

GLOBAL SECURITY FORUM 2020

OVERVIEW & FINDINGS REPORT

THE **SOUFAN** CENTER

GLOBAL SECURITY FORUM

A New World (Dis)Order?: Managing Security
Challenges in an Increasingly Complex Landscape

NOVEMBER 16-19, 2020
VIRTUAL EVENT



THE GLOBAL SECURITY FORUM

Established in 2018, the Global Security Forum (GSF) is an annual international gathering bringing together a multi-disciplinary network of experts, practitioners, and policy-makers from government, security, academia, media, entertainment, and the private sector. This global event provides a unique platform for stakeholders to convene and offer solutions that address the international community's leading security challenges.

2020 GSF

The 2020 Global Security Forum took place from 16-19 November. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, this year's GSF happened virtually, broadcast publicly each day. The GSF addressed the topic, "A New World (Dis)order? Managing Security Challenges in an Increasingly Complex Landscape." Earlier in the year, The Soufan Center (TSC) highlighted critical geopolitical trends, including an international system shifting from unipolar to multipolar; the globalization of white supremacy and right-wing terrorism; the continued proliferation of disinformation and foreign influence operations; and the momentum of worldwide protest movements. With this backdrop, this year's GSF explored, through a series of fireside chats and panel discussions, the evolution of global security challenges compounded by complex geopolitical dynamics and the COVID-19 pandemic.

ORGANIZER



PARTNERS



Thank you to all who participated in the 2020 Global Security Forum (GSF). In a year unlike any other, we managed to meet for four days, virtually, from all over the globe. On behalf of our 2020 partners—Qatar International Academy for Security Studies (QIASS), New America, Defense One, and the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Executive Directorate (CTED)—it was our pleasure to host some of the sharpest



minds and deepest thinkers in the field to discuss the topic: "A New World (Dis)order? Managing Security Challenges in an Increasingly Complex Landscape."

Over four days of keynote speeches, fireside chats, and discussion panels with an all-star cast assembled from government, academia, think tanks, media and film, and the technology industry, the 2020 GSF provided a strategic assessment of the security landscape, and offered concrete policy recommendations to meet a range of national security challenges. We discussed global geopolitical trends and analyzed the counterterrorism landscape, including groups like al-Qaeda and the so-called Islamic State, and how these groups have attempted to leverage the COVID-19 pandemic to resurge in various parts of the world. This year's GSF also went in-depth with policymakers and practitioners to discuss unique approaches to address the impact of disinformation and trace the evolving nature of the global information environment. We concluded with an overview of how popular culture views these threats and challenges.

Fostering greater collaboration across governments and partners, including the private sector, media and civil society organizations, will prove critical to addressing many of the security challenges highlighted by speakers in this year's forum. 2020 has been full of setbacks and surprises, but the themes discussed at this year's GSF helped us to make sense of the most pressing issues facing the world today. With new and diverse perspectives and insights, we move ahead into 2021 with a shared sense of purpose. We hope the ideas and proposals shared at the GSF will become the solutions to address the challenges we collectively face.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ali Soufan".

Yours Sincerely,
Ali Soufan
Founder, The Soufan Center

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KEY HIGHLIGHTS

The 2020 Global Security Forum (GSF) focused on the theme, “A New World (Dis)order? Managing Security Challenges in an Increasingly Complex Landscape,” tackling complex security threats in the volatile context of a global pandemic and ever-shifting multipolar international system. The 2020 GSF covered a breadth of issues, including: a strategic assessment of the national, regional, and international security challenges; changes in the production and consumption of information; the impact of disinformation; and public perceptions of such threats and narratives. The following key highlights reflect the central points raised by speakers throughout the GSF sessions:

- **COMPETITION BETWEEN THE U.S. AND CHINA REMAINS INFLUENTIAL IN SHAPING KEY POLICY PRIORITIES**

The United States’ relationship with China continues to dominate policy discussions, from Washington, D.C.’s “Beltway” to Brussels. Events in Hong Kong and Xinjiang further discrediting the argument that as China participates more actively in the global economy and increases its wealth, it will grow increasingly liberal and democratic. American soft power has not been sufficient to influence key flashpoints in this relationship—from the South China Sea to the Taiwan Strait—leading to increased U.S. investment in hard power. Budget cuts due to the economic effects of the pandemic, along with a relationship increasingly akin to traditional great-power competition between states, are likely to affect other critical policy areas like counterterrorism. It will be incumbent on President-elect Biden to build a coalition of likeminded countries to manage China’s rise and influence. At the same time, Washington must manage its relationship with Beijing carefully, ensuring that competition does not tip into outright conflict.

- **INCREASINGLY DECENTRALIZED TERRORIST GROUPS POSE NEW COUNTERTERRORISM CHALLENGES**

While terrorist groups like the so-called Islamic State and al-Qaeda may have diminished operational capacities, they remain dangerous in their ability to inspire attacks by self-directed individuals and groups, and through their support to regional affiliates. This includes operational and financial support to simply exploiting the brand affiliation. The COVID-19 pandemic and resulting economic crisis has further exacerbated poverty, inequality, and distrust of government, creating an enabling environment for terrorist recruitment and radicalization. Thousands of foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) remain in Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan, many of whom will seek to return home or relocate to third countries. This presents governments around the world with complex challenges related to prosecution, rehabilitation, and reintegration. Such considerations are also happening alongside diversion of security budgets to public health, leaving less resources for counterterrorism.

- **HOMEGROWN TERRORISM AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM WILL BE FUELED BY ONLINE INTERACTIONS**

The threat of homegrown, low-tech attacks persists in the U.S. and elsewhere, both from jihadist terrorists and increasingly violent right-wing groups, including white supremacists and anti-government activists. With more people—especially young ones—spending more time online and isolated from communities and peers, there is an increased risk of online radicalization and mobilization, heightened by disinformation campaigns and conspiracy theories.

A more strategic and coordinated response is needed both within states and among international partners to combat radicalization online. Social media companies must be more proactive in removing terrorist content and countering disinformation on their platforms, while protecting freedom of speech and human rights. This is a difficult balance requiring a whole-of-society approach, involving not only law enforcement, intelligence, and defense, but also the education system, religious institutions, and strong public-private partnerships.

- **REACTIONS TO THE 2020 U.S. ELECTION SHOW THAT DISINFORMATION REMAINS A SERIOUS AND ONGOING THREAT**

Disinformation propagated by both state and nonstate actors continues to pose a danger to democracy and stability around the world. Meanwhile, the 2020 U.S. presidential election was evidence that authorities are increasingly able to root out bots and manipulative techniques from foreign sources and deliver a successful election. However, there is still no solution to individual drivers of disinformation which garner organic, wide public viewership and support, evidenced by the ongoing responses to the election outcome. Social media algorithms intended to increase time spent on these platforms partially contribute to this issue by reinforcing individual biases through their algorithms.

- **THE BIDEN-HARRIS ADMINISTRATION WILL BRING RENEWED AMERICAN LEADERSHIP ABROAD, BUT DOMESTIC CHALLENGES WILL REQUIRE URGENT ATTENTION**

It is anticipated that under President-elect Biden, the United States will repair relationships with traditional allies to face common global challenges, including security, peace in the Middle East, and climate change. Yet, President-elect Biden’s need to focus domestically on challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic, resultant economic impacts compounding systemic inequalities, and protests for racial justice and police reform may stymie transformative change on the global level. Biden will also face challenges abroad that defy straightforward solutions. U.S. allies are looking forward to an administration that will again pick up the mantle of American leadership, but the need for focus at home may constrain resources and attention. Hyper-partisanship, rampant misinformation about governance and elections, and elevated public mistrust of the government will impede Biden’s ability to move forward on domestic fronts, further challenging his international ambitions.

