

Center for Strategic and International Studies

Schieffer Series Dialogues

Countering Violent Extremism

Moderator:

**Bob Schieffer,
Chief Washington Correspondent, CBS News,
and Anchor, CBS News “Face the Nation”**

Speakers:

**Farah Pandith,
Adjunct Senior Fellow, Council on Foreign Relations,
and First-Ever Special Representative to Muslim Communities,
U.S. State Department**

**Nancy Youssef,
Senior National Security Correspondent,
The Daily Beast**

**The Honorable Juan C. Zarate,
Former Deputy National Security Adviser for Combating Terrorism,
and Senior Adviser, CSIS**

Introduction:

**H. Andrew Schwartz,
Senior Vice President for External Relations,
CSIS**

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H. ANDREW SCHWARTZ: Good evening, and welcome to the Center for Strategic and International Studies. I'm Andrew Schwartz here at CSIS, and I'm pleased to welcome all of you on behalf of CSIS and on behalf of TCU and the Schieffer College of Communication.

Before we get started, I'd like to thank our generous benefactor who helps us make this happen. That's the Stavros Niarchos Family Foundation. Without them and without their generous support, we wouldn't be able to hold these fantastic sessions. We've had a number of them this year and I know a lot of you have been before. So welcome back.

Please follow us @CSIS. And our new evening newsletter, The Evening CSIS, some of you may have seen it. Please click subscribe. We're enjoying doing that a lot.

And I'm very, very pleased to welcome my colleagues here tonight. We have an incredible panel. And of course, we have the incredible Bob Schieffer? Please welcome Bob Schieffer. (Applause.)

BOB SCHIEFFER: It's always a compliment to me that you'll get a crowd this size when the weather is like it is – (laughter) – so thank you all for coming. Very pleased to have you.

Well, we try to stay on top of the news, and I don't think we've ever been as on top of the news when you put together a panel of extreme – terrorist extremism, is that appropriate title on that?

JUAN ZARATE: We'll talk about what we call it, yeah. (Laughter.)

MR. SCHIEFFER: Yes. (Laughs.) Because, as you know, they've just had two days of this over at the White House, and that's obviously where we want to start.

Juan over here – Juan Zarate is senior adviser, CSIS. He is the senior national security analyst for CBS News, visiting lecturer at Harvard, national security and financial integrity consultant. He served as deputy assistant to the president and deputy national security adviser for combating terrorism in the Bush administration. He was at the Treasury Department before he came to that job. And he is also a former – and I didn't actually know this, and I've known Juan for years – he's also a former federal prosecutor who served on terrorism prosecution teams prior to 9/11, including the investigation of the USS Cole.

Farah Pandith is adjunct senior fellow on the Council on Foreign Relations. She is the first-ever special representative to Muslim communities from the government. She has been a political appointee in the George H.W. Bush, George W. Bush and Barack Obama administrations, appointed the first-ever special rep to Muslim communities in 2009 by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. She has traveled to more than 80 countries and launched youth-focused initiatives. Also the main architect of the Women in Public

Service project. In January of 2013, she was awarded the Secretary's Distinguished Honor Award.

And to my left here, Nancy Youssef, senior national security correspondent for The Daily Beast. Before that, she was the Pentagon correspondent, national security reporter and a bureau chief for the McClatchy Newspapers through the – throughout the Middle East and Cairo. She has covered the war in Iraq. She did have one stint as their Baghdad bureau chief. And she has just been all over that part of the world and all over these issues.

So I think what we start with here is this summit that they had at the White House. And I'd like to hear from Juan and Farah, what's the headline here? What happened?

MR. ZARATE: Well, I think the White House was trying to draw attention to this notion that the problems that we're facing around the world – the problem of terrorism, the link – the lineage from al-Qaida to the Islamic State – really had an ideological underpinning. And I think the headline here is the fact that the White House itself was willing to gather people around this very theme and issue, because I think in many ways the Obama administration came into power not wanting to necessarily talk about these issues or even focus on them. The realities of the world, the nature of this movement, has I think forced this upon us. And I think the headline, for me at least, is that the White House has actually committed to providing some leadership on this issue and is now talking about this issue not as some bygone issue of the past, a creation of prior grievances, but really a generational struggle that's impacting Muslim communities around the world. And so from my vantage point, it's really the recognition that this is a long-term struggle and challenge, and that it's President Obama himself recognizing that and galvanizing interest to it.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Farah, what do you see as the headline here?

FARAH PANDITH: So I would absolutely agree with Juan. And I mean, I think it's really striking. I mean, you know –

MR. SCHIEFFER: Is there anything different here?

MS. PANDITH: So not thematically, except for what Juan just said about the ideological. And the violent ideology and the nonviolent ideology. The president pointed that out, very importantly. What is basically building the ecosystem from which the bad guys are recruiting? And I think he did a pretty good job of explaining the reasons why that ideology, both violent and nonviolent, are important.

But the other thing that I thought was very striking, I mean, just sort of sitting back and being there yesterday, was, you know, the president started off his administration very carefully looking at Muslims around the world, and in his inauguration speech on the steps of the Capitol inserted for the first time in American history this plea to Muslims, to say, I'm working with you, and goes to Ankara and then

goes to Cairo and gives the Cairo speech. And here we are in 2015 and this is the speech that he gives: Guess what, the world is a really dangerous place, and Muslims, you need to help me lead in this effort. And so that pivot, that change, that texture is actually very important to me.

And I think that the final thing is – and not – you know, I think we’ll get more into this – but when you look at the creation of this White House summit, the three days or events and how they did this, they were really trying to point to communities and say government can’t do this alone; we need to do this in partnership with you. And then very importantly underscore the fact that, hey, guess what, not only can government not do it alone, but we really need the private sector to help us get these ideas off the ground.

