

THE ASPEN INSTITUTE

ASPEN SECURITY FORUM: GLOBAL

DEFEATING ISIL

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DEFEATING ISIL

(9:00 a.m.)

MR. ERVIN: -- know from my having said so so often this is our debut of the Aspen Security Forum and Global. We would very much welcome your comments and suggestions. So we'll be sending out an electronic survey after you return to your respective places, so we'd very much welcome the comments that you provide to us when we send out that survey.

With that, we will begin. The number one question, I would argue, for counterterrorism professionals in the United States, United Kingdom, all around the world is the topic that we're tackling in this session, *Defeating ISIL*. To moderate this session we are very pleased to have with us Mark Urban, the Diplomatic and Defense Editor for the BBC. Beforehand, he was the defense correspondent for *The Independent*. He's also been *Newsnight's* diplomatic editor. And his most recent book is *Task Force Black: The Explosive True Story of the SAS and the Secret War in Iraq*, which was published in February of 2010. Please join me in welcoming Mark Urban, who will introduce the panel.

(Applause)\_

MR. URBAN: Thank you very much, and good morning. We'll push on, because I know timekeeping is also tight on these things. We are extraordinarily lucky this morning to have two key figures, Brett McGurk and Didier Le Bret, in the struggle of ISIL, ISIS, Daesh, call it what you will. Both diplomats, but both now in central roles in this particular fight. We will ask them to make initial statements of where they see the situation today. I will ask a couple of questions. And then I will do my very best to give you the chance to ask some questions as well. So we're going go to start by asking Ambassador Le Bret to give us an overview from the intelligence perspective. He now oversees the French Intelligence establishment, and can give us some great insights into what he thinks is the real state of Daesh today.

MR. LE BRET: Quite challenging. Thank you for

inviting me. And apologize if I'll be a bit depressing on such a beautiful sunny day talking about Daesh at 9:00 a.m. in the morning.

(Laughter)

MR. LE BRET: That's a great (inaudible) will make them. So make a long story short, two or three key remarks. First, one should acknowledge that this, that it's been said very often, but it's true, and it's still true, it is an unprecedented threat for four or five reasons. The first, as you know, the scale, or the theater as vast as Great Britain, with 10 million people, this is the first time we've had to fight against such an entity as large. We have, that what we know, at least 30,000 fighters, relatively well trained. And along them 50 percent are foreigners, so I'll come back on this very dimension.

They have acquired their working (phonetic) and they happen to be quite good at that. They've national footings, which is a greater dimension. And they might use unconventional weapons as well. So it's another dimension, another level of the threat. And all and all they're well skilled, not only to make war, but they have extremely clever people in their contingent service.

But what really changed from Al Qaeda area for us, I mean from our perspective in in Europe, first of all, this is the very border of Europe, what is happening in Syria and Iraq. Turkey is our external border. So we are part of this country. It's not something very far from us like Afghanistan, and at least to the public opinion perception, Syria, Iraq, Syria mainly, Libya, 200-something kilometers from -- this is part of our world. And those people I refer to for in-fighters are coming from countries that are quite close to us. Tunisia, which is one of the biggest reserve of volunteers, Morocco, not mentioning Libya. They are part of our day-to-day life. I mean we have 5 to 8 million people coming from those two or three countries I just referred to, including Algeria and France. This is not the kind of a war that is very far from us. It is our war, if I can say. So that's the first difference from Al Qaeda.

The second one is the first, I would say, 3.0 war. This is something we didn't expect. They are extremely clever the way they use and maximize the potential of internet, social websites, in a very differential way to address all kind of public. They may (inaudible) very broad message, but they can address a very narrow type of population. They are extremely, extremely good at that, and their communication is rather sophisticated, all in all.

And as I said, this is war and this is not a war. This is war because at the end of the day we have to defeat them, and I'll come back on this. But this is not a war in the sense that at home the domestic dimension is more social. We don't have enemies in France, in the sense that they're coming from nowhere, and we have to -- no. We know them. They are people who have grown in France. A majority of them were born in France, so they are the second and third generation. And when you go deeper in the profile of those people you understand many other aspects of our day-to-day life. So this is not a war type that you can win within a couple of years, in five years. This has to be long-term investment for my country to defeat, but more than that, to integrate those people who have obviously a problem with our country. They challenge it.

