's the idea of a holy struggle to advance Islam. And people who are frustrated, excluded, who would not have considered fighting with the longer-established IMU, some of these outfits that have been around in the area longer, they're perceiving IS as the creator of a novel political order, something—the call of the IS caliphate is more compelling. And an imam from southern Kyrgyzstan told us in an interview, in comparing Syria to Afghanistan, that Syria is about principles, Afghanistan was about colonialism. So there's something that's resonating now along those lines.

One group that we haven't talked about here is women, and indeed we are concerned about the radicalization of women. The traditional and state-approved Muslim community's sort of disinterest in the role of women in society allows underground groups to fill a need. Radical Islam gives them some framework to distance—for women to distance themselves from marital or family frameworks that they feel frustrated by. For other women, it's the call of a devout life for them, perhaps for their children. And still others are following fighters or family members that have already sort of tread the path and have a network of contacts in Turkey and IS territory.

Now, while the numbers of Central Asians who've received active combat training and might yet be rising through the ranks is increasing, so far the danger is something to be prepared for rather

than presenting some immediate threat. But for the time being, then, Central Asia is fortunate that Syria is a long way away, the problem's in its infancy, no major attacks have yet occurred back in their neighborhood—well, actually I should also say that a point that hasn't yet been made is that many, in fact, may not return because they may very well perish in Syria.

But in the meantime, and keenly aware of the dangers that the return of these fighters could pose, beyond criminalizing their participation abroad, the Central Asian governments have done very little to address the reasons why the draw exists in the first place for their citizens, nor have they contemplated how that dynamic might relate to broader unmet societal demands. The prevention of extremism and the rehabilitation of jihadis are just not high on the agenda, and female radicalization in particular is not at all discussed.

These dynamics risk gathering pace and purpose. They risk blindsiding the governments that are ill-prepared to respond to such a complex security threat. "Complex" is a term that we keep throwing around, but indeed it is. And these are governments that may well, in the current day, be tempted to exploit the situation to crack down further on dissent—not just dissent expressed through a more radical religious means, but generally speaking. These governments need to assess accurately the long-term danger that jihadism poses to the region and take effective preventive action now. That doesn't mean labeling everyone who is interested in an unfamiliar interpretation of Islam as an extremist, adopting increasingly severe laws to limit freedom of conscience and association, or promoting intrusive security practices. Rather, effective prevention means responding to an unmet demand for increased democratic space, revising discriminatory laws and practices, implementing outreach programs—we talked about creating jobs, ensuring better coordination between security services and tackling police reform. And on the most basic level tackling police reform needs to start with the basic matter of how they're perceived by the communities that they serve.

For its part, the U.S. and regional partners should recognize that Central Asia is a growing source of foreign fighters, and we need to be prioritizing police reform and a more tolerant attitude towards religion in our bilateral engagements and programming in the region. We heard some promising references from Secretary Rosenblum, but clearly more can be done. There are lessons to be gleaned from other countries—from Denmark, from Indonesia—about how they've addressed some of these issues. But the capacity of the Central Asian governments to absorb and implement these lessons are undermined by not only weak state institutions, but a profound lack of political will.

And with that, I'll stop. Thank you.

Mr. PIRTS. The Chair thanks the gentlelady. Thank you both for excellent testimony.

I'll begin the questioning, and like to start where I ask the secretary about the idea of motivation, not economic but religious. And you mentioned Islamic ideology. You mentioned religious duty and the caliphate. Could you drill down a little bit? Are there Islamic scholars who teach that, since there is a caliphate, they have a

duty to go there and defend the caliphate? Explain how serious that religious motivation, you think, is. We'll start with you, Mr. Cilluffo.

Mr. CILLUFFO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Obviously, that's a complex question, but—and I'm not going to zero right in on Central Asia specifically, but looking more broadly.

I touched on what I referred to as bridge figures. These are individuals who have played a significant role in radicalizing and ultimately recruiting individuals to fight alongside foreign terrorist organizations. You cannot underestimate the significant role that Anwar al-Awlaki played, for example, in recruiting Americans to join up with AQAP in Yemen or to stay at home, given the fact that they had recognized that the authorities may be on to them, and they become a homegrown violent Islamist extremist threat. So the bridge figure role.

And that's why I think the colonel's defection is so significant here. This is someone kids would look up to. This is someone who, if you think back to even gangs, think back to the role that Tookie Williams played, for example, a big gang-banger. Ultimately, he had more effect in renouncing the gang lifestyle to others than anyone else could. So this is a big coup in terms of defector if you think from intelligence perspectives.

And I think his message is important, and if it's OK I'll quote quickly what he said because it was dressed in religious garb, but at the end of the day his message was also trying to resonate from an economic perspective. And his note was this: "Going out to work every morning, look at yourself in the mirror and ask yourself: Are you ready to die for the state or not?" He was clearly speaking directly to his colleagues in the Tajik services and others who could be potentially susceptible to this message. He went on to say "I am ready to die for the caliphate. Are you?" So there's clearly a religious underpinning, but it's also tapping into obviously a much broader message as well.

There are imams who have spoken out against, obviously, jihad and violent jihad and terrorist activity. But there are also many that have not. And at the end of the day, there are people turning to the Internet—I don't mean to be pejorative here, but Sheikh Google, call it that. Anyone who's got the loudest voice is going to get a lot of the followers, and these videos are resonating with a number of folks.

Now, I think the role social media plays with Western foreign fighters is absolutely critical. I think it probably has less of a significant impact in terms of Central Asia. But don't underestimate that particular set of issues.

Everyone's going to disagree with me on this point in this room. It's not only about what we're doing good in the world. We need to think of it as negative political campaigning. We've got to tear down the enemy. We have to expose the hypocrisy, expose the lies, and facilitate it falling under its own weight. Why? Because it's ideologically bankrupt. And ideally, that wouldn't be with our fingerprints on it. Obviously, it should come from the communities themselves. But we've had a hard time recognizing this as a principal tenet of our response, and until we do we're always going to be playing defense. We're always going to be reacting because it's

the ideology, it's the underpinning of the overall message. So I'm sure that there are very different views on that in this room, including possibly on this panel, but those are my thoughts.

Mr. PITTS. Thank you. Ms. Leonard, if you could respond to that. And you mentioned principles versus colonization, if you can drill down a little bit more.

Ms. LEONARD. Well, maybe before I do I wanted to make a point that we're talking about push versus pull, to a certain degree. So are these individuals who feel so marginalized, disenfranchised, discriminated against that they have no options or feel their options are so little where they currently reside that they're pushed from their home country towards something grand? Or is the pull of the caliphate what's bringing them? I think in most cases it's not an either/or, it's a combination. And so we need to work to address both of those dynamics.

Now, in terms of sort of bringing it more local and understanding what the religious dynamics or the religious base that currently exists in each country—and each country is different—and we have to be truthful, and for a variety of reasons known very well by the panel varying degrees of access to each of these countries too. But historically the state-sanctioned imams are not as versed and as educated, and therefore as capable of countering that narrative, that lure. And to the degree that programs can enhance their understanding and their capacity and their ability to counter that narrative, it's a good thing. But they're operating in a space, too, where they are state-sanctioned. So the state itself needs to arrive at a level of comfort where that space can be provided and take some of the pressure off of the situation, and that in nearly every case runs counter to how these regimes approach governance.

Mr. PITTS. You mentioned the profiling. We've had a large discussion about fighters from Central Asia, but can you possibly highlight distinctions between fighters from this region and those coming from Europe or elsewhere? Are there differences in motivations? Are there differences in lethality or, in combat experience?

Ms. LEONARD. My comparative frame of reference—this isn't my expertise; we're sort of based in or near conflict zones, and we've done a lot of work historically in the Balkans but haven't taken a really close look at this. So I'm really not in a position to speak with any expertise on this.

Mr. PITTS. OK. Mr. Cilluffo, you want to speak to that?

Mr. CILLUFFO. Unfortunately, there's not a single, easy answer, a profile that comes in different shapes, sizes and forms, and different people are being—whether actively or susceptible to that message. So when you look at the U.S., for example, one of the things we saw that was very interesting when we were following some of the foreign fighter flows to Yemen and Somalia, the Brits were, in particular, they always had a significant foreign fighter issue vis-à-vis Pakistan, given the strong community in the U.K. Overnight, they were seeing, though, that a lot of these first/second generation of Southeast Asian origin fighters moving to Somalia and Yemen. And the answer that the security service would give you is they were coming back with the same street creds; in other words, they knew that the likelihood of them getting picked up was a lot higher traveling to Pakistan, but less so when traveling to

North Africa. So I think we are seeing a different pattern and demographic.

And the one thing I would note here is, we first did our first major study on foreign fighters about five years ago, and I get back to the fact that terrorism is a small numbers business. In this case, it was an individual by the name of Najibullah Zazi. This was a naturalized citizen who was traveling to Afghanistan. His intent was to join up with the Taliban. He was intercepted by al-Qaida, turned back around, and said you are of much greater value to attack the homeland. He had the ability to travel. He understood the region. And this was one of those cases since 9/11 where our system was really blinking red. Luckily, we got there before the bombs went off, and his attempt was multiple suicide/homicide bombings in the New York subway. We were able to prevent that, but that was pretty far along in the planning phase. And then if you look at another case in the United States, Faisal Shahzad, the so-called Times Square bomber, he too initially had intentions to go overseas and was turned back around.

So I just caution that you don't need huge numbers. And that's what makes this so difficult, because we can't—and when you're talking 25,000, when you're hearing some of the security services in Europe saying they are absolutely overwhelmed, they don't have the bodies, they don't have the capability, that's why transnational solutions I think right now are so important. And I think anything the Commission can do to keep Turkey's feet to the fire in terms of policing the border would be well-received because that's where most of these guys are still slipping through.

If you look back to the FATA region and foreign fighters in the past, it was pretty hard to get to the FATA. To get to Syria, it's a bus ticket, a train ticket, or a plane ticket away, and you can easily slip across the border. And there were probably about 18 months there where all security services were not aware of the significant growth of this phenomenon, so those numbers, who knows where they are and whether or not they've come back.