And so those are some of the sub-themes that I think came into the – into the conversation.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Nancy, you always concentrate on the military parts of this, a lot of the time, and also you have seen this from overseas as well as here. How do you think this is going to be received in the other parts of the world?

NANCY YOUSSEF: Well, I think it’s interesting we’re having this discussion seven months into a U.S. military campaign. The language, the terminology, the foe we face. Seven months after striking in Iraq and Syria, and defining this as – the Islamic State as a threat that demands military action, and only now we’re talking the terminology in terms of what that threat is. So it’s interesting to me that that’s the sort of direction that the conversation has taken.

What I worry about, as someone who’s spent a lot of time in the region, is how we use the term “Islamic” in that, if we put too much of the focus on that discussion, that I fear that we’re playing into the game of the – of the very people that the U.S. is looking to fight; that is, that it’s a battle of Islam versus the West, if you will. And at the same time, if that discussion doesn’t happen, that we don’t have a real understanding of what we’re confronting. How much of this is about ideology? How much of it is about a sort of hijacked version of Islam? How much of it is about governance? How much of this is about poverty?

And so I think it’s part of the bigger discussion, and it’s nice to see that that first step is happening. But I think for the region to not take it as about Islam and that sort of binary question, if you will, that it has to be part of that broader discussion.

MR. SCHIEFFER: I want to go back to you and talk to you about what some of the leaders out there are doing because I think that’s something we do need to talk about.

But, Juan, I want to go back to you because you, if memory serves, helped prepare George Bush for a summit very much like this. Did he say anything different than what President Obama said at this summit?

MR. ZARATE: Yeah, it's interesting you should say that, Bob, because in some ways the summit and the discussion around the ideology is a little bit like Groundhog's Day. And Farah can speak to this, sort of having been in multiple administrations. The conversations are largely the same.

But I'll just – I'll point to something, and I brought it here so I can get the wording right. We struggled mightily internally to talk about how you describe the ideology – to Nancy's point, the idea that you do not want to offend your allies, you certainly don't want to describe the threat in terms of a war on Islam, and you want to be very sensitive about this. Keep in mind President Bush, six days after 9/11, visited the Washington mosque to make these precise points. He went there in 2007 for the 50th anniversary of the laying of the cornerstone of the Washington mosque. And so he and the administration were at pains to try not to offend and to try to be sensitive to this.

But we had mighty debates, and the debates were not resolved. We had a very important speech the president wanted to give on October 6th, 2005, and this was the way the debate was resolved. The president said, "Some call this evil Islamic radicalism, others militant jihadism, still others Islamofascism. Whatever it's called, this ideology is very different from the religion of Islam. This form of radicalism exploits Islam to serve a violent political vision." He then goes on to explain what that is. And the purpose of this speech was to define clearly what the ideological underpinnings of this generational struggle was about.

Not a lot of people focused on it then, but it's really important to focus on the language now because I think the Obama administration is struggling with some of the very same issues. How do you walk that tight divide between – Scylla and Charybdis between not offending while also obviously identifying the fact that Islam is a part of the way that these groups identify themselves, it's a way they radicalize, it's the way that they think about their own political agenda, and it's frankly part of their own mythology. And so how do you, then, confront it? How do you undermine it if you're not recognizing that there is an Islamic component to it? And I think that's a challenge for the U.S. government – Democrat, Republican – and it's reflected in this speech.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Farah, it's almost – I could almost hear Barack Obama making that speech.

MS. PANDITH: Right, right. No, and as somebody who – as Juan said, I mean, walking through how not to offend was really important, but also let me just put some historical context in this. One of the things that we were doing as we were thinking about, well, what's the history of our country: How can we talk about this in such a way that American Muslims don't feel like they are victims and, B, don't feel like we're looking at them as a special threat group? How do we think about this in the context of the messaging we're going to give from Washington to communities around the world? What is it that we are saying? And importantly, what are the hooks that the extremists are going to pull from to play over and over and over when the president of the United

States says something? So, you know, you're making – it's a very careful dance that you have to do.

Now, talking about lexicon, let me take it just one step further. My former title was “special representative to Muslim communities.” I can't tell you how much time we spent on that title. It wasn't Muslim world, and there's a reason why: because the bad guys want you to believe that there is a special world in which Muslims live, a little petri dish in which they belong over here. To unpack that, to push back, the lexicon mattered. We took a lot of time to think about what that's going to mean. In the current moment right now, it's become so partisan and so inflamed that nobody is actually thinking through the elements of speech and what matters.

The final thing I'll say is something that the president alluded to in his speech yesterday – yesterday's speech, because he's given two, but it was to a domestic audience. He talked about Islam in America. And one of the things that we were really thinking a lot about was, how do you talk to the American public about the role of Islam in America when most Americans, including American Muslims, don't know its history? They don't know that Islam came here at the time of the slaves. They haven't heard every president since our Founding Fathers speak about Islam with dignity. I don't want to give an American history lesson, but I learned on the job. And I had to, because when you're overseas and the audience is asking you is America at war with Islam or they're going to the “Clash of Civilizations” article that Sam Huntington did in 1993 and saying is this what's going on, you must have your data, you must have your facts, and we must know the timeline of American history to be proud of who we are in terms of the legacy of Islam in America and, thank goodness, the way every single president in our country has spoken about it with dignity, consistently.

MR. SCHIEFFER: But you know, the part that I would like to know more about is, while we're, you know, almost like counting how many angels can dance on the – on the head of a pin, across the world they're cutting people's heads off. And we always seem to be surprised by the events that happen. We were – all of a sudden there was something called ISIL. Nobody had ever heard of that, we didn't know much about it, and all of a sudden here they control all this territory. Again, they're cutting people's heads off. They're taking hostages.