But anyway, ISIS, ISIL, or Daesh, will be defeated. I've no doubt. And I'll give you just a few signs before I conclude of a rather good sign. The first, as you know, they're losing ground. Over the last two or three months, they lost Palmyra, which is not a small thing. I think this was the last victory of a large scale. They lost it on the 27<sup>th</sup> of March. They lost Shaddadi, Shaddadi, which is on the 25<sup>th</sup> of February, which like Sinjar and Ramadi, main strategy victories for us, because it prevented them to move from one capital to the other one, from Raqqa to Mosul. So it's really stopping the way they have been conducting so far the war. So that is very good news. I don't refer, I'll come back to Kobani, that's old story, but nevertheless we should remember that one year ago people even doubted that it would be even feasible to take back Kobani City.

And, of course, most important, they are running short of money. That's for sure. We have obvious evidence, intelligence of that. All kind of strikes, starting with the coalition. We've been criticized for doing things that were of less, for fewer impact. We can see now, we can measure that it's not true. All tracks, all plans, everything that has been main targets, mentioning headquarters, training camps, it had a tremendous impact on their finances. They are paying, as you know, half less than six months ago. Their people start, you know, leaving those countries. We can measure it. We have a lot of French people who are coming back. So it's another challenge, of course, but we can see that they are coming back. That means they feel like it's not, you know, like at the beginning, the promise, Baghdad, they promised that they will get the ultimate war in Dabiq, where they will defeat the (inaudible). Actually, Dabiq is going to be soon the next target. So they will have a small communication challenge there, how they will justify that they are losing what was supposed to be the symbolic key elements.

And last thought, point, just, and maybe we can discuss it, nevertheless, one should not forget that it will take time. We may have a major victory within the year or a couple of years, that's for no doubt, but that doesn't mean that we'll set up peace in this region, for at least two main reason. The first reason is that on average we've seen that in these kind of conflicts in the Middle East it takes at least five to ten years to stabilize things. I mean to make people, you know, get all together and have a sense of finding out a consensus, and trying to find, and to set up democratic institutions. So we have been already four or five years period lost war. I think to be serious about that, it will take another five years to stabilize things.

And the second critical element, but I'm sure Brett will elaborate on that, this is a multidimensional crisis. This is the first regional world war we have. It's a proxy war. We have all key players deeply involved, and involved in the way that they feel like they are playing, what is at stake is their own --

MR. URBAN: Survival.

MR. LE BRET: Survival.

MR. URBAN: Yeah.

MR. LE BRET: That's what is at stake for Ankara, for Riyadh, for Mosul, not mentioning Tehran. So what is at stake is much bigger than simply a fight among people in Syria and Iraq. And then, for sure, no peace in the long run if we can find the proper political transition in Syria, and that means what do we do with Bashar al-Assad. This is a key element of the outcome. Second one, Iraq, no peace, if no international reconciliation. We know that by heart. That means rather Daesh, than the militia, (inaudible) militia, or paramilitia, so that's for sure. So reconciliation is the key pillar for a long truce in Iraq.

And then a new durable peace in this very region, if we can prevent seriously another war in Libya, which would be of a totally different dimension and if we let Libya become a safe harbor for Daesh, this is going to be really, really hard for us to correct that in the long run. I've been in all countries in the neighborhood. I've spent some time in Tunisia. And I can tell you that we were that close to a major catastrophe when the guys came from Sabratha to Gadhem (phonetic). There was little reaction from the Tunisian army. But who knows next time what they may come out. So I conclude there.

MR. URBAN: Brilliant. Thank you so much. I mean we do get a sense from what you've just told us, Didier, of progress, and one hears the US Administration talking about moving from a phase of degrading Islamic State to destruction. I don't know how far you'll address that, Brett McGurk, but it would be great if you could give us an overview of where you feel the fight has got to, and where you think it's going in the coming months.

MR. MCGURK: Thank you. I think I'll be fairly brief. But it's interesting, those of us working in this every day, we tend to actually describe it the same way.

