Thank you very much, Chris. Welcome to the Center for Strategic and International Studies. You’re now the director of the National Counterterrorism Center. Congratulations.

Thanks, Seth.

And what I’d like to do is start off by going backwards into history. You’ve got a really distinguished career, including on the ground. You were a member of fifth group, special forces, you served in Afghanistan, among other places, worked in the Pentagon in special operations and counterterrorism. But if you go back particularly to your special forces days, what – as you look back on them now from your current position – what did you take, or what do you take from your experience there that has been valuable in dealing with terrorism and the way terrorist groups operate, as well as countering them – so the counterterrorism component?

Thanks, Seth, Dr. Jones. You’ll always be Dr. Jones to me. (Laughter.) Just before we get started with that, that’s a great question, but I really wanted to thank you for having me out here. We’ve worked together a long time, and I always hold you up as kind of an archetype for what we want in a national security professional – not only extremely well educated, but you’ve also been a practitioner, the way you’ve kind of gone overseas, and we’ve worked together in the past. And I just kind of – you are what exactly we need, and your experience and your insights are just so valuable to all of us. I also just wanted to recognize your boss, Dr. Hamre, who we’ve – he’s had us in a couple times for off-the-record conversations. And he always ends with a kind of a shout-out to the civil servants and the nobility of civil service. And, you know, I represent about a thousand civil servants right now in the intelligence community that are a testimonial to what he’s talking about. So thanks for doing this.

Interesting question. I don’t like to talk about myself, however you asked the question and I guess that’s kind of what I’m supposed to do today. You know, I was a special forces officer. I was always what was called in unconventional warfare. That was my specialty, versus direct action, which is what we typically think about in counterterrorism – where you’re kicking down doors, you’re taking people out of buildings, or killing them. I’ve done both, but my passion was in unconventional warfare, which is what we call – a subset now of irregular warfare, where it’s kind of – I mean, it sounds cliché – hearts and minds. But really what we’re talking about is competing for the population’s loyalty.

And when I came – when I came back into the business after retiring, I’d had a few years off, honestly I kind of – the whole counterterrorism thing didn’t really impress me that much. And we had this cliché of, you know, it’s mowing the grass. And I came back in and I looked at it from a difference perspective. And I realized how successful we’ve been as a country in this enterprise since 2001. And we created this enormously proficient strategy and capabilities. And I had to look at it a little differently – (laughs) – because I’d always kind of looked down my nose at counterterrorism forces. Like, you know, how hard is it? You go in a door, you go left, or you go right, or you cut down the middle. I mean, it’s kind of, like, not that – for me at the time, it was not that horribly complicated.
I realize now that we've been enormously successful. The experiences I had – I think I'm the first person – someone asked this the other day – I think I'm the first person of the generation that actually was there in Afghanistan in 2001, and now as a field commander, as a company commander, I was in the field, I was in the street. And now to progress through to basically a strategy, policy position – I think I'm the first one. And not that I did anything special. But it's really highlighted, I think those experiences you have in the field where you understand the human dimension of what we're trying to do really helps a great deal in this current position.

Seth G. Jones: Well, that's where I've been most impressed about your background, is this is not just something you've done from – you know, from offices, from the bureaucracy. You've been involved on the ground as a commander of forces from the beginning, really – since 9/11. So I think there's a lot of value you provide to the country from now at a strategic position, but you served at the tactical level as well.

Christopher Miller: And then did operational plans and policy as well at the Pentagon, with you. And also at the National Security Council. I think the National Security Council was a really developmental position there because I'd always been pretty much focused on Department of Defense and the intelligence community. But to realize, like, I had no idea the brilliant things that Department of Treasury does, Justice does, the things they contribute to the counterterrorism fight. Of course, State Department has just enormous capability. So that was a real eye-opener for me, and really helped me in this position now.