And yet, you know, when the Jordanian pilot was burned to death in that hideous example, the king put on his – (chuckles) – on his fatigues and, you know, he led the charge. They executed two prisoners. They launched a bombing campaign. As I said on “Face The Nation” Sunday, we never want the American president to put on a military uniform, and there is a reason that he doesn't – because that's the way our government is set up.

But what kind of concerns me is, when these events happen, we seem totally overtaken by events. And if the president has his – you know, something scheduled for the holiday, he goes off, the Congress takes off for its regular Washington's Birthday vacation, and everybody says, yeah, we'll debate about that when we get back. That is

part of the communication here, not what you're going to call this or something, that bothers me. I'm not sure – the president said one time I'm not very good at the optics of this thing, but I wonder if – do you – Nancy, does that concern you that maybe people in that part of the world don't understand that we take this seriously?

MS. YOUSSEF: Well, it's interesting that –

MR. SCHIEFFER: I mean, we obviously are launching hundreds of bombing campaigns and they understand what that is, but –

MS. YOUSSEF: Well, it's – there are a number of points.

One of the reasons we're seeing this over and over again is because, in some cases, it's the very same people – literally the same people. In the case of Iraq, I mean, the Islamic State was born out of al-Qaida in Iraq. If you look at the Mosul campaign, which was the Islamic State's takeover of the second-biggest city in Iraq, it was very similar to the campaign they used to launch in 2005 and 2006 against the U.S. troops. It just happened to go much faster. And so I think in this effort to say that we're done and we've won and we don't want to spend any more money, there is a premature call of victory and it always ends up being a fragile victory.

On top of that, you have a region that, in a way, is not dealing with the issues. You can – you can keep fighting, but if there are still governance problems, if you still have prisons in which you mix various jihadi groups together and then release them five years later and allow them to sort of practice what they've learned in prison, then how do you have any hope of really ending the problem? And so it's this balance, right, between how much do you put in the military and how much can you depend on the military solution, and the systemic problems that are – that have defined the region for the last 50 years.

And so I think that's one of the reasons that we can be surprised. We're so eager to say that things are done. What we learned in Iraq and this latest iteration is that the peace that we claimed in 2011 was very, very fragile, and that the reality is it's not something you declare victory on. Look, if the war in Syria ended tomorrow and ended cleanly – which is not going to happen, but if it were to happen, we'd still be dealing with this for a decade-plus because you'd have fighters coming back, you'd have all these sort of second- and third-order effects. And that's if it ended tomorrow. So I think we're just so eager to say that something's done and that we can – we can walk away rather than accepting the fact that this is – this is a problem that will manifest itself in some way certainly for the rest of my life, and maybe for the lives of the generation after us.

MR. ZARATE: Bob, can I jump in here?

MR. SCHIEFFER: Sure.

MR. ZARATE: Because you raise a really important point. Nancy has really highlighted it.

You know, this ideology actually manifests itself in the real world. And the one concern I have coming out of the CVE summit is that we tend to think of countering violent extremism as some sort of ethereal long-term challenge. You know, how do you undermine the message? How do you inoculate at-risk communities? How do you intervene and prevent? All that, very important. And then how do you deal with some of these underlying conditions? But the reality is, in the – in the current environment, to your point, the ideology is actually manifesting in some incredibly virulent and violent ways, all right?

So in the first instance, you have groups that are adapting in this environment and individuals who realize they can have strategic impact, as with the Charlie Hebdo attacks or the attack on the kosher market, that have much broader impact on the debates around pluralism, debates around anti-Semitism, accelerating Jewish migration out of France. I mean, these were three guys with a – attacking in Paris. This wasn't a 9/11-style attack. But look at the strategic impact they had. That's an ideological manifestation of this threat.

You have the reality that the longer than the Islamic caliphate exists in Syria and Iraq, the longer and the more attractive this mythology and narrative of the caliphate is to young people in Muslim communities around the world. And so the longer we allow the Islamic State to exist, that perpetuates the ideological problem.

And then, finally, you have other places – hot spots, I would say – where the ideology is emerging in some interesting and dangerous ways. You have all the human rights abuses which we know about – sexual slavery, child soldiers, all the barbarity that we're forced to watch of videos – but you also have things like the emergence of polio in places where these extremists have taken hold, in northern Nigeria, Somalia, Syria, western Pakistan. You have the desecration – Farah and I have talked a lot about this – of cultural heritage, where you're really talking about cultural genocide, led by these groups because they're trying to change the shape of history and identity.

And so the thing I worry about is that, as we talk about CVE, all of the dimensions that are happening are important, but there are real-world manifestations to how the ideology is actually threatening humanity. And we haven't figured out a way of, OK, how do we react to it today? Because it will have long-term implications, to Nancy's point.

MS. YOUSSEF: Bob?

MR. SCHIEFFER: What is it that – the message that these people are putting out, Farah, that – what is the appeal?

MS. PANDITH: So I will say that the data point that was consistent from Argentina to Zanzibar, as I traveled around the world talking to young kids under the age of 30, was that they were having a crisis of identity. So this is a generation that's grown up every single day since September 12th, 2001 with the word Islam or Muslim on the front page of a paper, online and offline. And we can dismiss that and say, well, you know, that's just the burden of their generation, but it has had profound effect in how they think about themselves, about the difference between culture and religion, asking themselves questions that – sure, any teenager's going to ask what's the purpose of life and what am I supposed to do. But if the loudest megaphone of answers comes from the bad guys, they're getting pulled in to actually, instead of going to their parents to ask questions about tell me why my family doesn't eat halal meat or should I dress this way, should I – should I walk this way, should I pray this way, or a mom that says I don't want you, son, to play with a kid who's this type of Muslim, you're beginning to see, to Juan's point, a complete shift in the way our world will be.