- **GLOBALLY, THE DEMANDS FOR JUSTICE AND EQUALITY COME AT A TIME OF A RESURGENCE OF AUTHORITARIANISM**

From Minneapolis to Lagos, Baghdad to Santiago, the world has been gripped by protests against inequality, police brutality, racial injustice, and corruption. While the demands have varied, a common thread around the world has been protesters’ demands for governments to address and mitigate structural inequalities and failing institutions. At the same time, many countries have experienced a growth in populism and/or authoritarianism, with the potential for long-lasting damage to democracies and pluralism. For states already confronting weak governance and political fragility, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated inequality and accelerated grievances, creating hospitable environments for radicalization. Many democracies will continue to be vulnerable in the coming year, and support to partner states will be critical in order to prevent expansion of authoritarianism and increased human rights violations, resulting in greater global insecurity.

DAY 1

Monday 16 November

THEME A STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT OF THE SECURITY LANDSCAPE

WELCOME REMARKS

by Senator Joseph Donnelly Sr
Chairman of the Board, The Soufan Center



Senator Joseph Donnelly Sr

Joseph Donnelly Sr., Chairman of the Board for The Soufan Center (TSC) and former U.S. Senator, delivered the opening remarks. Senator Donnelly highlighted the great importance of this year's Global Security Forum taking place against the backdrop of a tenuous security environment made even more complex and unstable by the COVID-19 pandemic.

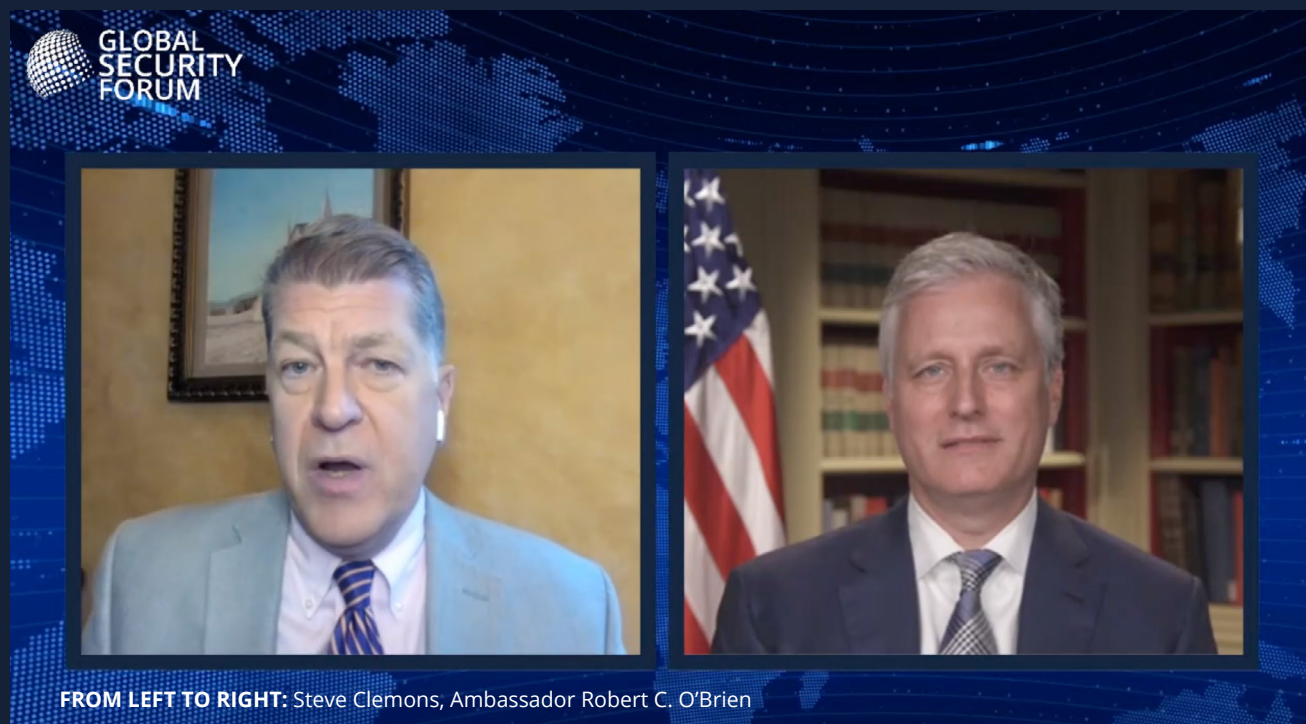
“Many of the security challenges posed by this new world disorder can only be tackled by countries working together, marshalling the innovation of the private sector, and harnessing the fortitude and compassion of their citizens.”



Watch this session here

FIRESIDE CHAT: “U.S. FOREIGN POLICY & GLOBAL SECURITY”

Ambassador Robert C. O’Brien,
United States National Security Advisor, and Steve Clemons,
Editor-at-Large, The Hill



Ambassador Robert C. O’Brien, U.S. National Security Advisor (NSA), joined in a conversation with Steve Clemons, Editor-at-Large at The Hill, to reflect on the work of the National Security Council (NSC) over the last year, and opened the Fireside Chat by offering greetings from President Trump. Ambassador O’Brien shared that his model for the NSC was based on that of Brent Scowcroft, and revealed that, in contrast to some of his predecessors, he saw the NSA role as providing the President with the views of the cabinet, rather than attempting to shape them according to his own perspectives.

Ambassador O’Brien shared that the Trump administration has rescued over 56 American hostages and detainees in more than 24 countries. In a moving video prior to the Fireside Chat, families of hostages and a former hostage expressed their appreciation for Ambassador O’Brien’s efforts to bring American hostages and detainees home. Marsha and Carl Mueller—parents of Kayla Mueller, a humanitarian aid worker kidnapped by the Islamic State—said, “Not all heroes wear uniforms—you, Sir, are one of those heroes.” Diane Foley—mother of journalist James Foley who was kidnapped and murdered by the Islamic State, and founder of the James W. Foley Foundation—thanked Ambassador O’Brien and the Trump administration for their efforts to ensure the return of innocent Americans held hostage abroad.

“Look, if the Biden-Harris ticket is determined to be the winner — and obviously things look that way now — we’ll have a very professional transition from the National Security Council.”


Former hostage held by the Syrian regime, Sam Goodwin, noted how meaningful it was to receive, upon his return home, his card among those that Ambassador O’Brien keeps with him for each hostage or detainee case. “You may not get a medal, but you’re a hero to those 50+ families that you’ve reunited,” said Carl Mueller. Marsha Mueller echoed the sentiment, asserting, “We know that with your help we will be able to find Kayla and bring her home.”



On U.S. naval posture, Ambassador O’Brien advocated for more submarines, frigates, and aircraft carriers with longer reach. He also highlighted the escalating importance of fronts in space and cyber, as well as the need to operate more jointly across branches of the military.