Unprecedented threat. So foreign fighters is something we're all obviously tracking. The number is now about 40,000 from 100 countries, or so. Never seen anything like that before. Depending on counting, what happened in the eighties, it's about twice as many that went into Afghanistan, of this kind of ideological Jihadi mindset. And we know what that led to. We think the numbers are down, but still it's an extraordinary number.

Also, for all the reasons that we just heard in terms of their territorial, seeking territorial expansion, controlling millions of people, we've just never seen something like this. So how do we even wrap our heads around it, and just in terms of how we analyze it, there's really three dimensions to the ISIL challenge. One is the core in Iraq and Syria. And the core is critical, because their entire ideology, how they recruit, their entire narrative is one, the words they use, retain and expand. It is a historic movement. It is expanding. It is constantly growing. And that is something that led to the explosive growth that we saw, particularly in 2013 through 2015.

So I've been all around the world, and we hear this everywhere, what is driving so many of your young people to go into Iraq and Syria. And one of the common denominators is this sense of being a part of this phony, but the way they describe it, this historic caliphate. So we have to shrink it. And to show that it's actually not expanding, it's shrinking. And it is shrinking. I can go through all the statistics and details, and it will continue to shrink. So that's the core in Iraq and Syria. And that's really a fundamental core priority of our focus, obviously.

Then there are the global networks. There's the foreign fighter networks. There's the financial networks. And there's the propaganda networks. And to do that that is truly a global challenge. And that's why we have built this global coalition with 66 partners all around the world. To break it down, when it comes to foreign fighters, we have a Chapter 7 UN Security Council resolution calling on all member states to pass laws against foreign fighters, to trade information, to share



intelligence information. This is something that is exceedingly difficult. It is much better now than it was when I first started doing this a couple years ago, but still it's not good enough. But we do have global attention and global focus on this.

The financial networks, in terms of money coming in, we think we have actually pretty much sliced that off. Daesh is now basically self-funding its operations from within Iraq and Syria. And based on the intelligence we have now, we are really going after that to a pretty decisive effect. As many of you know we've talked about this before, but, you know, we have special operations teams operating that do raise from time to time when we have an opportunity. One of the most significant was about a year ago against the number one financier of Daesh, deputy to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, named Abu Sayyaf. That was a raid, actually right into the heart of Syria, right into the heart at the time of their caliphate, and it happened to be near Shaddadi. Shaddadi was a citadel for Daesh. We know that's where Baghdadi was based for a while. That is where we picked up Abu Sayyaf, or killed Abu Sayyaf, picked up some of his people. Learned more about Daesh than we ever could have imagined. We picked up more information off that site than any such operation in the history of our special forces. We learned about their financing. We learned about how they moved money around. We learned about their oil. And now we've been targeting them. That then gets fed into military channels, and we've been targeting them to pretty decisive effect.

In Mosul we found out where they're storing all their money. Hundreds of millions, we think, actually, in the billion-dollar range, and we have targeted all that. They no longer have those funds to pay their fighters. So financing, we are going after them.

On the counter-messaging. The counter-messaging now is completely different than it was even six months ago. And all you have to do is just look at what Daesh, how they're describing themselves. They are no longer saying, and, you know, they think it's a war, as they describe it, of flags. And they used to have these maps

of the flags, continuing and expanding all the way to Rome, and continuing to grow. Now they're very defensive. They're explaining why they're losing, saying that they're being tested. This is part of the challenge. It's a very different narrative that they are putting out. And then we are also, of course, working globally with partners in the Gulf. The UAE is a 24/7 counter-messaging center. We also have a very good program here in London, getting at the different streams of messaging. There's religious-based messaging that our Islamic partners can do, and obviously we can't do. There's also the messaging and how they appeal to many, particularly here in the UK, and France, and elsewhere, of joining this historic movement. And you can just watch what they put out. It's (inaudible) scenes of children eating ice cream cones, and you can come and kind of be part of this glorious thing. We have been countering that quite aggressively, and it's actually fairly easy to counter now.