And it's colossal. One-fourth of the planet is Muslim, 1.6 billion people. Sixty-two percent is under the age of 30. This is a gigantic number. Just imagine how all these things are going to impact. And that's the part that scares me.

What is the appeal? The appeal is I finally have an identity that I can understand. And we may reject it and say it's horrible, but for that person that's struggling, that's trying to belong, that wants to feel something – this isn't about how rich or poor they are. This is not about how well-educated they are. It's about how they feel about themselves. And I've seen that, and I've witnessed it firsthand.

And to your point earlier about the thing that scares you and – you know, we're catching up – the thing that terrifies me is this inability for us to connect the dots. We are so focused on a region and a – the partnerships that we have with a particular country that everything else doesn't matter. And so when you come back from the Maldives or Central Asia or Brazil and you're overwhelmed with what you're hearing and you know very well that that horrifying ideology is actually impacting those kids there, for us it doesn't matter that the kids are, you know, from – I mean, Syria is on fire and I get that, but we kind of dismiss it, because the Maldives? What's the Maldives? Give me a break. But guess what? It matters because this generation's ideas get connected to each other. So if a kid in the Maldives connects an idea with the swish of his finger, some girl in Denver picks it up and says I get that, makes sense to me.

MS. YOUSSEF: Can I say, to both of those points, practically how that plays itself out is, you know, in the early years after 9/11 we treated this as a terror threat, that we had to go after big fish and that it was a terror problem, that there were just a few people and that if we got them that we took care of this problem. And I think what you guys are talking about are the little fish, that those are the ones that we have to worry about, that people who can be changed –

You know, I can tell you in Egypt, for example – it's hard for us to picture it here, but in Egypt, if you're the average Egyptian living on \$200 a month, this – it's a country

that was so hopeful after Arab Spring to have those – to have all of that dash. And that hope had been sustaining people for decades in some cases, that at some point there would be change. You have a president in Egypt who has brought back dictatorial-like practices and justifies it in part because of this ongoing threat, that I'm a better alternative. I can't tell you how many times in Egypt you'd hear "at least we're not Yemen," "at least we're not Libya," "at least we're not Syria."

And now you have people who, as Farah says, are – it's so fragile in terms of who goes in and goes out, and a persistent, relentless Twitter campaign, that the minute someone on Twitter feels that vulnerability who's an ISIS supporter, they're pushing and pushing and pushing and pushing. And so you go from being lost and not having any real hope in a country that feels quite hopeless right now to being offered the greatest opportunity ever. You go from having no value to having the greatest value, from being nothing to defending the faith. And it changes so quickly.

I would see it in these kids. And I don't think they start out in a lot of cases angry or ambitious towards it. So I mean, you would see it, particularly like with kids who are in the Muslim Brotherhood who have been ostracized by their – by their country, and all of a sudden someone's giving them a purpose and an appeal. And I've interviewed these kids, and they – you know, you – I talked to some kids who are in the Muslim Brotherhood who were starting to join jihadi groups right before I left, and they would – you could see the sadness. They were 19-, 20-year-old kids. They would sort of talk about their rage and how they tried to blow this up and tried to blow that up, and then they would say, I feel so rejected by my country. And you could tell that that was a core thing, that this was not some push to be an ideological hero but to be accepted. And it was amazing, I mean, because they're kids and, you know, they were just starting out. And you could just tell that just a little attention could have turned it the other way.

MR. SCHIEFFER: What should we be doing that we're not doing? I'd just like to get the take of all three of you.

MR. ZARATE: I think we need to amplify, first and foremost, what's already in the ecosystem, because you have a lot of groups in civil society, a lot of credible voices that are willing to confront and counteract the ideology, the narrative, the movement. The problem is it hasn't taken scale, all right? And so I think the U.S. – this summit may be a helpful catalyst – has the ability to convene, to fund, to network. And you've seen some of that: Movements.org, the AVE Network, and others are out there. So I think amplifying that, funding those.

I think, to my mind, identifying where the ideology is manifesting and actually confronting it. I think we need to find creative ways of dealing where the ideology is starting to take hold, where it may not have manifested yet as a terrorist movement or a terror safe haven, but confronting it and figuring out who are the right actors to do that. And ultimately, trying to foment a grassroots countermovement to the ideology and to the manifestation of this. I think that's where we need to do, and this has to be a global effort.

MS. PANDITH: So I would absolutely agree with Juan, obviously, but I also would say that, within – on the community level, that is a 360-degree thing, that you cannot do things in fits and starts. OK, there was that group in Brussels that's doing it that way, there's that group in Toulouse that's doing it this way, Minneapolis is doing it this way, and we can expect this like sort of little graph of nice little things that are happening. There needs to be a drumbeat all day, every day, and in your face all day, every day to pull kids away from that ideology. And it doesn't – a lot of people get very uncomfortable about that, but it has to be a consistent, generational all-day, every-day thing that they're seeing because if we only say, boy, this is happening right now because there's going to be foreign fighters or this is only happening because we are now in this part of the world, when we look at it that way, you're really missing things.