Ambassador O’Brien hailed the “tremendous leadership” of the U.S. in facilitating the Abraham Accords and stressed the Trump administration’s resolve to bring the rift between Qatar and the other Gulf Cooperation Council members to a quick end. He also highlighted the need to keep Huawei from becoming the technological backbone of 5G technology, describing the Chinese government’s ability to collect massive amounts of personal data through Huawei as a threat to democracy and applauding the countries that have banned the company.

Regarding the 2020 U.S. Presidential Election, the Ambassador said that a lack of foreign influence was the result of both a hardened infrastructure in the U.S. and clear signals sent out to unfriendly governments that meddling in the election would cross a red line. He promised a “very professional transition” from the National Security Council should the Biden-Harris ticket be determined to be the winner.

 Watch this session here

FIRESIDE CHAT: “A VIEW FROM THE MIDDLE EAST”

His Excellency Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the State of Qatar, and Ali Velshi, MSNBC Anchor and Correspondent for NBC News and MSNBC

His Excellency Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs for Qatar, was interviewed by Ali Velshi, MSNBC anchor and correspondent for NBC News and MSNBC. Minister Al-Thani began by praising the long-standing strategic partnership between Qatar and the U.S., stressing that the relationship would not be affected by U.S. election results, given the two countries’ strong ties at the institutional level. The conversation then shifted to the ongoing blockade of Qatar by other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) members, and



His Excellency Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani

Minister Al-Thani expressed his hope for a fair resolution soon. While he welcomed the U.S. role in attempting to end the blockade, he repeatedly emphasized that it is fundamentally the responsibility of the countries directly involved, pointing out that a stable and united GCC is crucial in this turbulent time in the region. Qatar was open to dialogue based on mutual respect and nonintervention in order to bring the crisis to an end, he said, while also expressing concern about the growing arms race in the Gulf and the wider Middle East.

Mr. Velshi asked the Minister about Israel and Iran and the Abraham Accords. Stating that Qatar recognized that the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain each had a sovereign right to pursue peace deals with Israel, Minister Al-Thani nevertheless stated his desire that the GCC form a united front in supporting Palestinian statehood. The Minister said a durable relationship between Qatar and Israel will not be reached until there is a resolution to the Palestinian issue.

On Tehran, Minister Al-Thani noted that Iran is a part of the Middle East, and all countries of the region must learn to live alongside it peacefully. This is particularly critical for Qatar, which shares the world’s largest gas field with Iran and relies on being able to use the latter’s airspace. While he accepted that differences and disagreements persist, his hope was that the U.S. and countries in the region would work to engage constructively with Iran to find a formula where they can all coexist.

Minister Al-Thani called for the use of diplomacy rather than military solutions in Afghanistan. He lauded the agreement between the U.S. government and the Taliban, but emphasized that the most important component is peace between the Afghan government and the Taliban, which has seen much less progress. He also called for accountability for the Syrian regime, arguing that the international community must push for justice and find a political solution to the conflict.

We have the desire to find a resolution for a stable GCC... We have all the good intention[s] and the good faith to have a constructive engagement with them and to reach a fair resolution for all countries.

Since the Arab Spring, Qatar has shown a great deal of support for democratic movements in other countries and holding governments accountable, he said, while acknowledging that Qatar is not yet a democracy. However, Minister Al-Thani highlighted several pluralistic developments in Qatar, including the signing of a constitution and upcoming elections for the Consultative Assembly, which have increased opportunities for people to contribute to government decision-making.



FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: Ali Velshi, His Excellency Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani

Finally, Minister Al-Thani pointed out that Qatar supplies almost 30 percent of the world’s natural gas, which will continue to be a part of the transition to a post-carbon world. Qatar has long been diversifying away from hydrocarbons, from more than 80 percent of GDP to around 50 percent today, recognizing that gas will continue to be a key energy element in the future.

[Watch this session here](#)

FIRESIDE CHAT: “THE VIEW FROM OUTSIDE OF THE BELTWAY: GEOPOLITICS FROM A NON-AMERICAN PERSPECTIVE”

Ambassador Bilahari Kausikan, Former Permanent Secretary of the Singapore Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Bobby Ghosh, Journalist for Bloomberg

Ambassador Bilahari Kausikan, former Permanent Secretary of the Singapore Ministry of Foreign Affairs, spoke with Bobby Ghosh, journalist at Bloomberg, about developments in the Indo-Pacific and the implications of a Biden presidency. While a Biden administration will be able to make some changes in foreign policy—such as working more closely with the World Health Organization and rejoining the Paris Agreement—Ambassador Kausikan did not anticipate a fundamental shift on most of the core issues, foremost among them being the U.S.-China relationship.

Mr. Ghosh and Ambassador Kausikan agreed that both within the U.S. government and in much of the international community, there is wariness regarding China. Yet, Ambassador Kausikan emphatically denied that the U.S.-China relationship could be categorized as a “new Cold War,” and described the two countries as part of a single global economic system. The dynamic is “much more complicated than that of the U.S. and the Soviet Union,” he said.

Ambassador Kausikan noted that President-elect Biden’s range of options regarding China will need to balance a bipartisan desire for a tough stance and the Administration’s need to focus primarily on domestic issues. China, too, will have trouble moderating its behavior, he added: businesses in China cannot thrive without a close relationship with the Chinese Communist Party, leading to business practices that result in tensions with trade partners. Similarly, the Chinese government would not be able to moderate its position in the South China Sea without undermining its own narrative of increased economic and military strength.

Ambassador Kausikan added that change has only become more difficult as President Xi Jinping has consolidated power and increased party control, and that the country will continue to be vulnerable to the underlying tension between control of society and market efficiency.

Pivoting to the U.S., Ambassador Kausikan was optimistic about the State Department’s ability to recover from what Mr. Ghosh called President Trump’s “dismantling” of it.



Ambassador Bilahari Kausikan



Watch this session here

He particularly noted the great wealth of talent in foreign policy and national security that Mr. Biden will be able to draw on, and the fact that the Department has faced similar challenges in previous transitions.

The conversation concluded with discussion of what a likely Biden administration policy will be on the Middle East. Ambassador Kausikan predicted the continuation of a trend—begun under Presidents Obama and Trump—of shifting from overextension in the region and involvement in ground wars to a new role as an “offshore balancer.” While President-elect Biden has spoken about hoping to rejoin the JCPOA, a potentially divided Congress and next year’s presidential election in Iran, in which recent events have strengthened hardliners, may not allow him to do so. Ambassador Kausikan noted that the U.S. will continue to face limitations in shaping some of the fundamental issues in the region, including the rivalry between Iran and the Sunni Arab states and the rift between Qatar and the other GCC countries. In addition, while President-elect Biden may place more of an emphasis on human rights, Saudi Arabia will continue to be an important strategic partner for the U.S. in the Middle East.



“Nobody wants to treat China as an enemy. In fact, it’s not an enemy...I have been very disturbed... by this loose use of the term ‘New Cold War’ to describe U.S.-China relations. I think it’s a totally inappropriate metaphor.”

DAY 2

TUESDAY 17 NOVEMBER

THEME

**FROM THEORY TO
PRACTICE: HOW
TO THINK ABOUT
REGIONAL &
NATIONAL
SECURITY
CHALLENGES**

PANEL DISCUSSION: "COVID-19 AND COUNTER-TERRORISM: KEY GLOBAL TRENDS AND CHALLENGES"

with the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Executive Directorate (CTED) Global Research Network and Moderated by David Scharia, Chief of Branch of UN CTED

David Scharia, Chief of Branch of the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Executive Directorate (CTED), moderated a panel discussion with Raffaello Pantucci, Ornella Moderan, Nurlan Abdylдаev, and Yulia Denisenko, whose organizations are members of the UN CTED Global Research Network (GRN)—a group of researchers and experts from across the globe—on how the COVID-19 pandemic is affecting counterterrorism around the world.