Mr. PITTS. Thank you. Recognize the Chairman, Mr. Smith.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you very much, Mr. Pitts.

Let me thank you for your testimony. I did read it. I was on the floor, regrettably, and missed most of the oral presentations. But let me just ask you a couple of questions.

In the Middle East, we know that anti-Semitism is used very effectively to radicalize communities in country after country. More moderate Muslims are ostracized/marginalized if they don't toe the line on being virulently anti-Semitic. And I'm wondering what impact anti-Semitism in an overarching way is having on the Central Asian countries. If you could—and maybe you don't want to, but if you could, how would you rate each country? What might be the best: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan? How would you say—who's doing the most? Which country is the laggard, or countries?

Your comments, Ms. Leonard, on motivations—I couldn't agree more. And I sometimes think that is missed, which is why I asked Secretary Rosenblum about that, whether or not there is an appreciation for how that motivation is what drives this, because they missed it on Boko Haram. I'll give you an example. For almost

three years I tried to get the administration to designate Boko Haram an FTO, a foreign terrorist organization—number of hearings, dialogue after dialogue, finally put in a bill to do so. The day we were going to mark up the bill, they announced it was an FTO. We had missed two and a half, almost three years in not so designating it because it was just a bunch of ruffians who were blowing up bridges and killing people rather than driven by an ideology. So I think your point about the idea of holy struggle to advance Islam, the novel political order, universal purpose, creation of a caliphate, I think those words need to be said over and over again. So you got to understand the nature of, in this case, a metastasizing of cancer in order to combat it. And so I thank you for bringing focus to that.

Because we do have to—and I did ask Secretary Rosenblum; if you could maybe, perhaps both of you, answer this—are we engaging the Islamic leadership well enough? I waited with bated breath to hear comments when al-Sisi made those famous comments on January 1st, and then a week later—I mean, that was bold. He was Sadat-like. And yet, it was like a dead silence here in the Capitol. We should have been embracing that in calling for that reformation and for Islam to heal itself from within. If you could speak to that.

Human rights—Secretary Rosenblum thought there was not a nexus between what’s happening in human rights—what your view is on that.

With regards to Chechnya, the dictator there, Kadyrov, and Chechen authorities in general, as you know, have become increasingly aggressive and tinged with Salafist notions. I remember we held hearings, did resolutions, traveled to Moscow. We even had Elena Bonner twice testify at hearings that I chaired—Sakharov’s wife—when the Chechen wars broke out. And now we’re seeing this renewed—maybe it never went away—radicalization occurring there. How does that figure into all of this? Because, as you all know, those fighters were absolutely bizarre in their extremism.

And finally, if you could—let’s see—again, whether or not the administration understands the core reasons why, I would note parenthetically that—and I held hearings on this as well—for half of President Obama’s presidency, he did not have an ambassador-at-large for international religious freedom, did not name countries of particular concern. To me—and I held hearings on it and asked them why, never got a good answer—it was revelation of priorities. It was no priority. We passed legislation last year to establish a special envoy for Middle Eastern minority religions. That would include the Islamic groups—faiths that are marginalized themselves, including Coptic Christians and others. There’s still nobody named as special envoy. We do have, thankfully, right now an excellent ambassador-at-large, David Saperstein, Rabbi Saperstein, but he came on late. He’s trying to do his level best. But you know, if you miss the reason why these things are happening, your remedy’s going to be far less effective and efficacious.

So if you could speak to those things.

Ms. LEONARD. That’s a long list.

You had asked for a ranking. I’m going to sidestep the ranking, but I’m going to address it a different way and talk about the acute

problem for Uzbeks. Now, we talk about Uzbek citizens and ethnic Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan, and that's what we've seen as the ripest group.

In Uzbekistan, it's a very repressive regime. There are all kinds of challenges, and those citizens have long demanded increased democratic space. We're no longer operating in Uzbekistan because of those same reasons. We were forced to leave the country, along with a lot of other NGOs, and that is a symptom of a very large and significant problem.

In the meantime, right across the border, you've got the ethnic Uzbek minorities, a minority that has really suffered in Kyrgyzstan as a disenfranchised minority. I referred to the death of 400 of them in 2010. That's totally unresolved. These are completely marginalized. They don't feel safe. Even if there are whiffs of radical activity and you're a moderate ethnic Uzbek in Kyrgyzstan, the level of trust with the security services, you're not going to go because it invites increased surveillance, harassment, potential detention. And so we're flirting with it becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy. And so, for that reason, I sort of single out the plight of Uzbeks in particular.

But that's not to say—I mean, as the alarming example of late in Tajikistan—that the problems aren't going to crop up. And if I use my colleague's term, this is a small numbers game. There are some really real threats. So I'll shift gears a bit on your request for a ranking and say as much.

Now, in terms of the threat of return of foreign fighters, a point that I didn't make in my shorter comments is the criminalization that's happening—this is laws that have been introduced in each of the countries, et cetera, in various stages—Uzbekistan is actually one that has said—contained in the legislation is basically an amnesty in terms of, as long as you haven't actually done anything, we'll forgive you, just come to us. And there's an effort to rehabilitate. If you are that individual making that choice, the track record of that government doesn't sort of infuse any degree of trust in taking that leap toward “I'm sorry, I've changed my mind, I want to walk back from it.” And so the Uzbek government and the rest of them need to really think hard about how do we prevent that.

Now, if you're a foreign fighter that wants to return home for whatever reason, our assessment is that you'd be more likely to probably find your way to Kyrgyzstan because Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan are going to treat you probably, on the relative scale of how you'll be treated in the neighborhood, more harshly. A zero-tolerance policy is what's likely to be anticipated. Kyrgyzstan, although there may be severe consequences and not a lot of faith in what the rehabilitation opportunities would look like, it might be a safer bet if you really feel compelled to return home.

You asked about human rights and the causal relationship. It's a symptom of a larger problem. While there may not be absolute sort of research illustrating the direct relationship between human rights violations and radicalization, I think we can all agree that we're here today suggesting that it's a worrying trend. These are repressive regimes, with varying degrees of repression in each. But human rights is symptomatic of a larger problem and a lack of

space. So, causal or not, definitively, I don't think it's a false road. I mean, it's a problem.

Chechens, I think I'll take a pass on that.

And whether or not the administration understands the core reason why. We've talked about Afghanistan. For about a decade, we've all talked about and—we've worked in Central Asia for over 15 years. The Commission has paid a lot of attention to the area. While the war was going on in Afghanistan and active, frankly, those national security priorities trumped the conversation that we're having today about the dynamics that have created this particular problem. So while we might have wanted to promote rule of law, governance, open democratic space, take some of the pressure off, attend to the very issues that we have identified as creating the environment where radicalization is happening, those were trumped by strategic and tactical priorities that flowed out of the operations in Afghanistan, and it was really hard to find some bandwidth. So here we are today having that conversation.

Mr. CILLUFFO. Mr. Chairman, I'll try to pick up and briefly touch on some of the excellent questions. By the way, that should be your Commission staff, if they could put together the answers to those questions I think they'll be very well focused for a year because those are excellent questions.

Firstly, let me just make reference on your comment on anti-Semitism and all minority religious rights—Christian groups and others. They are oppressed. And you had mentioned Boko Haram examples in Nigeria, but you've seen the same play out in Iraq, obviously, as well as minority Muslim—Sufis in particular have a pretty hard time operating in the area.

I'm also concerned about anti-Semitism, by the way, in Europe. If you notice the communications that are trying to resonate to the Islamists in the region, they do use that as part of that narrative.

But I might try to tie a point that my colleague said eloquently, and that ties to some of the human rights issues. Whether it's causal or not I think misses some of the point. The reality is it is part of the message, the story. That story is resonating, and it really is about storytelling with a certain group of individuals. So real or perceived grievances is almost irrelevant. It's how it's packaged in that broader story, and the storyboard has different components along the way. And human rights will always be one of those issues, real or perceived, raised in that storyboard.

One thing I'd note, especially as pertains to Western foreign fighters, it's not the message as much as it's the packaging around the message. It's an emotional call as much as it is a religious call. So it's in the trappings of religion, but it really is an emotional call. And we've been very uncomfortable unpacking that particular set of issues. So I think that is an area we can and should do more.

So a long-winded way of saying anti-Semitism is a concern. So are the rights of Christians in the area and other Muslims.

Mr. SMITH. I want to thank both of you for your extraordinary insights, your leadership. And we benefit greatly from that, as does the, by extension, Congress, and I hope the executive branch as well.

I do have to run to the floor. I have a speech I have to give, a colloquy. I might have missed it. I hope I haven't.

But I want to thank you so very, very much. The hearing's adjourned.

Whereupon, at 4:22 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

A P P E N D I X

PREPARED STATEMENTS

PREPARED STATEMENT OF HON. CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH, CHAIRMAN, COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

Welcome to our witnesses and to everyone joining us this afternoon for this hearing on foreign fighters and the escalating threat of ISIS in Central Asia.

A year ago today, the city of Mosul fell to Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, or ISIS, during a wave of violence that swept brutally through Northern Iraq. Many of those who took part in the offensive were foreign fighters—in fact, the UN Security Council recently estimated that there are now *at least 25,000* foreign terrorist fighters from more than 100 countries who have travelled internationally to join or fight for terrorist entities associated with ISIS and Al-Qaida.

According to the International Crisis Group, as many as 4,000 foreign fighters come from the five countries of central Asia. Just last week, we learned that the chief of Tajikistan's counter-terrorism program—someone highly trained by our own government—abandoned his post to join ISIS.

What does this say about the current efforts to stop terror-minded men and women from volunteering and traveling to the Middle East? Clearly, our government—working with others and with organizations like the OSCE—must take stronger action to combat radicalization beyond our borders, as well as to ensure that returning foreign fighters do not bring jihad and murder back home.

Central Asian governments face major challenges here. Many of these derive from their history as part of the Soviet Union, from wars in nearby Afghanistan and from limited economic development, which has led millions of their citizens to seek employment abroad, especially in Russia. The discrimination and exploitation to which those workers are subjected, as well as the decline of the Russian economy and changes in the Russian visa regime, have reduced the remittances these workers can send home to support their families and may have contributed to creating the conditions that ISIS uses to recruit foreign fighters from among different Central Asian nationalities.