So the counter-messaging, we are going after 24/7, and it's starting to make a difference. The foreign fighter numbers, as I mentioned, are lower, and even in their own propaganda they are now telling people, you know, actually, don't come into Syria. Go to Libya. And that's partially because it's a lot harder to get into Syria. And once these guys get into Syria it's much harder for them to get out. And we want to make sure (1) they can't get in, and (2) once they're in they're going to die in Iraq or Syria. They're not going to get out. So we think we're making progress there.

Finally is the affiliates. They have about seven or eight around the world, uh, depending on who's counting, but most of these are preexisting terrorist groups that now fly the flag of ISIL. So those are preexisting problems. Those are things that we've already been focused on, and we are still focused on them. We don't want to be too distracted every time some preexisting terrorist group raises the flag of ISIL.

Where we do get concerned, however, is where we see the transfers of money, the transfers of messaging instructions, and the transfers of leaders. And we have definitely seen that in Libya. So we've been focused

quite aggressively on Libya. We, as the US, have not hesitated when we see a threat emerging, to take military action. The leaders responsible for the attacks in Tunisia last year, we targeted them near Sabratha quite effectively. We'll continue to do that. We now have a government of national accord on the ground in Tripoli. We have to help that government mature. That will be quite critical. But Libya is an increasing focus of us.

So just again, the way we analyze this, and I think the way to think through it when you're looking at what we're doing is the core in Iraq and Syria, and that is shrinking their ability to control territory. It has shrunk quite a bit, about 45 percent in Iraq. In Syria, much of their strategic ground, the entire border with Turkey east of the Euphrates now has gone to them. All of their connections between Iraq and Mosul now are gone to them. They're forced onto back roads. And the pressure is increasing on Raqqa, but not to -- I can't, I really can't underestimate the challenges of where we go from here. It's extremely difficult, and every single day is a real struggle and we'll continue, but we're shrinking their territory.

The global networks, foreign fighter, finance propaganda, every single day we're working on that, not just in Washington and the US, but our partners around the world as part of a coordinated coalition. And then finally, the affiliates, which I think most significantly, of course, were focused on Libya, but also the Sinai and other affiliates in which they're trying to increase their capacity.

So it's a multidimensional threat, as we've heard. It's a global threat. It takes a global coalition to combat it, and we are making some progress now. I think you can see that. But we all recognize it's not fast enough. We want to move as fast as we possibly can. And these threats, it's just we have to all acknowledge will continue for the foreseeable future, even after we get Daesh out of Mosul, out of Raqqa. This is an ideology. People who are affected with the ideology will still be with us, and it will remain a threat really to all of us. So we have to prepare for a very long effort

over the coming years and make sure that what we saw in Afghanistan in the eighties, and the outgrowth of that, does not happen, given what we're seeing now, 'cuz these are a lot of young people. A lot of people have been to Syria and are already back in their homes. A lot of people still being indoctrinated over the internet and trying to go, or simply homegrown-based attacks. It's something that will be with us for long time. But we are now, I think you can really say, and you can see it, making some progress.

MR. URBAN: Thank you very much. Do you think, Didier, that as progress is made there is a greater desire on the part of them to stage spectacular terrorist attacks in Europe? How do you evaluate that threat right now? I mean we saw the tragic events in Paris and Brussels. Do you think that network is effectively countered or rolled up? How many people are still out there? Big questions, I know, but --

MR. LE BRET: Big questions, but very easy, also. Yes. Definitely. The more efficient we'll be on the ground, the more aggressive they will be around Europe. This is the easiest fix for them. Not to lose face. To be still proactive. To show that there are some, you know, gains, some victories at home. And there may be a bit hesitant on their global strategy. Will they keep harassing us on small easy operations, which is one option, or should they rather big-scale operation, which are rather complicated, but due to the geography of Europe, you can have a logistic basis in one country taking weapons from another, and decide to strike a third city. So there are still ways and means to organize those large-scale operations. My feeling is that they will do both. They will start keeping the pressure on our capitals to the highest possible level. I have no doubt about that. We all live in open societies. We're not going to change our way to apprehend our life. We're going to have within one month the Euro football championship. We're going to have those funds on, with the 20,000 to 100,000 in Paris gathering. We're not going to give up, so we're going to do everything that might provide our cities and our guests maximum security, but one should recognize that we might have to consent certain

level of risk to our life. But I mean the choice for our government is clear. We're not going to give up the way we live. That will be their victory.