And the kids – the thing that scares me, by the way, about the foreign fighters are not the ones who have gone and might come back, it's what's left – what's there in the ecosystem that's still growing. And you have to be able to poison that ecosystem from that – from that growth to happen. And that means that the other piece that we absolutely haven't done a good job about at all – and this is not just our country, but around the world – is to combine what we know about how kids get radicalized with the – with the mental health workers that can actually help that kids get out of that – out of that process. Not when they're already radicalized. I'm not talking about de-rad programs. I'm talking about the conveyor belt that leads them up and actually can move them – move them back.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Talk a little bit about the military situation. For example, what's going on right now in Egypt? I'm very interested in that.

MS. YOUSSEF: So Egypt, on Monday, launched airstrikes into Libya. So actually I should back up and say Egypt has an ISIS problem, if you will, on both sides. In the Sinai in the east, they – it's a population that's been ostracized for decades. I mean, they don't get a lot of government resources, they've been – their homes have been raided and destroyed in the past few years, certainly after the ouster of Mohamed Morsi in 2013. And so there are a lot of fighters coming in there. They're already radicalized. Ansar Bait al-Maqdis, which was the jihadist group of the time, has now pledged allegiance to the Islamic State.

Meanwhile, in Libya you've had a collapsed state with competing governments backed by rival militias. And Egypt, frankly, has been hankering to go into Libya and try to take care of this problem because a lot of the trainers or the weapons, the equipment, the fighters travel from Libya to the Sinai. I mean, it's literally a direct – you can – you can see it happening. And so they were really eager to do something about it because they see it as an existential threat, and in many ways it is.

At the same time, I would argue that Sisi has also exploited this conflict, if you will, to justify his own government, the way it ascended to power, and to mitigate those

who say that this is not the state that we wanted to emerge from Arab Spring. Again, it's better than Libya.

And so they were looking for a point, if you will, to get into this and to be able to take on Libya. And then a video was released showing the beheading of 21 people, most of them Egyptians. Now, you should know, in Egypt, I mean, there are 90 million people in Egypt, and we always say two or three just kind of get squeezed into Libya, and a lot of them are workers. And so these were workers and Egypt Christians, which was remarkable that there was – it created national outrage, as you can imagine, where the sort of sectarian differences that have defined Egypt were gone because there was, as you can understand – I mean, we've experienced it here as well – just outrage that this could happen.

And so Egypt goes in and does these strikes, a day of strikes. I would argue that that they were as much a show of force and a response to the public as they were about a serious military effort, because we really haven't seen much since. And Egypt will say – they're officially not a part of the U.S. coalition, because they say, why would we join the coalition in Iraq and Syria; we have an ISIS problem in North Africa. And they're asking the U.S. for help on that and getting sort of a mixed response because things have been rather tense between the United States and Egypt since Morsi's overthrow and Sisi's ascension. And so you have an Egypt that is trying to confront the spread of ISIS in North Africa, and at the same time you have a very tense relationship – which is sort of extraordinary; after \$40 billion there's not that – (chuckles) – that alliance that one would think.

Now, the military – the U.S. military response is that we shouldn't exaggerate the ISIS threat in North Africa, that they are exploiting the jihadi groups already there, Ansar al-Sharia in Libya and, as I said, Ansar Bait al-Maqdis in the Sinai; that this is a nascent threat; and that they are using the name and sort of the inspiration of ISIS rather than actively joining the Islamic State. I think that's true now, but I think things could change very, very quickly when we have two ungoverned spaces that are riddled – riddled – with jihadists.

MR. SCHIEFFER: How would you sum up where we are in this across the region? Because I must say, I'm the – I'm the only one here who's old enough to remember Vietnam. And kind of the rule in Vietnam was the good news that we always got was never quite as good as we were told that it was and the bad news was always worse than we were told that it was. How do you think the situation is right now? Are we winning this war? Are we – are we holding them in place? We just had Yemen happen. Where are we, Juan?

MR. ZARATE: Well, Bob, I think we have to check ourselves, to your point. You know, these aren't 10-foot giants, right, and there are conditions in the environment that play against them. There isn't unity among the jihadis, and we can play off of that. We've got huge advantages with our allies in the region.

But to answer you bluntly, I think the threat is growing more dangerous and more diverse. You have more geographic safe havens for these groups to operate. You have this ideological ligament that ties these groups. And so the Pentagon statements on this are almost in opposite to what the problem is. It doesn't matter what banner these groups are actually flying; the fact that these groups actually can operate and are effective is really the problem, whether it's an al-Qaida banner or an Islamic State banner or something else.

And I think what you've had is this allure of foreign fighters, now numbering over 20,000, from 90 nations being sort of lured by the pied piper dimension of the social media, you know, attractiveness of this narrative, some of which is really this allure to the heroic identity. And I think really we're facing a much more dangerous and diverse environment. And you hear this from counterterrorism officials. All my old buddies who have to testify and talk about this, they talk about a more diverse threat from a geography, from a nationality and from a group perspective.

And the challenge, Bob, to your earlier question, is how do you get ahead of the problem? How do you anticipate, perhaps even predict, where the new challenge and the new threats will come? And I think that's really difficult. That's what the intelligence community is always asked and tasked to do. From a policymaker's perspective, the challenge is, how do you shape the environment so that you're able to, at a minimum, contain the reach of these groups, and in maximalist terms actually end up defeating them? And I think we're a very long way from seeing that end goal.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Farah and Nancy, is the threat to the U.S. homeland today greater or lesser than it has been?

MS. PANDITH: I think it's greater for a lot of different reasons, but I also want to say one thing before I get to that in terms of what we – what we – what we should do.

You know, there's a – what Juan was saying about we know the tools that we need to scale up and mobilize all day, 24/7, but then there are the tools that governments must do that we haven't done, our government and governments around the world. And, yeah, OK, this is going to be controversial, but there are countries in the world – Saudi Arabia for one – who is building an ecosystem that is helping this ideology thrive. And we have tried to parse this conversation in a thousand different ways. And as far as I'm concerned, until we are honest about what is going on, we cannot get past it, first of all. And it –

MR. SCHIEFFER: In Saudi Arabia.