MODERATOR:

- **David Scharia**, Chief of Branch of the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Executive Directorate (CTED)

PANELISTS:

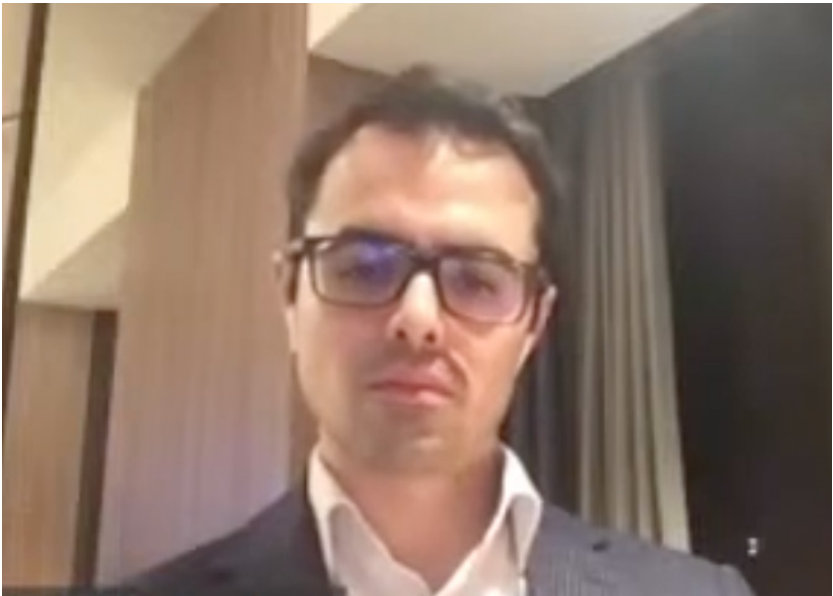
- **David Wells**, Head of Research and Analysis of UN CTED
- **Raffaello Pantucci**, Senior Fellow at the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies in Singapore and Senior Associate Fellow at RUSI in London
- **Ornella Moderan**, Head of the Sahel Programme at the Institute for Security Studies
- **Yulia Denisenko**, Director of the Asia Group Foundation
- **Nurlan Abdylдаev**, Legal Officer at the Asia Group Foundation (translator)



David Scharia

Raffaello Pantucci, Senior Fellow at the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies in Singapore and a Senior Associate Fellow at RUSI in London, noted that the pandemic has accelerated existing trends, including radicalization, which in some cases is occurring completely online. The response to the virus may exacerbate inequalities within communities and tensions between communities, increasing the potential for radicalization, he said. Mr. Pantucci also added that budgets for countering terrorism and violent extremism will suffer as a result of shortfalls from the pandemic and a renewed focus on great power competition.

Ornella Moderan, Head of the Sahel Programme at the Institute for Security Studies, discussed both the risks and opportunities that COVID-19 brings to the counterterrorism landscape in the Sahel.



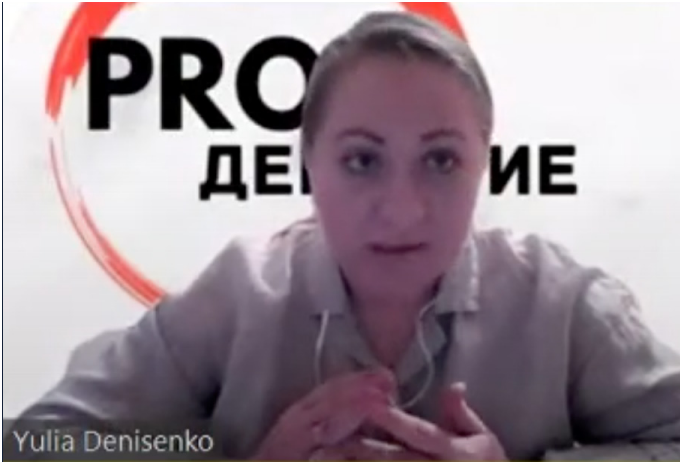
Raffaello Pantucci



[Watch this session here](#)

COVID-related developments have pushed six million people into poverty in the region this year, potentially setting the stage for more radicalization and violence in the future. Yet, she expressed her hope that a partial shift away from the purely military elements of counterterrorism could lead to a wider range of tools to fight the socioeconomic and security conditions that underpin terrorism in the region. She urged governments in the region to tackle the roots of insecurity by addressing the humanitarian, security, and governance crises as one interlinked issue.

Yulia Denisenko, Director at the Asia Group Foundation, spoke about the repatriation and rehabilitation process in Central Asia. Ms. Denisenko noted that there is a great need to learn lessons from what has and hasn't worked in the past when attempting to reintegrate fighters or their families who are returning from abroad. She encouraged policymakers to work more closely, and from an earlier stage, with the families and communities that will reintegrate them.



Yulia Denisenko

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



FIRESIDE CHAT: “AN OVERVIEW OF THE GLOBAL TERRORIST THREAT”

Ambassador Nathan A. Sales, Ambassador-at-Large and Coordinator for Counterterrorism at the State Department, and Peter Bergen, CNN National Security Analyst and Vice President for Global Studies and Fellows at New America

Peter Bergen, CNN National Security Analyst, Author, and Vice President for Global Studies and Fellows at New America, led a discussion with Nathan A. Sales, Ambassador-at-Large and Coordinator for Counterterrorism at the State Department. The discussion began with a broad overview of the counterterrorism landscape from the U.S. perspective. Ambassador Sales noted that al-Qaeda, whose senior leadership has been decimated, continues to exert its influence through a global network of branches and affiliates, such as al-Shabaab in Somalia. The Islamic State, meanwhile, has suffered since the loss of their so-called caliphate in Iraq and Syria and the death of leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi; yet, like al-Qaeda, they are adapting by shifting their energies to their branches and networks around the world. To fight this, the U.S. has focused on building the capacity of partner nations.

Ambassador Sales described Africa as “the key front in the next stage of the fight against terrorism.” West Africa, in particular, has a number of factors that are conducive to the emergence and rise of terrorist groups, including porous borders, governments which cannot control all of their respective territories, and security forces with histories of abuse: a key factor in fostering radicalization and recruitment for terrorist groups. Ambassador Sales noted that U.S. counterterrorism efforts in Africa might be very different than in Iraq or Syria (where the focus was on kinetic action and support for partner forces on the ground); there will instead be a greater reliance on law enforcement, border security, the civilian sector, and counter-messaging.



Ambassador Nathan A. Sales

Turning to the estimated two thousand foreign Islamic State fighters and seventy thousand family members who have been captured in Syria and held by the Syrian Democratic Forces, Ambassador Sales commended the U.S. effort to repatriate and rehabilitate these individuals or bring them to justice if they have committed crimes. He urged other countries to increase their efforts in this regard.

Ambassador Sales pointed out that while terrorist groups like the Islamic State may be losing territory and operational capabilities, they have not lost their ability to influence and inspire attacks.