So yes, they will try both. They are still, I think, hesitant in the strategy, but they clearly understand that it has to keep them regularly, one capital, another capital. Paris, we know for sure that France is pretty much high as good targets. First, because with the UK, the American, with the other colleagues, we are partners with -- we are pretty much in front of the war against Daesh. So we know that they have to clearly make an effort there, and they know that Paris, like London or Brussels, is very easy as a capital where all majors are present, so it give them an international audience every time they strike. So that's pretty good strategy. So yes, they will definitely keep up the pressure on the, on our --

MS. URBAN: Can I ask you, just in terms of other possible clouds on the horizon, or things that might threaten this progress that you've talked about, as the so-called caliphate is shrunk how concerned you about militias starting to contest the towns and other places that are freed of the Islamic State, that being a further alienation to Sunni, or other people who are in there, and it might help them to stabilize their position if each victory turns into a fight over the spoils between rival militias.

MR. MCGURK: Let me address that in two ways, one with an anecdote and then just with some facts of what we've seen in Tikrit, and now we're seeing in Ramadi. So an anecdote. Before the Kurdish Peshmerga launched the operation to retake Sinjar, and, of course, Sinjar is where a lot of this, we've been tracking this for many years, but Sinjar is where a lot has broke onto the international stage. Sinjar Mountain and the Azides. So it took a long time to get in place to actually retake Sinjar from ISIL, and very significant moment. And I was in Northern Iraq, and we spoke with a very senior Peshmerga leader, who had been on the front lines talking about what's going to come. And I asked this very question. I said, "One thing we want to try to make sure,

and we're working on this very aggressively, is that post-Daesh and Sinjar, we don't see retaliation, a tit for tat attacks." As you can imagine psychologically what the events of that, what happened in Sinjar, just the scars, which will be with people, obviously, for the rest of their lives. And he told me they were very focused on it, and he told me he had a meeting with a number of Azides, who were going to take part in the operation. And an elderly man, who stood up, and the Peshmerga were trying to say we have to -- once we get Daesh out, we want to make sure that the Arab families who are there are treated fairly. And this elderly Azide said to him, you know, 'They took my wife. They took my daughters. They took my mother.' And he said, "All I have left in my life is my revenge against these people." And that is a deep, especially when you're in Iraq, you can feel it.

And in the events of the summer of 2014, and I was there at the time, when Daesh breaks through Mosul, they're pouring down the Tigris Valley. They break through at (inaudible). And the Euphrates Valley, it looks like they're rolling towards Baghdad. They're announcing we're coming for Karbala. They're killing thousands of people and putting it up on YouTube, just outside of Tikrit. And the psychological impact of those days is so deeply woven now in the communities, particularly in Iraq, and also in Syria.

So you can never completely eliminate what you're talking about. The lawlessness, the tit for tat revenge-type events. We've worked extremely hard, first of all, for zero tolerance for that, and also to help build up the legitimate security forces to provide law and order afterwards. Again, it's impossible to be perfect in this regard. But Tikrit, Tikrit was a test case. The Tikrit operation began, the liberation of Tikrit from Daesh, it actually began by popular mobilization forces, and some of the popular mobilization forces known as the Shia Militias, which are not responsive to the authority of the central government in Baghdad. And that was a major problem, because a lot of those groups are not controllable.

They pretty much bogged down, and when we came

in to help it was Iraqi security forces that ultimately liberated Tikrit. We had problems immediately after Tikrit. But then we worked very hard, and I have to give the Government of Baghdad real credit for this, and the new Prime Minister, Abadi, who has one of the hardest jobs in the world, his philosophy is more decentralization, more empowering the local leaders at the grass roots. And so working over a series of weeks we pretty much got the militias at least out of the streets of Tikrit. Through the coalition we flooded Tikrit with what we call stabilization funding. We have a pretty revolutionary program, run through the Iraqi government and the UN to get lights on, get the basic conditions for people to come back to their homes.