MS. PANDITH: What they're doing on the ground. I'm not just talking about madrassas. I'm not just talking about textbooks. I'm talking about building a systematic approach globally that is changing the environment for Millennials so that, within one generation, they're moving in a particular space. We never talk about this. And I know, we're in Washington and this is a political place. But for me, if you're going to be

serious about stopping this, and if you have to name the fact that we, A, want to win this ideological war – if you are committed to winning it, then you need to be committed to talking about why the bad guys are so advanced. And there are many elements to that. Diversity of issues, that Juan spelled out – including, by the way, we haven't talked about, but you know, if you're al-Baghdadi and you're thinking down the pike how am I going to build the recruits, I – you know, you want a bunch from the West, and he's done a very good job of bringing those recruits in, but he's also done a very good job of now moving women in a different direction. And why are we catching up with this? We should have been on top of that. And children and others.

So, for me, looking down the pike and looking at the real world and stop being so politically sensitive about what we're doing, because if we're talking about defending the homeland, you can't defend the homeland if you are not being clear and precise about what not just the group threat is, but the ecosystem in which they thrive.

To your second point, about where we are in terms of the threat here, look, I will – when I was working with Juan in the Bush administration, right after the Danish cartoon crisis, we were totally caught off guard. Our country was caught off guard, Europe was caught off guard that something that could happen in Copenhagen could have an effect on life in Kabul. I mean, now we get it, it's all fine, but in 2006-2007 we were really not where we needed to be.

And we were a little cocky, I will say, about where we were with American Muslims because we felt like our narrative was different, we're not like the Europeans, this can't hit us. We kind of had a little bit of an approach of, because we're so different, we never colonized, we have all these other things going for us, we are more free to be a Muslim in this country than anywhere in the world, all these kinds of things, that we had some resilience here.

The fact of the matter is, in 2015, guess what? It's come home, and it is here. And the – and the things that we see happening in Europe are manifesting in communities in America that we don't like to talk about. And parents of kids who are looking at their Muslim kids going, how do I protect them, are asking themselves question: How do I – how did we get here? How am I, a second- or third-generation parent, having to deal with this crazy situation where I have a kid who now has an – you know, an affinity to something so crazy that I would never even imagine?

So we need to recalibrate what's actually happening on the ground and understand. And I'm not trying to build a fear-mongering environment. I'm simply saying that there is so much data that we've learned since 9/11, so much about recruitment and how it's moved and how it's manifesting itself, it's time to be practical and clear and calm about how we talk about it. And in that way, you can build the kind of – the kind of initiatives that are needed on the grassroots level to make sure our communities are not infected with this kind of ideology. (Scattered applause, scattered laughter.)

MS. YOUSSEF: Can I –

MR. SCHIEFFER: Go ahead.

MS. YOUSSEF: I just want to – I just want to – it's interesting how you describe

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MR. SCHIEFFER: We'll go to audience questions here after this, but I want to hear Nancy's thought about this.

MS. YOUSSEF: It's interesting you talk about the second and third generation because I was raised by two Muslim parents and there was – there was never even a luxury to indulge in such things. I mean, there were racial slurs said at us all the time. But it was so – we were so grateful to be in this country that you just dealt with it. So it's amazing to me that we've – it was just inconceivable because you just didn't indulge in that because there wasn't the Internet, there wasn't Twitter, there wasn't the sort of fanning of what was going on. There was just you were lucky to be here. I mean, that was what I was raised with my whole life. So it's so fascinating to me to hear how second and third generation think because I just grew up in such a different mentality, and it's still there in my house and within my family up until this day.

In terms of the question about the – could it affect the homeland, there's good news and there's bad news. The good news is that, relative to the European countries, the U.S. has relatively few fighters coming back – going to Syria; 150 from this country, and of course we're much bigger, rather – compared to 6,000 from France, 1,000 from the U.K. The challenge is that the – and I look at this from a military perspective because of where I spend my days – the expectation of the world community is we are the world's military. And so when something happens in France or in the U.K., the expectation is that the U.S. military response – when Charlie Hebdo happened, it was the U.S. that was supposed to be taking on the AQAP threat in Yemen. Remember that some of the three had gone – one or two, depending on whose reporting you believe, went to Yemen and got some training. And then the expectation is, France is attacked and the U.S. military has to respond because we have the largest military. And so the threat to the homeland becomes, I think, from second-order effects, that it's not necessarily just because a foreign fighter comes back, but a reaction to something that happens in Europe where they have a different problem set than the U.S. does.

MR. SCHIEFFER: All right. Well, let's go to the audience. Here's a lady right here on the front row – second row. Tell us who you are.

Q: OK. Hi. My name is Kristi Kaufmann. I'm the executive director of a nonprofit called the Code of Support Foundation, which supports military and veteran families. So we deal with a lot of the after effects about decisions that are made in D.C.

Two questions. Do we actually have a strategy, our government? Do we have a strategy? And what does winning look like? I know it's a long-term thing. And how do we articulate that to the American public?

MR. SCHIEFFER: I think it's an excellent question. Juan, why don't you –

MR. ZARATE: It's a great question.

You know, when I was in the Bush administration, we put out a strategy in 2006 and we did talk about this as a battle of arms and a battle of ideas, right? So we tried to articulate the mechanisms for what that meant: how do you intervene, how do you counter this ideology and ultimately replace it, and how do you deal with identity issues. That's a very difficult strategy to articulate.