Some of the challenges the central Asia governments face are of their own making—including widespread corruption, lack of rule of law, and their own human rights records. Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan have particularly terrible human rights records, among the worst in the world in respect of political prisoners and torture. All of these factors are exploited by ISIS recruiters and other organizations promoting radicalization and violent extremism.

It should be the particular role of the United States to promote, to the central Asian governments, our conviction that “fighting terrorism” is no excuse for violating human rights or the rule of law.

I look forward to hearing about the many issues here, including counteracting radicalization of potential foreign fighters, inhibiting the travel of recruits and volunteers to the Middle East, disrupting financial support to fighters and their families, and preventing their return to their home countries. This is in the first place the responsibility of the governments, and there is the question of what they are trying to do and how well they are doing it. There is the question of what our government and the OSCE is doing and can do better, working with the central Asian governments—here we need to talk about issues of document security, border security and law enforcement coordination. I hope we can touch on all of these aspects.

PREPARED STATEMENT OF HON. ROGER F. WICKER, CO-CHAIRMAN, COMMISSION ON
SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for your leadership and for calling a hearing on an incredibly important aspect of security for our country and for our partners in Central Asia and all across the entire OSCE region. I also want to welcome our witnesses, and I look forward to hearing their insights on how we can better address this threat.

I am pleased to note that the United States has a strong record of promoting multilateral, multidimensional approaches to combatting the diverse challenges associated with the recruitment of terrorists, as outlined by Chairman Smith, stretching back over 10 years. Since 2003, following a proposal by the United States, OSCE countries have been focused on improving security standards for international travel documents as a means of thwarting easy cross-border movement of terrorists. Constraining terrorists' mobility continues to be a major security concern in the region, particularly regarding flows of foreign fighters from Central Asia. Over the past several years, the establishment and increased efficiency of migration networks has played a major role in ISIL's ability to recruit terrorists from abroad.

Additionally, since 2004, OSCE participating States, again at the urging of the United States, have concentrated on the implementation of Financial Action Task Force recommendations regarding terrorist financing. Access to capital not only empowers military capacity of organizations such as ISIL, but also affords them the opportunity to finance travel expenses for foreign fighters. For many Central Asians, ISIL's appeal further rests on its supposed ability to offer greater access to educational opportunities, religious cohesion, and more stable social structures. If the United States and its partners wish to successfully extinguish the growing threat of these extremist organizations, then deliberate steps must be taken to dismantle its organizational structures.

In addition to monitoring the dangers posed in Central Asia by the continued recruitment of foreign fighters to Afghanistan, Syria and other areas of the Middle East, the United States must remain vigilant in safeguarding its own security. Each individual recruited from Central Asia and other regions contributes to the growing influence of ISIL and the prevalence of violent extremism around the world.

Over the past several years, thousands of men and women have abandoned their countries to join the ranks of ISIL. As Chairman Smith noted, on May 30 it was announced that a top military official from Tajikistan defected in favor of fighting for the terrorist group. The official had received formal military training in the United States. This troubling incident is indicative of the increased influence ISIL is continuing to build in Central Asia, even among powerful individuals. We must focus our efforts on nullifying the pretexts ISIL uses for recruitment and on destroying the framework of ISIL at the source, while simultaneously encouraging respect for human rights and bolstering institutions and rule of law in Central Asia and elsewhere. During the past decade, this Commission and the Congress have been staunch advocates of the counter-terrorism work of the Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), OSCE field missions, especially those in Central Asia, and the extraordinary efforts of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. This work must continue into the future and must remain a priority for the United States and OSCE member States.

PREPARED STATEMENT OF HON. BENJAMIN L. CARDIN, COMMISSIONER, COMMISSION
ON SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

I want to commend the Chairman for convening today's hearing. Developments related to the recruitment of foreign fighters throughout the OSCE space have been of deep and ongoing concern to me, and I want to see continued progress in addressing this matter. The cooperative bonds between the peoples of the United States and Central Asian countries, I believe, are a solid foundation for us to cooperate on the crucial issues of combatting violent extremism and of preventing radicalization of individuals to the point that they become foreign terrorist fighters.

As Chairman Smith noted, the Helsinki Commission has strongly supported the efforts of the U.S. government over many years to build cross-border, comprehensive security based on the shared commitments made by all OSCE states—including Central Asians—to respect fundamental freedoms. Human beings, whether they live in Washington or Paris or Tashkent, should expect of their governments reasonable steps to protect them from those who would do them harm, but also that their governments not impose repressive security measures that inhibit the exercise of freedoms of speech, assembly, media or religion.

Unfortunately, we have seen such steps taken by governments in Russia and Central Asian countries such as Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan. These restrictions fuel resentment on the part of law-abiding citizens and give the propaganda arms of organizations like ISIL ammunition with which to attempt to lure individuals into their international terrorist networks. While I look forward to hearing from witnesses about the scale of the threat we are confronting and the measures we are, or should be taking to counter it, I want to note the important multi-dimensional approach to security that is the hallmark of the OSCE. As the OSCE's first-dimension, or security dimension, response to threats to security and stability in the 21st Century has grown to focus on border security, policing and counter-terrorism, we have never lost sight of the interdependence of such measures with economic cooperation and respect for human rights.

If one looks at the Helsinki Commission's record over time, we have advocated for keeping the focus on human rights, democracy and the rule-of-law in U.S. policy as even handed as possible, toward allies and partners alike. We seek nothing but friendship and cooperation with the countries of Central Asia. But friends can—and need to—be honest with one another when they see mistakes being made. I take very seriously the grave concerns about ISIL and the threat that the recruitment of Central Asian fighters—from Russia and their home countries—represents to those countries and to the U.S. itself. As we listen to the views and suggestions of friends on our own shortcomings, I hope that others will be willing to consider our suggestions on how they can deal with security challenges like ISIL while respecting their OSCE human rights commitments.

Thank you Mr. Chairman and thanks in advance to our witnesses.

PREPARED STATEMENT OF DANIEL N. ROSENBLUM, DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY
FOR CENTRAL ASIA, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Introduction

Mr. Chairman, members of the Commission: I welcome your invitation to review U.S. efforts to address the issue of foreign fighters from Central Asia joining the ranks of ISIL (Daesh) and other terrorist organizations. The United States is working with governments in Central Asia and with multilateral organizations in the region—including the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)—in ways that parallel our work with partners around the world. Together with our international partners, we are committing significant resources to track and disrupt foreign terrorist fighter travel and recruitment. We are working together on information sharing and border security, legal reform and criminal justice responses, and countering violent extremism to prevent recruitment and radicalization to violence. And we marshal our resources to encourage key partners in Europe, North Africa, the Middle East, and Asia—including in Central Asia—to prioritize the threat, address vulnerabilities, and adopt preventive measures.

Central Asians and the Conflict in Syria and Iraq

For the overwhelming majority of Central Asians, the conflict in Syria and Iraq is a distant phenomenon; it is not something they think about day-to-day. But a small minority of Central Asians have been successfully recruited by violent extremists to join the conflict. Violent extremists have attempted to recruit Central Asians, millions of whom live and work in Russia as migrant workers, into the conflict in Syria and Iraq. In fact, while the nature of the conflict in Syria and Iraq and the clandestine nature of foreign terrorist fighter recruitment make reliable statistics nearly impossible to obtain, a variety of research suggests the vast majority of Central Asian recruits are being recruited from outside the borders of Central Asia, and many come from the Russian Federation.

Why are these Central Asians leaving Russia to fight in Iraq and Syria? Motivations vary widely throughout the world, and even on a country-by-country basis within Central Asia. One key factor for migrant workers in Russia can be the lack of a positive presence of family, community, and religious leaders that, back home, would all work to prevent recruitment and radicalization to violence. Furthermore, once in Russia, Central Asian migrant workers are often subject to ghettoization. Many regularly experience discrimination, harassment, and humiliation from both the public and the authorities. The absence of mitigating factors such as social, familial and spiritual bonds together with the presence of aggravating factors such as marginalization and disenfranchisement create fertile ground for extremist recruiters. Recruiters are able to traverse migrant-labor heavy neighborhoods in Russia's cities and use social media to find and target their quarry—isolated and lonely individuals who want to feel connected to something empowering and larger than themselves, often including individuals who were not previously religiously observant or educated. Recruiters employ a variety of narratives to attract adherents, including the idea of a “just war” in defense of innocents, an Islamic caliphate as a utopian paradise, and the opportunity to fight back against alleged “Western oppression.” When one or more of these narratives resonate with vulnerable individuals, they are encouraged to travel to the conflict zone to take up arms, either by recruiters face-to-face or through mechanisms such as social media. The new recruits are not only joining ISIL but also a range of other terrorist organizations, such as al Nusra Front, some of which in fact are in conflict with ISIL. Recruiters also use similar tactics to attract the smaller numbers of individuals who travel directly from Central Asia to the conflict zone.

What can be done to disrupt the flow of Central Asian fighters to Syria and Iraq? No one-size-fits-all approach could succeed, since radicalization involves a complex interplay of personal, group, community, sociopolitical, and ideological factors. Key to countering violent extremism is to mitigate causes of radicalization, such as economic distress and hopelessness; as such, one key effort is to improve economic prospects and job opportunities in the Central Asian countries themselves, where radicalization is less likely to take place than among migrant worker communities in Russia. Of course, improving economic opportunities in Central Asia is a long-term effort, and one that the United States and other donor countries have tried for years to address through various development aid efforts. There are also lessons to be learned about promoting safer labor migration as in the countries of South Asia. But there are also plenty of actions that can be taken in the short-to-medium term to address the threat of recruitment. And so, we have begun to engage the governments of Central Asia—and their peoples—about steps they can take to identify

and disrupt recruiting networks, prevent radicalization to violence, hinder financing, monitor and prevent travel and transit of recruits, engage civil society to develop resilient communities, build migrant support networks, and counter the false narratives spread by violent extremists. Additionally, we encourage Central Asian governments to identify and act upon credible domestic and transnational security threats, and to avoid conflating violent extremism with political opposition, the activities of civil society organizations, and peaceful religious practice. To prevent radicalization to violence, governments need to distinguish peaceful expressions of conscience from genuine threats of violence.