Watch this session here



FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: Peter Bergen, Ambassador Nathan A. Sales

Describing “lone wolf” attacks as the wave of the future, he pushed for more information-sharing and cooperation between the U.S. and European allies in order to prevent these types of incidents. He stressed that social media companies need to be more proactive in developing automated technology to remove violent content, while acknowledging that the U.S. and European partners do not always see eye-to-eye on how best to counter problematic content.

Lastly, Mr. Bergen and Ambassador Sales examined a number of specific counterterrorism contexts. Ambassador Sales emphasized that the peace agreement with the Taliban will be subject to rigorous verification to ensure that the Taliban lives up to its commitment not to support or host al-Qaeda. They also discussed the landmark decision to designate a white supremacist group, the Russian Imperial Movement, as a terrorist organization for the first time, as well as the extensive negotiations with the British government to extradite two members of the infamous Islamic State group known as “The Beatles.” Finally, Ambassador Sales lauded the success of the maximum pressure campaign on Iran in removing funding for Hezbollah, and he said that the organization’s other potential funding sources must be targeted next.

“Al Qaeda is on the ropes... We have decimated their senior leadership cadre... But we also know Al Qaeda is a group that’s capable of evolving and adapting... We’re seeing the group increasingly rely on a global network of branches and affiliates.”

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



PANEL DISCUSSION: “FROM LOCAL TO GLOBAL: NEW FORMS OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM”

“The rise of extreme right wing terrorism... is becoming more and more frequent, is becoming more and more lethal, and the overall online presence is manifesting itself more and more, [in addition to] the offline presence.”

— ASG Michele Coninsx

MODERATOR:

- **Karen J. Greenberg**, Director, Center on National Security, Fordham Law

PANELISTS:

- **ASG Michele Coninsx**, Executive Director, Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate
- **Gilles de Kerchove**, EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator

Gilles de Kerchove, Counter-Terrorism Coordinator for the European Union, and Assistant Secretary-General (ASG) Michele Coninsx, Executive Director of the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Executive Directorate (CTED), joined moderator Karen Greenberg, Director of the Center on National Security at Fordham Law School, for a panel on the current threats posed by violent extremism, how the threats are evolving, and where the most pressing challenges lie in the future.

Both panelists discussed the evolution of the threat from the so-called Islamic State and al-Qaeda across ideological, operational, and financial dimensions. While these groups have lost territory and operational capability, they remain influential through their ties to affiliate organizations around the globe and their ability to inspire homegrown, low-tech attacks. In addition, ASG Coninsx noted that societies will have to cope with the approximately 10,000 foreign fighters still in Iraq and Syria, and thousands more in South Asia, many of whom will seek to return to their home countries or relocate.

Nonetheless, ASG Coninsx emphasized the need to ensure distinct counterterrorism strategies toward various affiliate organizations, ensuring that the similarities in their tactics and messaging do not prompt one-size-fits-all responses. Mr. de Kerchove supported this by noting that some local franchises or affiliate groups pledge allegiance to the larger entities for opportunistic reasons. He warned that we may do them a favor and amplify their profile by looking at the affiliates as part of the larger entity. Mr. de Kerchove argued that there is a reciprocal relationship between violent jihadist and extreme far-right groups and ideologies. He highlighted how right-wing extremist groups, while following many diverse ideologies, have found common ground in Renaud Camus' idea of a “great replacement,” which drives their radicalization and mobilization.



FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: Karen J. Greenberg, ASG Michele Coninsx, Gilles de Kerchove



Watch this session here

“A lot of these local groups, they have just pledged allegiance to Daesh for a very convenient reason. These are local groups with local grievances and probably we do them a favor by looking at them as part of Daesh.”

— Gilles de Kerchove

Mr. de Kerchove additionally pointed out that both radical Islamist and far-right ideologies have spread largely through the internet, a trend which has only accelerated as people have spent more time online due to COVID-19 restrictions. On the most important platforms, he added, algorithms meant to increase engagement tend to favor more extreme content, thereby helping to promote extremist ideas.

On the financial front, ASG Coninsx emphasized United Nations action through Security Council Resolution 2462, which is a 2019 Security Council resolution updating international frameworks to counter the financing of terrorism, novel in its recognition of potentially negative impacts on humanitarian action. ASG Coninsx noted the resolution is a reflection of UN Member States' commitment to prevent terrorist financing. Both panelists stressed the need for an inclusive, whole-of-society response through not only intelligence operations, but also education, gender equality, criminal justice, and youth engagement. ASG Coninsx additionally highlighted the need for public-private partnerships to encourage social media sites to tackle extremist content more proactively.

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PANEL DISCUSSION: “GENDER MATTERS: THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN NATIONAL SECURITY”

Both panelists reflected on the many advances that have been made in increasing representation of women in national security, as well as the significance of the election of Kamala Harris as the U.S.’s first female Vice President. Yet, progress is still needed. Ms. Weiner called for changes in intelligence and law enforcement to better enable staff, regardless of gender, to balance work with familial considerations, and particularly during a pandemic given the often in-office requirements when handling confidential content.

Professor Ní Aoláin noted a number of structural barriers that have caused women to be underrepresented in national security, the result of both policies and culture, as well as the lack of women role models in the field.

MODERATOR:

- **Kimberly Dozier**, TIME Contributor and CNN Global Affairs Analyst

PANELISTS:

- **Rebecca Weiner**, Assistant Commissioner, NYPD Intelligence Bureau
- **Fionnuala Ni Aolain**, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights while Countering Terrorism

She concluded, stressing the importance of women having access to opportunities to demonstrate their professional skills, “We work in a highly challenging field, where the stakes are really high in really fundamental ways for people’s lives, people’s rights, people’s experiences, for the ways in which governance works. And so what we bring most of all to the table is our skillset: how good we are at what we do.”

“**I personally look forward to the moment when these historic strides [referencing Kamala Harris as the first female United States VP] are utterly unremarkable.**

— Rebecca Weiner”



Watch this session here

“**There is an enormous symbolic resonance for the U.S. to have elected a female woman of color and South Asian woman to this [Vice President] role.**”

— Fionnuala Ni Aolain”

Kimberly Dozier, TIME contributor and CNN Global Affairs Analyst, led a conversation with Rebecca Weiner, Assistant Commissioner for Intelligence Analysis for the NYPD’s Intelligence Bureau, and Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, Professor and United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights while Countering Terrorism, about the roles of women in national security.



FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: Fionnuala Ni Aolain, Kimberly Dozier, Rebecca Ulam Weiner

PANEL DISCUSSION: “THE EROSION OF THE SOCIAL CONTRACT AND THE RISE OF GLOBAL PROTEST MOVEMENTS”

Ali Velshi, MSNBC Anchor and Correspondent for NBC News and MSNBC, moderated a panel discussion with Professor Rami G. Khouri, Director of Global Engagement at American University of Beirut and Nonresident Senior Fellow at the Harvard Kennedy School, and Dr. Maria J. Stephan, co-author of *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict* and co-editor of *Is Authoritarianism Staging a Comeback?*, on global protest movements.

The panelists began by discussing the roots of the protests that have taken place across the U.S. and the world in recent years, attributing them to massive corruption and structural inequalities, the failure of institutions to provide access to adequate healthcare or opportunities, and widespread human rights abuses. Professor Khouri commented that across the Arab world, the list of demands in these protests has been the same because they face similar conditions: “Every dimension of an ordinary person’s life—in their home, in their work, in their community—every dimension has deteriorated across the region for most of the last 20 or 30 years.” At the same time, the panelists noted that this rise in nonviolent protest is happening concurrent to a backsliding of democracy and a resurgence of authoritarianism around the globe.