In terms of this administration, you know, the president's West Point speech is the most recent articulation of the counterterrorism strategy writ large, and that is we are going to obviously go after terrorists when they're imminently threatening us. We're going to support our partners regionally to deal with these threats. And to the point about France, we're going to rely on key partners like the French to deal with problems in North Africa or AQIM and others. And from an ideological perspective, we're going to rely on communities of interest like those assembled at this White House summit to actually help counter the ideology, and to do it at a community level and to do it at a national level. That's sort of the thumbnail sketch of what the strategy is.

The question is, how do you actually implement that when the threat seems to be morphing quicker than our strategy is adapting and when we seem to be putting artificial limitations to the types of resources and forms of American power that we're willing to invest in that? And what's why I said at the start one of the interesting things to me is that the president's actually investing in this, at least for three days, to say, look, we have to deal with this ideological problem. That really wasn't the attitude through most of the administration, and I think there's been a lagging strategy and lagging resources as a result.

MS. YOUSSEF: Can I – can I try the military strategy, for whatever it's worth?

MR. SCHIEFFER: Yeah.

MS. YOUSSEF: So here's the military strategy. We're not going to put forces on the ground. We're going to depend on local forces. So, essentially – I hope I don't offend anyone – we're the air force for the Iraqi army and the rebels that have yet to emerge that we have trained in Syria. OK. So the airpower is going to go after ISIS and limit their mobility, that they can't – they won't have the many tanks as they had when they stole the ones we gave the Iraqi army in Mosul. They're not going to have as of an ability to move. They're not going to be able to take territory, which is very important because territory allows them to take money from banks, it allows them to exploit populations, it allows them crops even, things like that. Like, if you keep taking

property, you never have to build something new, right? You just keep going to the new resource. So that's what the air campaign is going to do. And the Iraqi army is going to come through and, once we train them up again, they're going to be able to be the ground force at some point to take advantage of the sort of containment of ISIS.

The problem in Iraq is – and I'm not sure that Iraqis see themselves as Iraq the way they once did just a few years ago. There was a fascinating story in Reuters, were talking to Kurds and Shia and Sunnis, and they see it as sort of three separate districts. And how do you get a majority Shia military to risk their lives to take back the Sunni-dominated area of Mosul?

In Syria, the problem becomes the rebels, the moderate rebels. I mean, it's such a vague term I don't know what it means. I mean, Nusra was considered a moderate rebel and now they're – two years ago, and now they're aligned with al-Qaida. Now, the military said they have identified 1,200 that they're going to train at some point and that that will be the basis for a ground force in Syria. So that's the military strategy.

Victory looks like that there is a government that can sustain those military gains such that there's not the ungoverned space in which ISIS has been allowed to operate in Iraq and Syria, strictly speaking.

MR. SCHIEFFER: How long will it take to train these Iraqi troops that are going to be the ground force?

MS. YOUSSEF: Well, they say that they hope to have forces in place by summer. Today the military was talking about its campaign to retake Mosul. They're training some forces that will allegedly be a part of a campaign that starts in March and April. So we're talking about weeks.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Is there any indication that any other country is going to actually put any kind of ground forces in?

MS. YOUSSEF: No.

MR. SCHIEFFER: A lot of offers to hold our coats, but nobody –

MS. YOUSSEF: A lot of offers to do airstrikes, a lot of offers for ISR. I think the Jordanians are great for things like intelligence gathering. But no, there's – because what army would – could take this on? And so, yeah, there's no – I've never heard – I've never heard the Egyptians or the Qataris, you know, say we've got a great – (inaudible).

MR. SCHIEFFER: So basically speaking, to put together the kind of force you'd need, it's going to take some time here.

MS. YOUSSEF: The conservative estimate is three to five years.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Yeah.

MR. ZARATE: Bob, in fairness you've got the Kurdish peshmerga, who have been incredibly courageous and forceful in pushing back ISIS, but they're not going to take Mosul. And you've had the debate with Turkey as to how forceful they're going to be. The challenge there is Erdogan wants the U.S. to deal with Assad in addition to ISIS.

MS. YOUSSEF: First.

MR. ZARATE: First.

MS. YOUSSEF: Yeah.

MR. ZARATE: And so he's not going to commit Turkish resources until that's done. And so we're talking about a Rubik's Cube meeting a three-dimensional chess game here.

MR. SCHIEFFER: And the other – and the other – you know, Mike Morrell, the number-two guy at the CIA, works for CBS now, he said the other day that had it not been for the airstrikes that we launched, that he believes that ISIS or ISIL would have taken Baghdad.

MS. YOUSSEF: It would have been a fight for sure.

MR. SCHIEFFER: It would have been.

MS. YOUSSEF: But the thing is, there are militias all over that were ready to defend Baghdad. It would – I mean, some of them trained by, advised by Iran. So I mean, it would have been a fight. It would have been a fight and it would have been an area that they fought for.

Remember that ISIS is not good at wars where they actually have to fight. We saw that in Kobani in northern Syria, where they had to fight the peshmerga. They didn't fight for Mosul; they were handed Mosul because the forces didn't fight. So that's why Baghdad becomes so fascinating because we have yet to see them really be able to take on a real, sustained force. And Baghdad is so valuable to the Shias in particular that it would have been – it would have been a fight.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Next question. Let's see. Well, let's go over here, back here. I'll try to get somebody from every section here. There you go.

Q: Thank you. My name is Ivan Plis. I'm a reporter with The Daily Caller News Foundation.

Now, it's been a really strange week in the realm of ideas. We had an article earlier this week in The Atlantic asserting that, you know, the Islamic State is, in fact,

very Islamic and that, you know, it's foolish to talk about these things without entering realistically and very seriously into the realm of ideas. And my question is, to what extent does theology have consequences? What role does the United States play in talking about theology and about these things on the realm of ideas? And how do we combat a very seriously theologically driven threat?