Let me also turn for a moment from the conflict in Syria and Iraq to briefly address recent media reports on the presence of ISIL in Afghanistan. We have seen signs that ISIL is attempting to spread into Afghanistan, and that some Taliban groups have rebranded themselves as ISIL to attract funding and recruits. ISIL's presence in Afghanistan is a relatively new phenomenon and it will take time to evaluate its long-term prospects.

It is clearly a complicated situation, and one that requires a complex response. Let me turn to some of the efforts we are undertaking globally, regionally, and at the national level through both bilateral and multilateral engagement.

Global Efforts

Under the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL, which we have been encouraging our partners in Central Asia to join, our key efforts include disrupting the flow of foreign fighters and countering the messaging of violent extremists. On the former, efforts range from legal reform and criminal justice responses, to border control, to information sharing, to interdicting the travel of known and suspected terrorists, and more. On counter-messaging, the United States, along with the United Arab Emirates and the United Kingdom, lead the Coalition Working Group on that subject, which directs coalition efforts on counter-ISIL messaging across platforms and languages. The UAE has established a messaging center in the UAE and may examine prospects for other regional messaging centers. This is a critical element because, as I mentioned earlier, so much of the violent radicalization and recruitment begins on social media, on people's smartphones, where our enemies are employing sophisticated and effective techniques, and we have to counter them.

Another global effort regarding foreign fighters is through the United Nations. In September 2014, President Obama chaired a session of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) that adopted Resolution 2178, which requires countries to take several steps to address the threat of foreign terrorist fighters, including preventing them from entering or transiting their territories and to adopt and implement appropriate legislation to prosecute them. Resolution 2178 also called for improved international cooperation through sharing information on criminal investigations, interdictions, and prosecutions. The resolution marked the first time that the UNSC named countering violent extremism as a priority for Member States. The UNSC directed UN counter-terrorism organizations to assist countries in enforcing the resolution. The resolution resonated in Central Asia, as shown by Kazakhstan's statement accompanying the resolution, in which Deputy Foreign Minister Yerzhan Ashikbaev said cooperation between neighboring States and regional organizations plays a key role in preventing terrorism and highlighted specific concerns about young people travelling to join "terrorist-driven conflicts."

Third, in February the White House convened the Summit on Countering Violent Extremism that brought together ministers from more than 60 countries, the United Nations Secretary-General and other international organizations—including the OSCE Secretary General—and representatives from civil society and the private sector to develop a comprehensive action agenda against violent extremism. It charted a path for progress that includes a leaders-level summit on the margins of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in September 2015. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan took part in the event in Washington and have continued to engage as the participants have built on the Summit's action agenda.

So that covers some of our global efforts, but what are we specifically doing in the region?

Regional Efforts

At the end of this month, the Government of Kazakhstan will host a ministerial-level Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) Summit in Astana. The Astana event follows up on the White House CVE Summit and aims to bring together government authorities, multilateral representatives, and civil society leaders to exchange perspectives and share information, and propose programs that will address violent extremism at its roots. The Summit's sessions plan to focus on eight priority areas:

- Assessing the Drivers and Threats of Violent Extremism in South & Central Asia
- Innovative Approaches in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism
- Violent Extremist Propaganda: Countering the Message and Offering Alternatives
- Developing National Strategies/Action Plans to Counter Violent Extremism
- Promoting Local Research on the Drivers and Spread of Violent Extremism
- Building Relationships and Success Stories—Government and Community Collaboration
- Empowering youth, women, and religious leaders and civil society to prevent violent extremism
- The Role of the Private Sector in Helping to Prevent Violent Extremism

Later this month, and complementing the Astana event, we are supporting a Civil Society CVE Summit in Istanbul. That summit plans to focus on nine priority areas:

- Promoting Local Research and Information-Sharing on the Drivers of Violent Extremism
- The Role of Civil Society, including Women and Youth in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism
- Strengthening Community-Police and Community-Security Force Relations as Ingredients for Countering and Preventing Violent Extremism
- Promoting Positive Narratives and Weakening the Legitimacy of Violent Extremist Messaging
- Interactive Technology Training for Addressing CVE
- Promoting Educational Approaches to Build Resilience to Violent Extremism
- Enhancing Access to Mainstream Religious Knowledge
- Preventing Radicalization in Prisons and Rehabilitating and Reintegrating Violent Extremists
- Identifying Political and Economic Opportunities for Communities Vulnerable to Radicalization and Recruitment to Violent Extremism

So our regional approach is to bring together governments and civil society across Central Asia to identify the drivers of radicalization and find the solutions. We are also helping to support the OSCE as it leads several regional efforts on the issue in Central Asia. This past February, the OSCE's Transnational Threats Department and its Tajikistan office organized a regional three-day workshop on promoting regional cooperation and response to foreign terrorist fighters. This workshop was the first of its kind in Central Asia and brought together participants from government and civil society to discuss the requirements of the UNSC and OSCE resolutions on countering foreign fighters. From Central Asia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan all sent representatives. The OSCE also plans an August regional workshop on preventive obligations regarding foreign terrorist fighters under UNSCR 2178 in Almaty, Kazakhstan, in addition to a June OSCE-wide Conference in Vienna on countering the incitement of foreign terrorist fighters and preventing their recruitment and departure. And as a follow-up to the White House CVE Summit, the OSCE has developed a multi-year program that aims to build the capacity of civil society leaders, including youth, women, and religious figures, to contribute to CVE efforts.

National Efforts

Central Asian governments are deeply concerned about the spread of violent extremism, and they want to engage with the United States and like-minded partners. Our diplomats regularly discuss these issues with their counterparts, and we encourage the countries of Central Asia to take a comprehensive approach to CVE and countering foreign fighter recruitment and radicalization to violence that includes improving security and law enforcement capacities consistent with international human rights obligations, as well as broadening engagement with civic groups, religious organizations, private businesses, and other groups to counter the spread of violent extremism through grassroots programs. Our bilateral programs also encourage this kind of comprehensive approach. These efforts include security-focused programs such as building law enforcement capacity and enhanced investigative skills, but also broader programs such as those aimed at training law enforcement in community policing techniques, or increasing the role of religious leaders in conflict resolution at the local level.

Kazakhstan

As shown by their hosting of the upcoming CVE Summit and co-sponsorship of UNSC 2178, Kazakhstan is a leader on these issues in the region. At the highest levels, Kazakhstan's leadership has stressed the importance of joint efforts to dis-

credit ISIL and counter its propaganda. We could not agree more, and we look forward to working with Kazakhstan and other countries in the region on counter-ISIL messaging. We are already working with the Kazakhstanis, through our assistance efforts, to help increase access to civically-relevant information; and to support increased communication among communities, civil society organizations, the private sector and government officials. The Department of Defense is also using counter-narcotics funding to build the capacity of Kazakhstan's border guards with border outposts and training.

Kyrgyz Republic

The Kyrgyz Republic has followed up on the White House CVE Summit with programming and policies based on the Summit's recommendations, and our Embassy reports very positive engagement on this issue. U.S. development assistance provides economic growth programs designed to improve people's lives, promote jobs, and enhance business and trade, as well as to support the development of a more collaborative relationship between government and civil society. NGOs like Foundation for Tolerance International have partnered with the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) to conduct preventative training exercises in areas that are especially susceptible to recruitment. Our Embassy funds programs on increasing the role of religious leaders in peacekeeping in volatile areas, as well as English language and vocational skills training for madrassah students. And the OSCE, through its Community Security Initiative, is embedding police advisors in at-risk neighborhoods in the south of Kyrgyzstan to promote community policing approaches, encourage ethnic reconciliation, and mitigate tensions.

Tajikistan

In Tajikistan, we are working to address some of the drivers of radicalization by increasing economic opportunities within the country in an effort to reduce migration and potential exposure to extremist ideologies. USAID's Feed the Future initiative, for example, seeks to improve food security, and reduce poverty and hunger. Its programs work with local communities to improve irrigation water management and help local families to improve the quality and quantity of their crops, thereby increasing family incomes. USAID is also helping to strengthen citizen participation in local government decision making and to improve local governments' abilities to support its communities. The Department of State's Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement (INL) operates a Border Guard Infrastructure program that, in addition to training and equipping border guards, focuses on district-level community policing efforts that work to counter violent extremism in remote areas. This program runs in parallel to an OSCE project that focuses on regional-level community-policing coordination. INL and OSCE are working to dovetail their efforts to create direct communication, coordination, and community input on policing efforts at district, regional, and national levels. The OSCE has also partnered with international and local NGOs on initiatives focused on encouraging family members, particularly mothers, to identify and address early signs of violent extremism in their local communities. For example, we supported a pilot OSCE CVE program in Tajikistan aimed at supporting women's roles in security, working with mothers groups in rural villages to train them to recognize and respond to early warning signs of potential radicalization in their children. We are also in the planning stages of a community-based cultural program designed to counter extremist messaging in Tajikistan. Additionally, the U.S. Department of Defense provides counter-narcotics funding in Tajikistan to build the capacity of border guards with border outposts, training, and communications gear.

Turkmenistan

We support an ongoing OSCE project to train officers from Turkmenistan's State Border Service on border management that enhances that country's ability to patrol and conduct searches, surveillance, and counter threats at the border—a key component in the effort to identify credible security threats in the region and addressing them accordingly. Additionally, in March, we sent representatives to a regional workshop on border security management for countering terrorism hosted by Turkmenistan and organized jointly by the United Nations Regional Center for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia (UNRCCA), the UN Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force, and the OSCE's Center in Ashgabat and its Transnational Threats Department/Action against Terrorism Unit. The workshop focused on countering the flow of foreign fighters through enhanced transnational cooperation by law enforcement agencies.