Tikrit, of course, is an iconic Sunni city in the heart of Saladin Province, and we now have, according to the UN's own numbers, about 95 percent of the population has returned to Tikrit. You know, life has come back to the city. Tikriti's, local police are in charge security in the streets. The university is open again. Again, nothing is perfect there, but that's pretty good. If you look on this map of where people are actually returning to their homes, it's actually happening in Iraq. So Tikrit is exhibit A. Now in Anbar, and something that a lot of analysts said couldn't be done about six months ago, are actually retaking all of the Euphrates Valley from ISIL. Ramadi's been retaken, and the Iraqi forces, importantly to your question, working with the local tribes of Anbar Province. The tribes are interwoven into these operations now. They just liberated the Town of Hit, which is between Haditha and Ramadi, if you go up the Euphrates Valley. And Hit was, again, a stronghold of ISIL in the Euphrates Valley. It was retaken by Iraqi security forces and local tribes.

So now in Ramadi, we're focused in keeping kind of elements now responsive to the state out, and getting people back to their homes. This is difficult, because as ISIL leaves a place they put IEDs into homes and into refrigerators, and it's extremely dangerous. We have a program, about \$15 million, with counter-IED. Some of the best companies in the world working with the UN and working with the Iraqis to clean the streets of these

landmines and IEDs. And we have about 60,000 people who have now come back to Ramadi. The Iraqis want to modulate that, because it's still very dangerous, given the IED threat, but, you know, people are coming back to their homes. So the underlying philosophy is that post-Daesh, it should be local people in charge of their own security. It should not be people from the outside, and Tikrit has been a model for that, and Anbar Province right now is a model for that. But you just can't underestimate the challenges here and the fact that even post-Daesh, post-ISIL, you know, these are fairly violent places. There's not going to be rainbows and have peace breaking out everywhere. But we can defeat and we will defeat this transnational terrorist movement, which is a threat to all of us. And then it will be the post-ISIL phase, which will be just as challenging, but a different challenge, and not so much a challenge that directly threatens us and our capitals.

MR. URBAN: Okay. Thank you so much. We have time for questions, not a huge amount of time, but we're just trying to keep it as quick-fire as possible. John Scala (phonetic)? Yes, there's a microphone making its way.

MR. SCALA: When you were talking about numbers, so I think you said there were 40 -- you said got up to 40,000, or one of you said it got up to 40,000, but they were coming down. Now given what you're saying, and how they're reacting defensively, as you describe, and, therefore, the ever-expanding, you know, caliphate is a different story, are we seeing that reflected in numbers of fighters, and foreign fighters, and volunteers coming in, going down? Because up until now the pictures that we're being presented constantly is the other way around.

MR. LE BRET: From the figures I've got from all around urban capitals, it's getting down. I mean people are less inclined to get there, because they've got a feeling that it's not going that well. Nevertheless, we've got 100 French citizens, for instance, who got there. We've got quite a lot of people who are still trying to move back and forth. So those are huge numbers for us. The same for Belgium. But all in all we feel



like it's getting in the right direction, and we are better at keeping our own citizens at home as well. And the cooperation with the Turkish Government is better and better. They are more cooperative and they are retrying their utmost to help us to control the flow of the people.

MR. URBAN: Brett, did you want to come in on that, or are you --

MR. MCGURK: Again, we also see the same trend. It's definitely gone down. We have about 140 Americans have gone to Syria. I think my colleague, Lisa Monaco, will be here later today. Obviously, we track this very closely on the counterterrorism side. So the trend lines, which were all going the wrong way now are going the right way, but that's, again, not to -- we can never underestimate the significance of this threat, which is going to continue.

MR. URBAN: Okay. Thank you very much. The gentleman there, and then --

MR. SANGER: David Sanger, from *The New York Times*. Good to see you again. Yesterday at one of the panels we were discussing the question of the degree to which it was possible with a group like ISIL to disrupt their command and control through cyber means, through non-kinetic means, which you've heard the President, the secretary of defense, others discuss in recent times. And that seems to be a relatively small part of what otherwise looks like, from your description, a fairly traditional kind of counterterrorism efforts. So can you tell us what's new and different when you compare this to, say, what you were doing with Al Qaeda, which was a different kind of threat group a few years ago?