“

There’s a whole series of things that authorities tend to try to do to quell demonstrations, and essentially make only small symbolic little changes. The demonstrators have learned this over the last 20 years...and that’s why there is a stalemate now, in the Arab world and many other countries.

— Rami Khouri”

“

There has been far more far-right violence in this country [the U.S.] than there has been ANTIFA or far left, and similarly, a lot more violence committed by police vis-à-vis protestors than violence committed by protestors towards police, so it’s very important to put this all into perspective.

— Maria Stephan”

The panelists voiced concerns about both traditional and social media, with the politicization of the former and the proliferation of mis- and dis-information broadly, while recognizing that independent media is crucial for translating the protestors’ demands into political change. Yet, they ended on a hopeful note about the future of “people power” and democracy, and their ability to eventually bring about the type of structural reform that is demanded.



Watch this session here

MODERATOR:

- **Ali Velshi**, MSNBC Anchor and Correspondent for NBC News and MSNBC

SPEAKERS:

- **Rami G. Khouri**, American University of Beirut Director of Global Engagement, and Harvard Kennedy School nonresident senior fellow
- **Maria J. Stephan**, Co-author, *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict*; co-editor, *Is Authoritarianism Staging a Comeback*



FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: Ali Velshi, Maria Stephan, Rami Khouri

DAY 3

WEDNESDAY 18 NOVEMBER

THEME

THE IMPACT OF DISINFORMATION & THE EVOLVING NATURE OF THE GLOBAL INFORMATION ENVIRONMENT

TED-STYLE TALK: “DISINFORMATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST”

Marc Jones, Assistant Professor, College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Hamad Bin Khalifa University, Doha, Qatar

Marc Owen Jones, Associate Professor in Middle East Studies and Digital Humanities at Hamad Bin Khalifa University, shared a TED-style talk on disinformation in the Middle East. He discussed how the Middle East has become an exporter for disinformation to global audiences, sharing his own experience with a particular campaign targeting Yemeni activist Tawakkol Karman. Dr. Jones' research has uncovered evidence of disinformation efforts to promote policies favorable to the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, often by influencing right-wing publications in the U.S. He noted that these campaigns have grown more complex over time through the use of artificial intelligence and trained operators.



Dr. Marc Jones

Dr. Jones described social media companies as having a “blind spot” when it comes to accounts that are not in English or that do not directly impact U.S. interests, and highlighted the growing danger of authoritarian regimes in the Middle East using social media as a tool for disinformation, intimidation, and harassment.

“

What this allows is a space where there are a lot of authoritarian regimes who are obviously used to clamping down on freedom of speech, using social media and platforms as tools of disinformation but also tools of intimidation and harassment.

”



Watch this session here

FIRESIDE CHAT: “THE ONLINE DIMENSIONS OF EXTREMISM & RADICALIZATION: DISCUSSING THE ROLES OF THE PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTOR”

Congressman Max Rose, U.S. Representative for New York’s 11th Congressional District, and Nicholas J. Rasmussen, Executive Director of the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism (GIFCT)



Congressman Max Rose

Max Rose, former Congressman from New York, joined Professor Nicholas J. Rasmussen, Executive Director for the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism (GIFCT), for a lively conversation on responses to online extremism. Both agreed on the importance and scope of the issue, recognizing the need to tackle extremism online before it translates into acts of violence. They also pointed out that the problem cannot be solved by government alone, but would also require the type of public-private cooperation that GIFCT was created to foster.

Congressman Rose laid out a number of concrete recommendations to address the problem, including raising the standards to which social media companies should be held to account for any content that they host and that more stringent rules should be enforced as they grow. He described social media companies’ claims that they are doing their best as “totally false” and said that they should be regulated to the same extent as, for example, the finance or car-manufacturing industries. He cast doubts on their claims that they would not be able to survive with more stringent regulation, as they have been able to operate and even profit despite being actively regulated in the EU.

When you get more followers on these platforms, you are held to a lower standard, because they consider what you are doing ‘newsworthy.’ It should be the opposite... you should be held to a higher standard.

— Max Rose

Many of these companies at the small end of the spectrum do not have the capacity... to invest in the kind of content moderation capability that comes with a Facebook or Twitter.

— Nicholas Rasmussen

The two panelists disagreed on the subject of “over-moderation,” with Professor Rasmussen worried about the unintended consequences of overly active moderation, despite the need for moderation to some extent. He expressed concerns that limiting access to the platforms would constrain speech, as well as inhibit law enforcement efforts to monitor threats and access evidence that may be necessary for prosecutions. Congressman Rose argued that this is not a legitimate concern yet. He concurred that the problem is international in scope and argued that it must be tackled on a national level first.



FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: Congressman Max Rose, Nicholas Rasmussen



Watch this session here

PANEL DISCUSSION: “MILITIAS AND DISINFORMATION: THE CROSSOVER BETWEEN CONSPIRACIES AND EXTREMISM AND WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT”



FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: Adrienne LaFrance, Bret Schafer, Joshua Geltzer

Joshua Geltzer, former National Security Council (NSC) Senior Director for Counterterrorism, and Bret Schafer, Fellow for Disinformation at the Alliance for Securing Democracy, participated in a panel moderated by Adrienne LaFrance, Executive Editor of The Atlantic, and focused largely on the question of disinformation and conspiracy theories online. They began with the 2020 U.S. Presidential Election, arguing that social media companies were far more prepared than in 2016. However, Mr. Schafer cautioned against focusing solely on the period right around elections, considering that Russia’s 2016 efforts to influence the election were part of a years-long effort and that elections themselves are a relatively easy event for platforms to moderate. Dr. Geltzer added that the social media companies were much more successful in thwarting foreign efforts than domestic ones, particularly facing challenges with disinformation from official government actors deliberately spreading lies about the electoral system. The social media companies have improved their capacity to root out bots and manipulative techniques of international interference, but they have no solution for genuine Americans who spread disinformation to their own large followings.

On the question of de-platforming, both panelists agreed that it can be an effective tool, but only if used early on. By the time conspiracies have gained a large following, de-platforming will only prompt adherents to move to a new platform, as happened for QAnon. According to Mr. Schafer, this could be even more dangerous, because the platforms they move to are less likely to be policed and have fewer moderating voices, with content only feeding into existing persecution narratives.

MODERATOR:

- **Adrienne LaFrance**, Executive Editor, The Atlantic

SPEAKERS:

- **Bret Schafer**, Media and Digital Disinformation Fellow, Alliance for Securing Democracy
- **Joshua Geltzer**, Former NSC Senior Director for Counterterrorism

Panelists agreed that the algorithms of social media platforms often contribute to radicalization and fail to flag dangerous content quickly enough, noting the need for greater coordination and transparency across companies. They noted how the platforms can mobilize individuals toward increasingly specific and action-oriented extremist content. The panelists nonetheless commented on improvements that social media companies have made in sharing information and taking coordinated action to shut down violent groups or conspiracies.

However, these groups have also adapted. Extremist groups which were active on larger platforms, realizing that their time is limited, are building alternative channels from the start, and redirecting their followers to other platforms once they are banned.