Uzbekistan

For the first time in ten years, two Uzbekistani officials participated in training this past April by the Department of Defense on the law of armed conflict. The training dealt in part with the nexus between terrorism and human rights. In 2014 Uzbek security forces also participated in border security training through a resumption of the Department of State's Anti-Terrorism Assistance (ATA) program. In addition to anti-terrorism training, our Embassy's social media and programming in Uzbekistan, as elsewhere in Central Asia, focuses on education, family, and peace—topics that, at their heart, are the surest ways to counter the appeal of violent extremism over time. Furthermore, anti-trafficking activities in Uzbekistan promote safe migration and minimize the risk of labor exploitation that can exacerbate radicalization.

Conclusion: A Generational Challenge

To conclude, I could not do better than to quote from the recent speech in Doha by General John Allen, Special Presidential Envoy for the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL: "From the point of radicalization and recruitment to the process of rehabilitation, we as a Coalition and a community of nations must work together to confront this generational challenge." The nations of Central Asia, and the nations of the world, are waking up to the challenge of foreign terrorist fighters in Syria and Iraq. The United States plans to continue to work with global institutions, regional groups, and national governments to confront the challenge of foreign fighters and reduce the threat to our partners, allies, and to our own country. And the Department of State is eager to work closely with this Commission and others in Congress to address this generational challenge. Thank you and I look forward to your questions.

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During 2008–2014, Mr. Rosenblum was Coordinator of U.S. Assistance to Europe, Eurasia, and Central Asia. His office provided strategic guidance and oversight for all U.S. foreign assistance to more than 30 countries in the former Soviet Union, the Western Balkans, and Central Europe. He and his team coordinated the efforts of more than a dozen U.S. government agencies supporting economic reform, the development of democratic institutions and rule of law, building the capacity of law-enforcement and other security-sector institutions, and relieving human suffering through humanitarian aid. He also served as the primary U.S. government liaison with other international donors, including the European Union and multilateral development banks.

During 1997–2008, Mr. Rosenblum held a variety of other positions in the Assistance Coordinator's office, including Deputy Coordinator, Director of the Eurasia Division, and Special Advisor for Economic Programs. He played the lead role in developing economic initiatives for several regions of Russia; served as the State Department liaison to 10 U.S.-backed investment funds operating in the region; and was instrumental in designing and implementing large packages of assistance for Ukraine, Georgia and the Kyrgyz Republic following internal upheavals, and for Kosovo following its declaration of independence.

Before coming to the State Department, Mr. Rosenblum spent six years as Senior Program Coordinator at the Free Trade Union Institute (FTUI) of the AFL-CIO. FTUI conducted educational programs and provided technical assistance to labor unions in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Mr. Rosenblum managed the operation of field offices in Moscow, Kyiv, and Warsaw. While working for FTUI, Mr. Rosenblum also served as a public spokesman for the AFL-CIO on the labor movement in the former Soviet Union, and social problems associated with the transition to a market economy. Mr. Rosenblum has a BA in History from Yale University and an MA in Soviet Studies and International Economics from the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies.

PREPARED STATEMENT OF FRANK J. CILLUFFO, ASSOCIATE VICE PRESIDENT AND DIRECTOR, CENTER FOR CYBER AND HOMELAND SECURITY, THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

Chairman Smith, Co-Chairman Wicker and distinguished Members of the Commission, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today on the issue of foreign terrorist fighters. Your leadership in examining this challenge is important because the threat to U.S. interests at home and abroad, and to U.S. allies, is both real and pressing. At the same time, we cannot go it alone: the threat spans national borders, which means that international cooperation and transnational solutions are required.

Allow me to begin with a word about how these remarks are organized. This testimony is structured with the bottom line up-front: a thumbnail sketch of the problem accompanied by key recommendations for action. This executive summary is then followed by additional details which serve as context and background for the crucial topline material. The latter is intended to serve as a resource for those with the time and inclination for a deep dive into the subject at hand.

The foreign fighter challenge is a matter of serious concern for the United States and its allies. While the foreign fighter phenomenon is not new, its present scale and scope is unprecedented. As individuals from the West travel to conflict zones around the world, they are forming new networks with discrete skills and they are amassing battle experience that may be turned around and redirected at their countries of origin. So-called returnees are a particular challenge for domestic law enforcement officials and intelligence agencies of the United States and its allies because such individuals possess cultural fluency and are able to walk amongst us. While tripwires such as exit and entry measures and controls are increasingly being adopted by the U.S. and Europe, it remains a challenge to identify and intervene before they cause actual harm, given the volume of individuals of concern. Communities and local authorities are at the tip of the spear in this regard because they are closest to the problem and are best placed to identify and prevent it before it fully materializes.

This problem is all the more complex as the U.S. draws down its engagement in Afghanistan. This conflict zone and others (such as the Maghreb and Sahel) are under-governed spaces where nefarious forces can thrive; and with respect to Syria and Iraq, ISIL actually controls territory. As the official U.S. presence tapers off in Afghanistan, particularly in the context of indigenous forces being either unable or unwilling to ramp up commensurately, our adversaries are afforded space and time in which to train, plan, plot and recruit.

Of course the problem is not confined to Afghanistan. To the contrary, a variation of the problem extends throughout Central Asia: as the Commission has pointed out, the so-called Islamic State in the Levant (ISIL) has attracted hundreds if not thousands of fighters from “the ‘stans”. These numbers demonstrate that the ideology and narrative of violent Islamist extremist movements and groups continues to resonate with and successfully recruit individuals who are susceptible to such propaganda.

In short, foreign fighters pose a threat to innocents within the conflict zones, to countries in the surrounding region, and to the broader international community. The crucial question, therefore, is: what can and should we do to combat this problem? Allow me to offer several suggestions.

First, we need to combat the root of the problem which is the ideology upon which ISIL feeds and recruits. Pushing back on this narrative in order to expose its inherent inconsistencies and falsehoods must therefore be a crucial plank in both national and transnational strategy. Unless and until we combat the lifeblood of the jihadists in this way, their pool of recruits will continue to grow.

Second, there are many more operational activities, both within and across borders that can be deepened and broadened to achieve more robust (counterterrorist) outcomes. Specifically, the United States must continue to work in tandem with its allies within the “Five Eyes” intelligence alliance, and expand its cooperation in this area to other countries in Europe and beyond. Information is the crucial component that underlies virtually all counterterrorism efforts, both domestic and cross-border; hence we must maximize the intelligence that US officials and their counterparts in allied nations possess in order to best formulate and execute the measures that will keep foreign fighters’ plans left of boom.

Third, the United States should work with the countries of Central Asia to assist them in building the capacities that are necessary for them to be their own best guardians. For instance, more could be done in the area of border security (including sharing best practices in this field) in order to clamp down on the freedom of travel currently experienced by foreign fighter aspirants and returnees.

The measures recommended above are intended to complement, deepen and extend ongoing OSCE work which leverages the Organization's unique strengths and abilities.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify before you today. I look forward to trying to answer any questions that you may have. And I hope that you find the detailed explanatory material below useful.

Context

The current terrorist threat climate is reminiscent of that prior to 9/11, marked by budget cuts and the rollback of hard-earned gains. The emergence of ISIL, along with active terrorist groups in Nigeria, Mali, Yemen, Libya, and Somalia, pose a set of unprecedented challenges. The most notable: foreign fighters. These individuals constitute a critical threat to the security of the United States and our allies. Foreign fighters and bridge figures—the latter equipped with the cross-cultural fluency to punch up and spread the radicalizing message across a broader pool of recruits—come from a myriad of backgrounds, but share a common ability to move across borders, extend conflict zones, bolster insurgent factions both operationally and motivationally, and threaten the territorial integrity of their home countries upon return.¹ ISIL has attracted well over 20,000 foreign fighters (at least 4,000 of whom Western, including 150 Americans) from nearly 90 nationalities.² Bridge figures play a key role in radicalizing and recruiting Westerners, as was the case when an Uzbek-American from Brooklyn was charged with radicalizing three other Central Asian-Americans and funding their transit to join ISIL in Syria.³ Countering the extremist threat—abroad and at home—will require robust international and domestic partnerships emboldened by a clear-cut foreign policy and strategy.

Foreign fighters and bridge figures internationalize local conflicts, drawing the attention of Western media, promoting the jihadist cause, and recreating recruits among populations. Moreover, these conflicts became extended through time and space; forming networks and cells through which ideology, manpower, and expertise are exchanged across borders. The first conflict that involved mobilized Islamic foreign fighters for the sake of jihad was the Afghan-Soviet War from 1979 to 1992. The modern notion of individual obligation as a religious duty was popularized by founding member of al-Qaeda Abdullah Azzam. Throughout the 1990s, similar reasoning was used by foreign fighters during the Bosnian War, First Chechen War, and Somali conflict.

Many foreign fighters end up returning to their home countries, radicalized, jobless, and well-trained. Such was the case after the Soviet-Afghan war, as thousands of Arab foreign fighters leveraged personal contacts with former comrades and bridge figures to form decentralized cells and networks across the Middle East and North Africa. This nascent, but growing jihadist scene produced a spate of violent attacks against the U.S. and its allies, Arab governments, and Israel. Led by Osama bin Laden, al-Qaeda emerged as the ideological and operational vanguard of jihadism, inspiring the 1993 attempted bombing of the World Trade Center, orchestrating the 1998 U.S. Embassy bombings in East Africa, funding local militias in Bosnia and Somalia, and staging the 9/11 attacks in 2001.

At the same time, Afghanistan—thrown onto the back burner by both foreign jihadists and American policy-makers—continued to collapse under the weight of civil war. Central Asian fighters; the peoples from Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan, long oppressed by their own authoritarian, secular governments, flocked to the new dominant force in the region—the Taliban. The Taliban provided Central Asian combatants with a clear banner to mobilize and fight under and shielded bin Laden after 9/11. Despite being toppled by the U.S.-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in 2002, the Taliban resurged in 2006 with the help of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), other Central Asians, Chechens, and Caucasians. The U.S. military operations in Iraq in 2003 forced a shift in administrative energy, resources, and troops away from the Afghan

¹ "Bridge figures" are defined as primary actors in the radicalization process and serve as a major catalyst for recruitment. Frank J. Cilluffo, Jeffrey B. Cozzens, and Magnus Ranstorp, *Foreign Fighters Trends, Trajectories & Conflict Zones* (Washington D.C.: The George Washington Homeland Security Policy Institute, 2010).