MR. MCGURK: Thanks, David, I think we actually are doing quite a bit on the cyber piece. We obviously don't talk about everything that we're doing, but look, we're now -- we're now striking a leader of ISIL about every three days, and we're increasingly either picking up or killing some of their bigger fish. Just recently Hashi Amman, who was another deputy to Baghdadi, a very sophisticated well-known terrorist, after Shaddadi, Omar

Shishani, their overall war Amir. So we're actually deep now inside the network, and beginning to unravel it.

You said something upfront about their kind of command and control. What we've been trying to, when we first drew this up it was, you know, degrade was the key word, because we want to degrade their war fighting capacity. That means their command and control, their ability to mass and maneuver force, their ability move around the battle space, and that was what makes it different than Al Qaeda. It really was operating as a conventional army and as a quasi-state. So it is a very different, it's not just a CT -- there is a CT component, but it's also more just conventional warfare of trying to make sure that they cannot maneuver like an army and re-take all this territory. So we greatly degraded that.

But, you know, we've had some success against networks like Al Qaeda, so those tools were very much applying to Daesh. So I don't think it's so much different. And a kind of high-end counterterrorism, what we're doing is very similar to the way we target Al Qaeda networks around the world. The external plotting network, and it is a network, it is run out of parts of Syria, and we are doing everything we can to learn about it, to find out who they are, to make sure the people can't travel, and to target the leaders. So the kind of counterterrorism dimension of the counter-ISIL campaign is very close to the way we deal with Al Qaeda. But what's different about Daesh is it's a quasi-state-like entity, with millions of people under its domain, and that's why it also has a conventional warfare piece.

MR. LE BRET: If you'll allow me under this cyber side of the war, I fully concur with what Brett just said. I think we'll have to rely as well on our civil societies. That will be a powerful tool at our disposal to defeat them. It's not just a matter of government counterterrorism, it's as well our capacity to mobilize all our strength, including our community managers, our -- and there are a lot of skills in our countries who are capable on their ground to defeat them. And I think in the counter-propaganda it can be a government action. We do really have to be spotted by a larger number of

communities, including Islam, Muslim Sharia communities.

MR. URBAN: We are out of time, but being a terrible broadcasting faux pas I will carry on for another few minutes, because I can see there's still quite a few people who want to ask questions. So what we'll do is we'll take three quick-fire questions. John Garrison first.

MR. GARRISON: Thanks very much. Drawing on something I raised yesterday, much of the mobilization that you've been talking about we were told was not from the body of people who were persons of interest just ten years before, i.e., a surprise, a new mobilization. It's a bit unfair, because you're talking about ISIL, but how confident can we be that we're not going to face the next threat? I mean are we thinking about how we're going to deal with terrorism, and the instance of it, rather than defeating each challenge as it comes along?

MR. URBAN: So that's the next wave, and then the gentleman that --

MR. GARDEM: Hi. Duncan Gardem (phonetic). I think James Comey said on Thursday that he believed there might be some lessons to be learned from the attacks in France and Brussels over the last few months. And I just wanted to ask Didier what he thought those lessons were likely to be.

MR. URBAN: Richard, do you want to -- one last one here, and then we'll try and canter through those -- they're all counterterrorist focused at the moment, so --

RICHARD: Yeah. Thank you. And so is mine, I'm afraid.

MR. URBAN: Good.

RICHARD: I noticed a recent study by Will McCants, who's a well-respected scholar of Islamic State, that pointed out one of the most common shared characteristic between people who had been involved in terrorist attacks over the last few years was that they

were francophone. And --

MR. URBAN: Oh, oh.

RICHARD: And I was quite surprised by that. But thinking back to the address that Mohammad Adnani made in November 2014, when he encouraged Islamic State supporters to go out and attack foreign people, he was particularly discourteous to the French. And I wondered, you know, if you saw any significance in that.

MR. URBAN: Okay. Three quick questions there, but obviously I think --

MR. LE BRET: No. Francophone has nothing to do with the potential of being a terrorist or a criminal, whatever. There is no essentialism, like you speak English, you might be this way you speak French, no. It's just that for historic reasons, as you know very well, the Mashriq and part of the Maghrib, Middle East, has extremely close ties to France. So it happens that they speak French, and it happens that the Muslim Arabic world is, you know, in turmoil. So the conclusion is that yes, part of those people who speak French, they happen to be part of this mess. But I don't think one can say if you learn French, if you speak French you have more chance to become a terrorist, I don't think.