MS. PANDITH: Well, fun question, thanks.

I do want to say one thing to you: Do we have a general that's in charge of ideas? Do we have somebody who wakes up every day and looks at the ideological war and says this is how we're going to play the battlefield? We don't.

Q: Yes.

MS. PANDITH: Really?

Q: No.

Q: Commander of the U.S. Civil Affairs Psychological Operations Command. That's his job, psychological operations. Military ISO, military information support –

MS. PANDITH: So it's not just that piece, though, it's all of the other things that we are putting into the bucket of the soft power that that person doesn't actually control.

Q: (Off mic.)

MS. PANDITH: And so the integration of both of those things, I mean, in my view, as we think about all of these pieces, including the theological piece, each part of our government is doing things in their own way and there's nobody who's actually working it.

I actually believe in our Constitution and I believe that there is a really clear line between church and state, and I don't think anybody in the United States government should be sitting around talking about what a religion means. I think it is very dangerous. And as somebody who was the special representative to Muslim communities, I never, ever quoted the Koran because you as a taxpayer did not put me in charge of telling you what the Koran means, to tell – to tell people around the world. So I have a – I may be the only one on this stage, but I have a very hard line on this.

I think that – I also think that this theological conversation that we're having is extremely – having just generally in the public is very dangerous. We aren't a divinity school. We're not sitting here pondering the meaning of these things.

You know, one-fourth of the planet is Muslim, and they're really diverse, all over the world. Cultures and heritages have impacted the way they practice their faith, and we need to honor that. And even within the academic realm, there's a lot of controversy

about what is and is not Islamic, whatever that might mean. I happen to be an American and I happen to be Muslim, but I am not qualified to sit here and tell you that something that was written at the time of the prophet means this today. I don't feel comfortable doing that. And I think we get into very dangerous water when we start to nip and put things in little boxes.

Of course these bad guys are using the inspiration from their interpretation of a religion to do terrible things, and I absolutely believe that Muslim parents around the world need to accept that and to do everything that they can to stop their kids from being recruited based on a faulty premise of what the religion is. But it is not, in my view, the American government's responsibility to work through the Koran and start telling people who's a good Muslim and who is a bad Muslim, and my goodness.

And the final thing I'll say about sort of the diversity of Islam is in the kind of approach that we're taking – which is only talking about the Sunnis and only talking about the Shia – there are a lot of minorities who are Muslims that are left behind. And as far as I'm concerned, it is not for me to say that a Muslim in Stockholm is more or less Muslim than a Muslim in Surabaya, and I will not say which sect of Islam are the better and the – and the good and the bad. And I think the minute we start talking about this we walk down a really dangerous path, and that is not the path of America as far as I'm concerned.

MR. SCHIEFFER: All right. (Applause.) This section over here. Anybody over here? Right here.

Q: Back in the – back in the '60s –

Q: Mic please.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Here comes the mic.

Q: Oh, I'm sorry. (Comes on mic.) Back in the '60s, we had a lot of young people getting radicalized to conduct violence. We had in this country the SLA. We had the Red Brigades. We had the Meinhof Gruppe in Germany. All these groups were being radicalized and people's nice middle-class children were robbing banks, were killing people, were taking hostages. How is this different?

MR. SCHIEFFER: Good question.

MR. ZARATE: I think it's a great question, and a lot of the counter movements that we've talked about have tried to learn lessons from that period and tried to learn lessons from the anti-gang initiatives and movements in certain communities, in part because you have certain strains of the recruitment and radicalization that look an awful lot like this. You look at the prison radicalization problem in the country just generally, there are certain strands that are very similar. And in fact, one of – one of the key initiatives to counter violent extremism is an attempt to gather former extremists of all

stripes to learn lessons, to galvanize them, and then to go out and try to counter the ideology and those who are being recruited. So it's a – it's a great question.

The main difference, from my perspective, it goes back to this question of theology, because the difference between what you described in terms of the nationalist or other terrorist movements of the '60s, '70s and even '80s, or even the Cold War, which is often looked to as a model for how do we engage in ideological battle, is very different from dealing with a transnational set of actors and networks that are trying to hijack a religion, that really are trying to use elements of the theology and the mythology around it to reshape identity, and are really trying to redefine and be vanguard for Muslims around the world. I mean, their very notion – and this was, in part, Bin Laden's doing post-9/11, was to create a Muslim awakening that would imbue this ideology – this notion that the West is at war with Islam, that there is a religious obligation to fight, there's a heroic dimension to this, and all the grievances real and perceived are actually to be acted upon. And I think that theological dimension in this transnational context, in the 21st century when social media can amplify at the speed of Twitter, that really is the difference between then and now.

MR. SCHIEFFER: I would just add this, and this will be our last comment: It's different because the stakes are so much higher and because the weapons are so much more dangerous. It's one kind of a fight when you're fighting with axe handles or even with rifles or even with machine guns, but the fact is there are now nuclear weapons out there. If one of these groups got one of those weapons, there is no question I would think in anyone's mind that they would use it, and you would talk about being – killing hundreds of thousands of people and not just a few people. So there's always – you know, in every – in every movement from the history of the beginning of mankind, there has been a strain of violence that has run through it. But I think at no point are the stakes higher than they are today because of the danger that these weapons pose. That's just my opinion, clearly labeled.

And that'll have to be our last. Thank you so much for coming, and really appreciate it. (Applause.)

MS. PANDITH: Thank you, Bob. Thank you very much. (Applause.)

(END)