² Peter Neumann, "Foreign fighter total in Syria/Iraq now exceeds 20,000; surpasses Afghanistan conflict in the 1980s," *International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation*, January 26, 2015, <http://icsr.info/2015/01/foreign-fighter-total-syriairaq-now-exceeds-20000-surpasses-afghanistan-conflict-1980s/>

³ "Fourth Brooklyn, New York, Resident Charged With Attempt and Conspiracy to Provide Material Support to ISIL", *Department of Justice Office of Public Affairs*, April 6, 2015, <http://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/fourth-brooklyn-new-york-resident-charged-attempt-and-conspiracy-provide-material-support>

theater, allowing both the Taliban to re-emerge under the regime of Hamid Karzai and al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) led by Abu Musab az-Zarqawi, to expand in the Levant. It is significant to note AQI is ISIL's predecessor. Up until this time period, the international jihadist network consisted of al-Qaeda "core"—bin Laden and his small cadre of commanders—and its various affiliates. Islamic insurgencies and localized, homegrown cells sprouted up through these overlapping logistical, financial, and personal networks.

The fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003 and eruption of region wide uprisings in 2011 provided a set of completely unique circumstances under which jihadists could threaten Western interests. As opposed al-Qaeda core's priority of hitting the "far enemy", or the U.S. and the West, the Islamic State or ISIL emphasized and was successful at consolidating and governing territory. It has done so in Syria, Iraq, and Libya; supported by cells across the region and world. ISIL's declaration of the "Caliphate" in June 2014 bolstered by a sophisticated, savvy media campaign—two things al-Qaeda never fully achieved—has given it unprecedented legitimacy and appeal in the eyes of foreign fighters. ISIL has attracted well over 20,000 foreign fighters (at least 4,000 of whom Western) from nearly 90 nationalities.⁴ To provide a sense of scale, these numbers are unprecedented compared to the Soviet-Afghan War, which attracted 5,000 Muslims from around the world, the Chechnya conflict 1,000 fighters, Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan 1,000, and Operation Iraqi Freedom 4,000.⁵

With most of the international community's attention on Syria and Iraq, a loss of focus on Afghanistan can lead to the rollback of hard-earned gains that had been achieved through the investment of \$686 billion and, most importantly, the lives of over 2,000 of our men and women in uniform. If the U.S. ends military operations in Afghanistan by the scheduled January 20 2016 deadline, we run the risk of allowing the Taliban, both al-Qaeda and ISIL-backed elements, to carve out safe havens. Given the freedom to operate in such havens, there is a greater likelihood foreign terrorist organizations will be better positioned to plan and conduct attacks against the U.S. and Europe. The key to the Taliban's survival and success: Central Asian fighters. If the U.S. can cooperate with regional and international allies to not only stem the growth of Western jihadism, but also the free flow of Central Asian militants to and from Afghanistan—some pro-ISIL and some not—then the security of the American homeland and our allies will be better addressed.

ISIL and Central Asia

While most of the international community is focused on Syria and Iraq, a regional crisis is brewing in Central Asia and Afghanistan. The activation and growth of Central Asian foreign fighter networks pose three acute threats to U.S. security. First, these individuals provide direct support to ISIL's foothold in the Levant and stand to protract the conflict found there. Second, when these fighters return to their home countries, many will use the financial, logistical, and military skills acquired in the Levant and Afghanistan to form cells and groups in Central Asia. Third, the entrance of ISIL-branded elements in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) internationalizes the fight against a Taliban rejuvenated by Central Asian foreign fighters.

Direct Support

ISIL has made clear that it intends to engage heavily with Central Asian Islamists. In January, its leadership began a charm offensive and leveraged their position as an anti-establishment, Islamic alternative to the region's secular regimes. ISIL's leadership has been able to claim some level of religious authority, as it has effectively exposed the (fairly naked) ties that moderating voices have to the government. This political positioning has been bolstered by promises of economic opportunity, with advertised salaries ranging as high as \$5,000 per month. In contrast to the glossy tactics used to attract Western fighters, social media plays a more limited role. The 'old pulls' of economic opportunity and an outlet of political expression foster a deeper support and will require a corresponding countering violent extremism strategy.

The approach has been quite successful to date—some estimates hold that 4,000⁶ Central Asian foreign fighters have begun to fight in the Levant. According

⁴ <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/the-islamic-state-a-video-introduction>

⁵ <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/the-islamic-state-a-video-introduction>

⁶ <http://tonyblairfaithfoundation.org/religion-geopolitics/reports-analysis/report/isis-central-asia-growing-threat>

to the International Center for the Study of Radicalization (ICSR), there are an estimated 500 Uzbeks, 360 Turkmen, 250 Kazaks, 190 Tajiks, and 100 Kyrgyzs, bolstered by 1,500 Caucasians and 800–1,500 Russians fighting in Syria.⁷ According to the U.S. Counter-Terrorism Center, there are more than 1,000 Kazakhs fighting for ISIL.⁸ Like Western foreign fighters, Central Asians provide propaganda and language services for recruitment abroad. In Syria and Iraq, Central Asians are divided along ethnic and linguistic lines into *jamaats*, or factions. Some of the most prominent ones like the Uzbek factions Katibat al-Imam Bukhari and Sabri's Jamaat—both of which operate in northern Syria alongside 1,500 veteran Caucasian fighters—have pledged allegiance to ISIS.⁹ These factions mostly operate out of northern Syria, contributing to ISIL's dominance in Raqqa and never-ending attempts to take Aleppo, Idlib, and Latakia. In the absence of U.S. Special Forces and human assets on the ground to guide air strikes, these fighters enjoy more time to train, plot, and execute attacks against moderate Syrian rebels.

Cell Formation

Central Asians and Caucasians not only fill the rank-and-file, but also important leadership positions. ISIL's Central Asian commanders with previous military experience—for example, ISIL's northern Syria Emir Umar al-Shishani, a former Special Reconnaissance soldier in the Georgian Army and Tajikistan's former Special Forces chief Gulmurod Khalimov—are particularly dangerous for several reasons.¹⁰ These fighters, through mosques, prayer rooms, and personal connections, have been able to recruit and radicalize hundreds of Central Asian youth alongside ISIL. The combination of a committed leadership pool and a broadened domestic base imbues the region with the necessary raw materials for violent Islamist organizations to form domestically. As leaders begin to convert their operational and administrative knowledge into active terror cells, Central Asian governments may be forced to contend with new threats.

These fronts will be further enhanced by returning foreign fighters. Central Asian Islamist groups—driven by the desire to establish a transnational Caliphate across the region since the 1990s—have a long history of armed opposition to both pre- and post-Soviet regimes. The success of these groups spawned a plethora of decentralized Islamist extremist groups. Some engaged American and Pakistani troops in Afghanistan and Pakistan and others remained at home to conduct bomb attacks and assassination of regime targets. In essence, Islamist militancy in Central Asia—long cultivated by a history of social and economic oppression by secular police states—spawned a cadre of battle-hardened jihadis bent on transiting from one conflict zone to another to establish an Islamic state. It is no accident that the IMU experienced a pronounced period of resurgence, immediately following the return of Taliban-affiliated foreign fighters from Afghanistan. The result in Central Asia could prove to be an existential threat for some of the region's governments.

Conflict Convergence

Foreign fighter recruitment has served as a platform from which ISIL has grown its physical presence. In September, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan—one of the region's most active terror organizations—effectively severed its ties to the Taliban and pledged allegiance to ISIL's leadership. The move represented a large swing of momentum in ISIL's favor and was accompanied by the emergence of ISIL-affiliated fighters in Northern Afghanistan's Kunduz Province. From here, operations have expanded into parts even less easily governed. The Fergana Valley—a remote region that is incorporated into parts of Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan—has the beginnings of a promising haven for returning ISIS fighters. And—as we saw in the April attacks in Eastern Afghanistan—ISIL will challenge Taliban territories in and around the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA).

The most pressing concern lies in the FATA, however. Here, ISIL and the Taliban are poised to battle one another for regional supremacy. Syria's own civil war has shown that national militaries are ill-suited to maintain territorial integrity, while combatting two rival adversaries. In particular, an unproven Afghan National Army (ANA) stands particularly vulnerable to these challenges. Geographically challenging borders stand to exacerbate the problem and will likely be exploited by

⁷ <http://icsr.info/2015/01/foreign-fighter-total-syriairaq-now-exceeds-20000-surpasses-afghanistan-conflict-1980s/>

⁸ <http://www.csce.gov/index.cfm?fuseaction=contentrecords.viewdetail&contentrecordid=1199&contentrecordtype=p&contenttype=p>

⁹ <http://jihadology.net/2014/07/22/al-%E1%B8%A5ayat-media-center-presents-a-new-video-message-from-the-islamic-state-join-the-ranks/http://www.rferl.org/content/under-black-flag-central-asia-militants-allegiance/26666098.html>

¹⁰ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-32917311>

transnational groups who can more easily move materiel across national borders. Ultimately, decisive action will be required if countries around the world are to deny ISIL a stronghold that has lent its occupier the ability to stage more destructive attacks.

Remedies

In order to stem ISIL's further expansion into Central Asia and Afghanistan, the United States needs to work with domestic and international partners to ensure both short and long-term security. The instability in Afghanistan is largely attributed to the conflating violence in Syria and Iraq, as it is reported that 2,000–4,000 Central Asians are fighting on behalf of ISIL.¹¹ These individuals are leveraging the political and economic marginalization of Muslim communities to recruit and radicalize others. The police states of Central Asia view ISIL not only as a security threat, but also an excuse to crack down on political dissent—further crushing prospects of political and social change. Circumstances warrant a security-oriented strategy that reunites and enhances our relationship with the “Five Eyes” (U.S., United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand), the world's strongest and most valuable counter-terrorism partnership. We can take various lessons from this dynamic and expand it to our European Union, transatlantic, and then, Central Asian partners to fully curtail the foreign fighter and homegrown threat. On the other hand, to prevent the opening up of terrorist safe havens in Afghanistan and possible collapse of the nascent Kabul government and Afghan National Army (ANA), the United States should not make the same mistake as it did when disengaging from Afghanistan in 2003 and Iraq in 2011. Foreign fighter pipelines have intensified, requiring even more determination, focus, and willpower to sustain our counter-terrorism and military efforts in the FATA.