“
If you have an account that has 10 million followers, and that account is the sort of the ‘superspreader’ of disinformation, [social media companies] have no way of quarantining it.

— Bret Schafer

“
We saw the leading social media companies and other communications platforms almost girding for battle as the 2020 election unfolded in a way that we didn’t see in 2016.

— Joshua Geltzer



Watch this session here

FIRESIDE CHAT: “RENEWING AMERICAN LEADERSHIP”

General John R. Allen (Ret.), President of The Brookings Institution, and
Moderated by Kevin Baron, Executive Editor of Defense One

Kevin Baron, Executive Editor at Defense One, led a conversation with General John R. Allen (USMC, Ret.), President of the Brookings Institution and former commander of the NATO International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and U.S. Forces in Afghanistan, on a range of issues, from the drawdown of troops in Iraq and Afghanistan to the future of foreign policy under a Biden administration. General Allen voiced his concern that the recently announced drawdown of troops in Afghanistan would destabilize the entire international presence there, the Intra-Afghan negotiations, and the Afghan government itself. He argued that the decision was intended only to limit President-elect Biden’s range of options, saying, “There was no tactical, operational, or strategic merit to doing this in such a short period of time.”



General John R. Allen (Ret.)

General Allen likewise excoriated the decision to pull U.S. troops out of northeastern Syria, commenting that they were meant to provide a much-needed basis of stability while the larger question of the future of Syria was determined. “We have clear interests in maintaining the stabilization of northeast Syria because of our relationship with Iraq and our relationship with Kurdistan,” he added. General Allen went on to say that political and military leaders must do a better job of explaining to the American public the purpose and accomplishments of stationing troops in northeast Syria and Iraq. He also advised that President-elect Biden undertake a sober assessment of the nation’s troop requirements in the region to prevent a resurgence of the Islamic State and to stabilize Iraq.

“
The U.S.-Chinese relationship for America, and I think for China, will be the consequential relationship for the 21st century.
”

“
The United States is most consequential in the world when we are engaged. Those points of engagement need to be explained, and that’s what the responsibility of our leadership needs to be.
”

They ended with a discussion about U.S.-China ties, which General Allen described as “the consequential relationship for the 21st century.” He warned that trying to separate China from global technological development could create a dangerous bifurcation of technology, with authoritarian states around the world “buoyed by the Chinese system of technology.” General Allen stressed that while China would remain a key competitor for the U.S., it was important to manage that competition to prevent it from morphing into a strategy of perennial confrontation—and eventually conflict.



FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: Kevin Baron, General John R. Allen (Ret.)



Watch this session here

FIRESIDE CHAT: "FOREIGN INTERFERENCE AND ELECTION MEDDLING"

John Brennan, Former Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, and
Moderated by Kevin Baron, Executive Editor of Defense One

John Brennan, former Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, joined moderator Kevin Baron, Executive Editor of Defense One, for a virtual fireside chat that explored recent developments in U.S. national security. They began by discussing the firing of Christopher Krebs—just hours before the start of the GSF that day—the first Director of the Department of Homeland Security's Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA), by President Trump over Twitter. Mr. Brennan said that this should not have come as a surprise, considering President Trump's history of taking action against those whom he considers disloyal to him personally. Mr. Brennan praised Mr. Krebs and the work that his agency did, together with the FBI and CIA, to secure the 2020 U.S. Presidential Election.

“
There needs to
be a fresh look at
whether the United
States government is
organized in a manner
that is poised to deal
with the challenges of
the future as opposed
to the past.
”



John Brennan

Mr. Brennan addressed what the role of government should be in combating disinformation and called for a bipartisan commission to explore this. Pointing out that the digital environment is "owned and operated 85 percent by the private sector," he stressed the need to bring together an "unprecedented partnership" of the public, private, and non-profit sectors to find solutions.

On the future of U.S. foreign policy, Mr. Brennan said that the victory of President-elect Biden drew a "welcome sigh of relief" from American allies. He predicted that the U.S. would "reclaim its rightful role in the international arena" through the support of multilateral organizations and international agreements.

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One**

Regarding the recent announcement that the U.S. would withdraw most of its forces from Afghanistan and Iraq, Mr. Brennan voiced concerns that, of the remaining 2500 troops in each country, not enough resources would be dedicated to the vital counterterrorism and training missions, as opposed to essential support functions.

Mr. Brennan criticized Acting Secretary of Defense Christopher Miller's recent decision to elevate Special Operations Command within the chain of command as part of an undue focus on viewing security through a counterterrorism prism, describing Mr. Miller as "very inexperienced and unqualified to serve as Acting Secretary of Defense." Finally, Mr. Baron and Mr. Brennan discussed the need to take a holistic look at the country's national security structure, arguing that crucial changes to adapt it to future challenges have been neglected in favor of "petty turf battles" between politicians.



Watch this session here

DAY 4

THURSDAY 19 NOVEMBER

THEME

HOW DOES
POPULAR
CULTURE VIEW
THREATS AND
CHALLENGES?

FIRESIDE CHAT: “EXPLAINING 2020 THROUGH THREE DOCUMENTARIES”

Alex Gibney, Award-Winning Director and Lawrence Wright, Staff Writer for The New Yorker

Lawrence Wright, Staff Writer for The New Yorker and Pulitzer Prize winning author, joined Alex Gibney, award-winning director, for a look at 2020 through the lens of three of Mr. Gibney's documentaries. They began with Kingdom of Silence, about the life and death of journalist Jamal Khashoggi. Both panelists praised Mr. Khashoggi's courage. Mr. Wright said that Khashoggi's embodiment of the “enduring spirit” of the Arab Spring against the “tyrannies of the Arab world” is what made him such a dangerous figure for the Saudi regime.

ALEX GIBNEY'S DOCUMENTARIES



CREDIT: HBO DOCUMENTARY FILMS



CREDIT: SHOWTIME



CREDIT: NEON

Following the screening of a clip from Mr. Gibney's film, Agents of Chaos, the panelists discussed Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election. Mr. Gibney noted that on the Russian side, these efforts were part of a domestic agenda to show Russians how “robust Putin and Russia were on the world stage that they could mess with other people's elections.” The digital disinformation techniques they used were “honed and refined first starting with attempts to undermine democratic elements in Russia,” then tested during the war in Ukraine. Mr. Gibney disputed the idea that President Trump was actively colluding with Russians during the election, but rather that Russia was “moving behind Trump” because they saw him as an agent of chaos in part of their larger objective to “discredit the institutions of democracy.”

The ultimate objective is to discredit the institutions of democracy. To mock them. And in a way, to use the vital weaknesses of democracy... to create all sorts of divisions that ultimately begin to tear at the institutions themselves.

— Alex Gibney

They concluded with a discussion about Totally under Control, Gibney's film about the Trump administration's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Mr. Wright pointed out that “Crimson Contagion,” a simulation led by the Department of Health and Human Services that closely resembled the COVID-19 pandemic made it clear that the U.S. was woefully unprepared for a public health crisis of this magnitude. The panelists excoriated the federal response, citing a lack of federal leadership and the “heartbreaking” politicization and dismantling of the Centers for Disease Control. They contrasted the U.S. response unfavorably with that of South Korea, which discovered its first positive case the same day as the U.S. but managed to quickly institute a plan to test and trace the virus and succeeded in bringing it under control.



FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: Lawrence Wright, Alex Gibney

LIVE



Watch this session here

END-OF-CONFERENCE WRAP UP

Ali Soufan, Founder of The Soufan Center

Ali Soufan, Founder of The Soufan Center, began his wrap-up of the four-day GSF with Edmund Burke's aphorism that "the only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men do nothing," adding that he hopes this year's Global Security Forum is "a humble example of good people standing up and trying to do something--trying to do the right thing." Noting a "thirst for American leadership" in the world today, he urged the U.S. to reclaim its rightful role in the international arena and participate fully in international agreements and treaties. He summarized the main themes from the four days of the GSF, from disinformation and the need for public-private partnerships to combat it, to continuing threats from terrorist groups such as the Islamic State, and signed off with his hope that next year's event will be in person.



Ali Soufan

I hope this year's GSF is a humble example of good people standing up and trying to do something and trying to do the right thing.

— Ali Soufan



Watch this session here

MEDIA COVERAGE

MEDIA COVERAGE

The 2020 Global Security Forum (GSF) drew upon a distinguished set of journalists to serve as moderators. The event generated significant domestic and international media coverage. Moderators from the media included The Hill’s Steve Clemons, MSNBC’s Ali Velshi, Bloomberg’s Bobby Ghosh, CNN Analysts Kimberly Dozier and Peter Bergen, Defense One’s Kevin Baron, The Atlantic’s Adrienne LaFrance, and The New Yorker’s Lawrence Wright. This year’s GSF was organized in partnership with Defense One, who livestreamed the event. Additionally, MSNBC, Al Jazeera, and Bloomberg, also livestreamed parts of this year’s GSF.

Discussions and commentary from the 2020 Global Security Forum were picked up by over 60 national and international media outlets, including: NBC News, The Washington Post, Reuters, AP, NPR, CNN, The Wall Street Journal, The Hill, U.S. News & World Report, and Al Jazeera, to name a few. Insights on a wide range of national and geopolitical topics from the GSF were covered by media. Such topics included: the 2020 U.S. Presidential election, the Gulf crisis, normalization of relations with Israel in the Middle East, U.S. troop withdrawal from Afghanistan, the future of al-Qaeda and the global terrorism landscape, prosecution and repatriation of foreign terrorist fighters and populations formerly affiliated with the Islamic State, the future of U.S.-China relations, and the threat of China’s Huawei equipment to telecommunications infrastructure around the world. Some notable media highlights include:

Ambassador Robert C. O’Brien, U.S. National Security Advisor (NSA):

“Look, if the Biden-Harris ticket is determined to be the winner — and obviously things look that way now — we’ll have a very professional transition from the National Security Council.”

— Ambassador Robert C. O’Brien

At the 2020 Global Security Forum, Ambassador O’Brien joined in a conversation with Steve Clemons, Editor-at-Large at The Hill, to reflect on the work of the National Security Council over the last year. Ambassador O’Brien’s commentary on the 2020 U.S. Presidential Election, promising a “very professional transition” from the National Security Council should the Biden-Harris ticket be determined to be the winner, generated significant media coverage, along with commentary on resolving the Gulf crisis and the future of U.S.-China relations, among other topics.



Trump national security adviser Robert O’Brien says it looks like Biden has won
NBC News



Trump’s national security adviser says it looks as though Biden won
The Washington Post



Trump’s national security adviser nods to Biden’s victory
Politico



Trump’s national security adviser nods to Biden’s victory
CNN

H. E. Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the State of Qatar:

“ I think it’s better to have a united front...”

— H. E. Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani ”

His Excellency Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs for Qatar, was interviewed by Ali Velshi, MSNBC anchor and correspondent for NBC News and MSNBC. The conversation was covered extensively by regional and international media, most notably Minister Al-Thani’s remarks on the normalization of relations with Israel in the Middle East and efforts to resolve the Gulf crisis.



Qatar FM: Normalisation with Israel undermines Palestinian statehood efforts

By Reuters Staff

3 MIN READ

DUBAI (Reuters) - Qatar's foreign minister said on Monday Arab states that establish ties with Israel undermine efforts for Palestinian statehood, but it was in their own sovereign right to do so.



Qatar FM: Normalization with Israel undermines Palestinian statehood efforts

Reuters



إدارة ترامب ترغب بحل الأزمة الخليجية قبل رحيلها ووزير الخارجية القطري يؤكد انفتاح الدوحة على الحوار



The Trump administration wants to solve the Gulf crisis before its departure, and the Qatari foreign minister confirms Doha’s openness to dialogue

Al Jazeera Arabic

Ambassador Nathan Sales, Ambassador-at-Large and Coordinator for Counterterrorism at the State Department:

Peter Bergen, CNN National Security Analyst, led a discussion with Nathan Sales, Ambassador-at-Large and Coordinator for Counterterrorism at the State Department. Media coverage of their discussion focused on Ambassador Sales’ push for countries to repatriate their citizens formerly affiliated with the Islamic State (ISIS) and presently detained in the region. Ambassador Sale’s commentary on the demise of al-Qaeda’s senior leadership also generated coverage.

“

The US has assisted a number of countries around the world with repatriating their citizens and that is a standing offer. We are ready to assist any country that wants to move forward. Give us a call and we’ll find a way to make it work.

— Ambassador Nathan Sales ”



US offers to repatriate foreign nationals held in northeastern Syria

Top official says other countries must take responsibility for IS-linked suspects and families and tells them 'give us a call'



US offers to repatriate foreign nationals held in northeastern Syria

Middle East Eye

The Washington Post

Trump’s military cuts in Afghanistan highlight an array of divisions in a 19-year-old conflict

The longest war in U.S. history isn’t over, and there are still many disagreements about what to do.



Trump’s military cuts in Afghanistan highlight an array of divisions in a 19-year-old conflict

The Washington Post



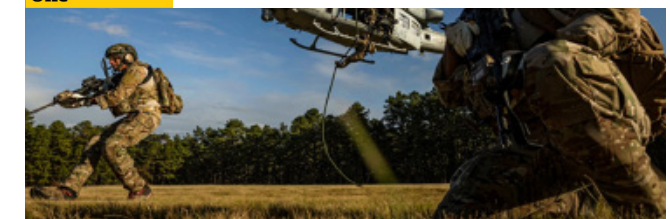
Al-Qaida 'On the Ropes' After 2 Decades of War

By Jeff Seiden
Updated November 17, 2020 05:25 PM



Al-Qaida ‘On the Ropes’ After 2 Decades of War
Voice of America

Defense One



Special warfare airmen assigned to the New Jersey Air National Guard participate in fast-rope training with a Marine Corps UH-1Y Venom helicopter at Joint Base McGuire-Dwight-Lakehurst, N.J., Oct. 10, 2019. AIR NATIONAL GUARD MASTER SGT. MATT HECHT

IDEAS

As Spotlight Fades, What Next for Special Operators?

Under Trump, the Pentagon’s ‘service secretary’ in charge of SOF has changed hands eight times between seven people.

KEVIN BARON | NOVEMBER 19, 2020

As Spotlight Fades, What Next for Special
Defense One

America’s Future: The 2020 Global Security Forum hosted conversations with General John R. Allen (Ret.) and John Brennan, Former Director of the Central Intelligence Agency. Commentary from each of these events was covered by media and touched upon counterterrorism operations, special forces, and the impact of the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan.



GLOBAL SECURITY FORUM

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