(Laughter)

MR. LE BRET: If it is the case, I'm ready to give up speaking French.

(Laughter)

MR. LE BRET: And on the lessons drawn on the --

MR. URBAN: Yes. I was going to ask you about that.

MR. LE BRET: Yes. This is my daily headache. How can we scale up our old capacities, our legal framework, everything that can prevent, deter, and stop this threat. And this is the same for my British

colleagues, Paddy McGuinness here, and everybody around those tables. And yes, we are doing it. Just to give you a small, I mean an example. Before I took over my duty, I mean it was more overseas that we had to strike and fight against terrorism, and the threat was more outside than in our countries. And at that time we had like it was (inaudible), the highest council, where we talk about that, it was like once every two years when we gathered at the level of the President. Right now it's every three months. So we're taking stock of every decision we try to make some benchmarking to see how efficient it is, what next step, on all sides, fights against the (inaudible), our legislation, cooperation is a key element between partners within EU framework, so we're doing it on a daily basis. Yes.

MR. URBAN: Can I ask you for a final word on lessons learned from Paris and Brussels, but also the (inaudible) is important, the new way. So I think in part you were addressing that through Libya, but is this going to be a recurring phenomenon?

MR. MCGURK: The new, and I think, and we are, within our coalition, we were just in Riyadh. I think we had very frank conversations with our likeminded partners, with others. Look, beyond Daesh there's a strain of thought within the Islamic world that has to be addressed by the Islamic world, and that's something that I think our Islamic partners are very focused on. That was a big topic of our discussions, of course, in Riyadh with the GCC, but it's very dangerous. And it's something that has to be addressed by our partners, particularly in the Gulf, and particularly Saudi Arabia. And the Saudis are now doing quite a bit, because ISIL is a threat to Saudi Arabia. There's been a number of attacks in Saudi Arabia, including one just about two weeks ago. So that was a main topic of conversation with the President and our partners in the GCC.

From Brussels and Paris, one of the lessons is the sophistication of the external attack planning network. And something that was just, for me, particularly surprising, we knew one of the main external -- the way they have their network they have external

plotters who are planning attacks in different parts of the world. That's kind of how they do it. And then we, you know, try to act accordingly to make sure that that can't happen. But one of their terrorist named Abad Eud (phonetic), was the head of their external plotting in Europe, and after the Paris attacks we figured, obviously, he was probably one of the planners, but he was based in Raqqa, and we've been trying to find him for some time. It turned out he actually traveled from Syria to Paris to oversee the attacks. That's something I don't think we've really seen before, where one of the main planners, one of the more sophisticated guys actually travels to the site of the attack to oversee the attack. And thanks to the great work of our colleagues in France he's no longer around, and we're breaking up that network.

But it's a sophisticated network. It's based in Syria. It's not new. Go back to what Baghdadi was saying three or four years ago, but go back to what Sarkowi (phonetic) used to say, the kind of first colonel with this thought. They want to attack us at home. It is part of their core to their ideology, and we have to make sure that that doesn't happen. However, given the sophisticated network, which is global, this is going to be with us.

But what we want to be able to do is degrade that network, which is coming out of Syria, which leads to the more spectacular type atrocities that we've seen in Paris and Brussels, the one-off attacks like we saw in San Bernardino, the people who are just indoctrinated over the internet, that's something that will take civil society, will take all of us to kind of banding together to try to make sure that we're able to identify people before they are indoctrinated and try to prevent those types of attacks. But just the lessons learned, sophistication of the external attack plotting network, we knew it was sophisticated, but we now know more about it than we have ever before. And now it's up to our intelligence services cooperating with our counterterrorism professionals. And you'll hear from some of them, I know, later today about degrading and unraveling the network.

MR. URBAN: Thank you so much. We are really

out of time now. So I hope you'll all join me in thanking them both for a fabulous presentation.

(Applause)

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