First, the U.S. needs to take on a clear yet broad-based stand against foreign fighters. This may include a more concerted effort to enforce U.N. Security Resolution 2178 (2014), which lays out appropriate measures on preventing inter-state travel of foreign fighters, enforcing proper information-sharing practices within national security systems, and criminalizing terrorist activity.¹² In terms of counteracting Western foreign fighters, the Five Eyes may consider expanding intelligence cooperation to include other European nations that suffer from radicalization and extremism, such as Germany, the Netherlands, Denmark, Belgium, France, Norway, Spain, Italy, and to a controlled degree Turkey, the Balkan states, and Central Asia. Integrating European and Central Asian intelligence can provide the necessary framework for broader, more global law enforcement information-sharing equipped with secure communications networks, databases, and a system of notices, plus measures to track illicit money transfers, stolen, forged identity papers and travel documents.

An example of the present lack of critical information sharing is the relative ease in transferring personnel and resources from the Levant, either through Turkey and the Caucasus and across the Caspian Sea or overland through northern Iran, into Afghanistan. Travel to Turkey is visa-free for citizens of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan, while Uzbeks can get a 30-day visa upon arrival.¹³ Intelligence sharing between Turkish authorities and Central Asian security services is lackluster. As one of its NATO allies, the U.S. should encourage Turkey to re-evaluate its liberal travel controls and cooperate more with Central Asian nations. In order for this to occur, there needs to be greater efforts to identify and investigate potential foreign fighters. There are several mechanisms designed to maintain and improve border management in Central Asia, including the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the Border Management Programme in Central Asia (BOMCA). BOMCA is a European Union-U.N. Development Programme joint venture meant to promote stability and security of Central Asian nation-states through integrated, modernized border management.¹⁴ Originally conceived to combat the illicit transit of goods and personnel across Central Asia, BOMCA should be develop the capacity—through U.S. and European assistance—to combat foreign fighter migrations. This means more intelligence sharing to help border security officials identify, apprehend, and ultimately prosecute violent extremists. The OSCE has two lines of programming that can assist the BOMCA in

¹¹ <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/asia/central-asia/b072-syria-calling-radicalisation-in-central-asia.aspx>

¹² http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_res_2178.pdf

¹³ <http://www.crisisgroup.org/media/Files/asia/central-asia/b072-syria-calling-radicalisation-in-central-asia.pdf>

¹⁴ http://www.undp.org/content/brussels/en/home/partnerships_initiatives/results/bomca.html

beefing up border practices: border management and combating terrorism.¹⁵ However OSCE and BOMCA activities are not streamlined and they lack information sharing amongst themselves, let alone between the nation-states they are attempting to help.¹⁶

To make border management more geared towards counter-terrorism, it is worth considering creating a liaison office that integrates the OSCE and BOMCA offices with the Joint Plan for Action for Central Asian States under the U.N. Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy and Istanbul Process. The former enables all states to agree on a broad strategy to combat terrorism. A major issue is the sluggish process of implementation across national contexts and regional relationships.¹⁷ The Istanbul Process, focused on security and development, also faces issues of integration and implementation. Kazakhstan, the largest Central Asian nation, is not formally a member in the Process's counter-terrorism section.¹⁸

Better border management with an orientation towards counter-terrorism and transnational security will reduce the spillover of violence into northern Afghanistan, where the Taliban and ISIL-affiliated groups are not only fighting each other, but also the ANA. ISIL's goal is to one day merge its *Wilayat al-Khorasan*, or "Khorasan Province" with its territory in Syria and Iraq. This prospect is unlikely, but constitutes a direct threat to Afghanistan. President Obama's rapid withdrawal of American troops from Iraq in 2011 should serve as a valuable lesson in maintaining our political, economic, and humanitarian commitment to Afghanistan. In Iraq, our lack of presence in the post-withdrawal period afforded then-Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki a complete mandate to fill political and military ranks with Shiite loyalists, dilapidating an Iraqi military that the United States had spent \$25 billion to train and equip.¹⁹ The Sunni population was marginalized and pushed into the arms of a rejuvenated ISIL. To avoid a similar situation in Afghanistan—where the United States has spent \$686 billion since 2001—American military officials, in tandem with Kabul, should continue to pressure Taliban and ISIL-affiliated elements with counter-terrorism and military operations led by Special Forces and covert elements to earmark airstrikes.²⁰ The continued presence of U.S. troops will help the ANA prevent the Taliban or ISIL from taking over and consolidating territory and forming potential safe havens.

A consistent ANA campaign backed by U.S. airstrikes will subsequently strengthen the Afghan government's position in negotiations with the Taliban. The best option is to leave the U.S. troop withdrawal deadline unknown to the international community and U.S. public. Once the Taliban and ISIL know the definite date, they will hunker down, wait out the drone strikes, and re-emerge to feast on the ANA. Air strikes and presence of American operatives dramatically increases the costs for the Taliban to operate in the open, maintain pipelines to other parts of the region, facilitate transit, and build training camps. This gives our enemies less time to train, plot, and execute terrorist attacks while giving our allies more time to train, obtain experience, and become a more competent fighting force. Plus, if Ghani reaches a tentative deal with the Taliban, ISIL's position will be significantly weakened. ISIL, which already clashes with the Taliban over territory and ideological legitimacy, risks opening up a second front with its Pashto rivals.

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Cilluffo is routinely called upon to advise senior officials in the Executive Branch, US Armed Services, and State and Local governments on an array of national and homeland security strategy and policy matters. He also frequently briefs Congressional committees and their staffs and has testified before Congress over 25 times

¹⁵ <http://www.osce.org/secretariat/110768>

¹⁶ Law, David. "Intergovernmental Organisations and Security Sector Reform"

¹⁷ <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2014/12/26/counter-terrorism-in-central-asia-requires-international-cooperation/>

¹⁸ <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2014/12/26/counter-terrorism-in-central-asia-requires-international-cooperation/>

¹⁹ <http://www.stripes.com/us-advisers-hope-realistic-training-scenarios-help-iraqi-troops-face-islamic-state-fighters-1.343931>

²⁰ <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/RL33110.pdf>

at high profile hearings on counterterrorism, cyber threats, security and deterrence, weapons proliferation, organized crime, intelligence and threat assessment, as well as emergency management, border and transportation security. Similarly, he works with US allies and organizations such as NATO and Europol. He has presented at a number of bi-lateral and multi-lateral summits on cybersecurity and countering Islamist terrorism, including the UN Security Council.

Cilluffo serves or has served on various national security-related committees sponsored by the US government and non-profit organizations, including the Homeland Security Advisory Council, where he served as the Vice Chairman of the Future of Terrorism Task Force. Cilluffo also served as a member of the Secure Borders and Open Doors Advisory Committee, Defense Science Board committees and summer studies, and along with Norm Augustine, chaired the first Quadrennial Homeland Security Review Advisory Council.

Cilluffo joined GW in 2003, establishing CCHS as a prominent nonpartisan “think and do tank” dedicated to the building bridges between theory and practice to advance US security. CCHS has hosted numerous Cabinet Members and agency directors, military and law enforcement officers, Members of Congress, diplomats, business executives and academics and has issued dozens of reports that are widely cited by media, research institutions, think tanks and governments.

Prior to joining GW, Cilluffo served as Special Assistant to the President for Homeland Security. Immediately following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, Cilluffo was appointed by President George W. Bush to the newly created Office of Homeland Security. During his tenure at The White House, he was involved in a wide range of counterterrorism and homeland security strategy and policy initiatives, served as a principal advisor to Governor Tom Ridge, and directed the President’s Homeland Security Advisory Council.

PREPARED STATEMENT OF JENNIFER LEONARD, DEPUTY DIRECTOR, INTERNATIONAL
CRISIS GROUP

Thank you for the opportunity to speak before the Helsinki Commission today. My organization, the International Crisis Group, values the Commission's sustained focus on Central Asia.

As an international conflict prevention organization, our approach is grounded in field-based research. We have teams of political analysts located within or near countries vulnerable to violent conflict and based on our research and analysis, we develop policy recommendations to prevent and resolve it.

We have covered Central Asia for over 15 years. From our current base in Bishkek, we conduct frequent visits throughout the region exploring the challenges and opportunities facing it, with particular focus on the interplay of democratic regression, threat of radicalization, and the decay of the economy and infrastructure.

In January 2015 we published, *Syria Calling: Radicalisation in Central Asia*, which addresses the very topic of today's discussion.

INTRODUCTION: The Islamic State (IS) is attracting a coalition of Central Asian jihadis and sympathisers and fostering a network of links within the region. Prompted in part by political marginalisation and bleak economic prospects, in the past three years IS has beckoned roughly 2K–4K Central Asian citizens.¹ While the phenomenon has a disproportionate impact on security perceptions at home, the region supplies only a small fraction of IS fighters in Syria, however, if enough return, they could present a risk to regional security and stability.

This presents a complex problem to the five CA governments, each of whom suffers from its own brand of poor governance, poverty, and corruption and has struggled to accommodate the growth of religion and religious organisations. The belief that Syrian-trained jihadis plan to establish a caliphate in the region has shaped the security debate and response in each—including increased surveillance, harassment and detentions—and provides additional justification for ever-stricter laws on religious practice and expression that may be counterproductive.

Meanwhile, the call of IS—which says it wants not just fighters but also facilitators, e.g. teachers, nurses, engineers—can appear to offer an attractive alternative for those alienated, marginalized, or discriminated against, who are inspired by the belief that an Islamic state is a meaningful alternative to post-Soviet life.

PROFILE. There is no single profile of an IS supporter from Central Asia: rich/poor, young/old, men/women, educated or not. There are seventeen-year-old hairdressers, established businessmen, women abandoned by husbands who have taken second wives in Russia, families who believe their children will have better prospects in a caliphate, young men, school dropouts and university students.

The largest single group is reportedly Uzbek, both citizens of **Uzbekistan** and **ethnic Uzbeks** from the Ferghana Valley, including Osh, **Kyrgyzstan's** southern city, where risks have amplified since the violence in 2010 that killed over 400 ethnic Uzbeks.² While Tashkent estimates 500 of its citizens are in Syria, they could exceed 2,500.³ With the exodus that began in the Valley in 2011, perhaps 1,000 men and women [including 500 ethnic Kyrgyz and others from Osh] have left to fight for or provide humanitarian assistance to IS.⁴ In northern Kyrgyzstan there could be another 300 unreported cases.⁵

¹ Official Central Asian governments' estimates of several hundred are conservative. Western officials suggest the number is 2,000, and it may be as many as 4,000. Western officials estimate that about 400 fighters from each of the five Central Asian countries have travelled to join the Islamic State. A Russian official put the total regional figure at 4,000. Crisis Group interviews, Bishkek, October 2014; Astana, November 2014.

² Many ethnic Uzbeks have retreated from engaging with the Kyrgyz authorities for fear of harassment and extortion. Many men have migrated to Russia to find work and escape discrimination. Unlike ethnic Kyrgyz elsewhere in the country, Uzbek families are unlikely to report or seek help regarding the radicalisation of relatives since it invites at best state surveillance, at worst detentions, beatings or demands for cash. Inter-ethnic tensions in southern Kyrgyzstan have gone unresolved, and the political and economic marginalisation of the Uzbek community contributes to the appeal of radical groups, particularly Hizb ut-Tahrir, and the jihadi cause in general.

³ Crisis Group interview, Russian official, September 2014, who also said there were 2,500 Russian citizens fighting in Syria.

⁴ Crisis Group interviews, senior Kyrgyz official, Bishkek, July 2014; senior police officer, southern Kyrgyzstan, August 2014; Uzbek opposition activist, Turkey, September 2014.

⁵ 20 former residents from just one medium-sized town are reported to have travelled to Turkey in 2013 with the intention of going on to Syria; Crisis Group interview, Kyrgyz security official, Chui province, Kyrgyzstan, May 2014.

In **Kazakhstan**, IS supporters tend to come from the west and south of the country, but not exclusively.⁶ Some 150 people made headlines when a video showing them in Syria appeared on YouTube in October 2013.⁷

In **Tajikistan**, recruitment is nationwide but appears strongest in two particular provinces. At least twenty people left from just one village in September 2014⁸ and recent revelations that a senior Tajik security official, who disappeared only to re-surface in an IS propaganda video calling for violent jihad, has rattled the region.⁹

[It is worth noting that estimates vary among local, national, Russian and Western security sources, underlining significant information gaps which in turn complicate efforts to create prevention and rehabilitation policies.]

RECRUITMENT: Recruitment of these individuals is happening at local levels, by word-of-mouth. Some are recruited at home— in mosques and prayer rooms. Others are radicalised abroad, often as migrant workers [where dislocation can lead them into the arms of jihadi recruiters].¹⁰ The internet and social media play a critical but not definitive role.

While groups such as Hizb ut-Tahrir and Tablighi Jamaat play a peripheral role in so far as both men and women may be radicalised as they gravitate toward their teachings, these groups do not appear to be directly involved with recruiting to Syria, though they are sometimes unwittingly staging posts in the journey [to extremist violence].¹¹

More worrying for the regional security climate is the way Syria appears to have provided the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and its offshoots with a renewed sense of purpose. While the IMU and Afghan Taliban have long-established links, for a while the IMU and IS kept a polite but admiring distance from one another. However, in March 2015 the IMU released an IS style-beheading video [shot in northern Afghanistan] to declare their allegiance to the organisation.

MOTIVATIONS: Socio-economic factors play a role but economic reward is not a motivation. Rather it is the idea of holy struggle to advance Islam. Frustrated and excluded, people who would not have considered fighting with the longer-established IMU or Taliban perceive IS as the creator of a novel political order, a more universal purpose: the creation of a caliphate. An imam from southern Kyrgyzstan compared it to Afghanistan, told us that “Syria is about principles, not colonialism”. And not all who go to Syria want to engage in violence, but accept that others will do it for them in pursuit of the ordained cause.

For women, the traditional and state-approved Muslim community’s relative disinterest in their role allows underground groups to fill a need. Radical Islam also gives some a framework to distance themselves from marital and family circumstances. For other women, it is the call of a devout life, or an Islamic environment for their children. Still others follow fighters or family members who have established contacts in Turkey or IS-controlled territory.

RISK OF RETURN: While the numbers of Central Asians receiving combat training and progressing through IS command structures is increasing, so far, returning jihadis are a danger to be prepared for rather than an immediate threat. For the time being, Central Asia is fortunate that Syria is relatively distant, no major attacks have yet occurred,¹² and the risks posed by returning jihadis are still in relative infancy. In fact, many will not return because they will die in Syria.

⁶ Crisis Group telephone interview, Kazakh security expert, Astana, October 2014.

⁷ “Astana probes video allegedly showing Kazakh ‘jihad’ family in Syria”, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), 21 October 2013.

⁸ Masum Mukhammadradjab, “Chorqishloq: Birthplace of 20 participants in the Syrian war”, Radio Ozodi, 25 September 2014.

⁹ Col. Khalimov was an intimate of the elite—the head of Tajikistan’s Special Assignment Police Unit (OMON), a key element in the security apparatus, he has trained in Russia and the US. His defection is a blow to Rahman’s regime on many levels, as he speaks to the parts of the elite not yet bought off and to the alienation of a substantial segment of society.

¹⁰ Its Federal Migration Service estimates there are some 3.95 million Kyrgyz, Tajik and Uzbek citizens working in Russia. See [“There are more than 550 thousand Kyrgyz citizens in Russia”], Radio Azattyk, 20 November 2014.

¹¹ Tablighi Jamaat, a non-violent organisation founded in 1926 in India, is banned in every Central Asian state but Kyrgyzstan. Hizb ut-Tahrir, a non-violent organisation that seeks to establish a caliphate, is banned in all five Central Asian states.

¹² Alleged plots included bomb attacks in Bishkek and Dushanbe and on strategic road tunnels through the Tajik mountains.

In the meantime and though keenly aware of the dangers returning fighters could pose, beyond instituting measures criminalizing fighting abroad,¹³ Central Asian governments have done little to address the reasons why such a diverse cross-section of their citizens seek to participate in IS, nor have they contemplated how the dynamic might relate to broader unmet societal demands. Prevention of extremism and rehabilitation of jihadis are not high on the agenda and female radicalisation, in particular, is largely ignored [by religious leaders].

CONCLUSION: These dynamics risk gathering pace and purpose, blindsiding governments ill-prepared to respond to such a complex security threat and tempted to exploit it to crack down on dissent. These governments must assess accurately the long-term danger jihadism poses to the region and take effective preventive action now. This does *not* mean: labeling unfamiliar interpretations of Islam as extremist, adopting increasingly severe laws to limit freedom of conscience and association, or promoting intrusive security practices, etc.

Rather, effective prevention means responding to an unmet demand for increased democratic space, revising discriminatory laws and policies, implementing outreach programs, creating jobs at home for disadvantaged youth, ensuring better coordination between security services, and tackling police reform, starting with the most basic matter of how they are perceived by the communities they serve.

For its part, the U.S. and other regional partners should recognise that Central Asia is a growing source of foreign fighters and consider prioritising police reform and a more tolerant attitude to religion, in its bilateral engagements and programming. Indeed, there are lessons to be gleaned [from places like Denmark and Indonesia],¹⁴ but the capacity of Central Asian governments to absorb and implement these lessons are undermined by weak state structures and lack of political will.

Jennifer Leonard joined Crisis Group's Washington office in June 2002. As Washington Advocacy Director, she works across the spectrum of Washington's foreign policy actor—including the Administration, Congress, media, think-tanks, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs)—to design and implement strategies that impact the policy process. She also has primary responsibility for advocacy and research in Crisis Group's Central Asia, South East Asia, North East Asia and Caucasus projects.

Jen came to Crisis Group after three years with the U.S. Department of Energy where she worked for the Assistant Secretary for Nuclear Nonproliferation, then as special assistant to the Administrator of the National Nuclear Security Administration. At the Department of Energy she oversaw aspects of a new non-proliferation initiative, helped establish the Russia Task Force, worked at the U.S. Embassy Moscow, and liaised with other U.S. government entities, international organizations, and foreign governments on national security matters. Before joining the government, she worked with variety of NGOs, including Conflict Management Group, a non-profit consulting company dedicated to promoting peacebuilding through engagement, training and research.

She has been an Associate at Harvard Law School's Program on Negotiation, a Graduate Fellow at the U.S. Embassy in Yerevan, Armenia, and a regular contributor to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's election-related activities in the Balkans and Caucasus. She earned her MA from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy and a B.A. from Connecticut College.



¹³ *Tajikistan* and *Kazakhstan* have introduced laws criminalizing fighting abroad, the former coming into effect in July 2014, the latter on 1 January 2015. *Uzbekistan* banned terrorism training without reference to location in January 2014, but the law was widely interpreted as directed against foreign-trained fighters. The law states that persons with no previous convictions who turn themselves in will not be held criminally liable (no such provision in the legislation of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan,) but doubt surrounds Uzbekistan's actual willingness to rehabilitate returning fighters. *Kyrgyz* parliament approved criminal code amendments suggesting sentences of eight to fifteen years for taking part in conflicts, military operations or terrorist- or extremist-training in a foreign state in September 2014, but these have yet to be signed into law.

¹⁴ In Denmark, effective rehabilitation programs are based on trust built up between the authorities and the families of fighters. In Indonesia, police forces develop responses to radicalisation in terms of improved intelligence-gathering techniques and building community relations, as well as rehabilitation.

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**Commission on Security and
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