Seth G. Jones: So I want to turn – you've talked a little bit about successes. In the news over the past couple of months there have been – the media's reported U.S. strikes against al-Qaeda linked individuals, particularly those from Hurras al-Din in Syria, including in the Idlib area. So Sayyaf al-Tunsi in September, Khaled al-Aruri in June. Can you talk a little bit about the threat from al-Qaeda, and how you thought about operating against them? These are two relatively recent strikes. So many Americans may not necessarily realize that we are still fighting al-Qaeda and still conducting operations against them, including operatives that are potentially planning attacks against the U.S. and its partners.

Christopher Miller: Al-Qaeda started this war. We’re still at war. It’s kind of – it’s kind of – it’s kind of bittersweet in some ways because the American public – it’s not in the daily news every day, like it was earlier. I kind of use that, though, as a measure of the effectiveness that we’ve had, that it’s no longer the national security priority like it was for, geez, probably 14-ish years. And you know, some people have problems with that, but I’m like that’s exactly what we wanted. This is where we wanted to be, remember, in 2001-2002? We wanted to be in a place where we could – where we could think logically and strategically about this.

And what’s going on in northwest Syria is absolutely fascinating, and I think indicative of a couple things. One is our counterterrorism enterprise is optimized. It is at flood tide right now. This thing is going gangbusters. And what you see right now – what I see from my perspective – it’s really interesting because, you know, what you want to do is something that you apply a capability, or you take action to get them to do something else. And that’s what we’re seeing right now. And I’m sure Sun Tzu has some line about, you know,
the acme of skill is separating your enemies and have them fight each other. If they don’t, we probably need to come up with that ourselves. We can maybe –

Seth G. Jones: We can do that, yeah.

Christopher Miller: Maybe we could market that. Maybe we could brand that for CSIS. You know, I don’t want any funds from that, but if that’s what CSIS does.

But that’s what we’re seeing right now, is they’re coming undone. And this is the challenge with our current structure, is you look at – we use – the intelligence community looks at it, and they have to have certain criteria. But I think that’s something the operational side – or, on those in the operations side bring. You can feel what – you can feel what’s happening with the enemy. I’m telling you, Dr. Jones, I feel the enemy’s coming undone right now. Our strikes against al-Qaeda’s senior leadership – this was all by design. You know, everybody kind of thinks this was a haphazard, like, oh, we just kind of ad hoc, we stumbled into this. I brought up mowing the grass, as what I used to think.

That’s not it. This is a purpose-built campaign. And right now, it is absolutely optimized. What’s been most impressive in northwest Syria is our forces have had to do innovative, new things to get at the enemy that has been absolutely breathtaking. And as you noted, it’s been extremely effective. Al-Qaeda right now, I got to tell you, Seth, they’re not in a good place. Now the thing – obviously, you know how dangerous it is to say that. We’ve talked about this before. Like, what if they attack again? They’re going to attack us again. That’s not the point. The fact is, they cannot apply mass combat power against us, including cataclysmic attacks.

Seth G. Jones: So if you look at al-Qaeda – and we’ll move to other groups in a moment – if you look at al-Qaeda, you know, they’re still around in smaller numbers in Afghanistan. There’s a U.N. report from a couple of months ago that argues that they still have a relationship with the Taliban in that country. We still have al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. They appear to have been involved in the attack in the U.S. in December of 2019 by the Saudi national. There’s al-Qaeda involvement in West Africa. How would you say right now – how is al-Qaeda looking more broadly than just the Syria, Idlib area where we started?

Christopher Miller: I think if you’re an al-Qaeda operative in Afghanistan/Pakistan, all you’re doing right now is trying to stay alive. You’re not long-lived if your make – if you come up in the net in any way, shape, or form. AQ in the Arabian Peninsula, that’s another fascinating thing. They’re having squabbles with the Houthis, the ISIS, the elements there. They’re all fighting each other right now. I’m very, very interested in – I guess my greatest concern, other than acquisition and use of weapons of mass destruction, is what’s going on in West Africa is concerning. Obviously Shabaab in Somalia, we can’t take our eye off of. I think they’re in a little different place right now too. However, they have the intent to, you know, attack us, or attack Western interests.

What I see in West Africa, though, is they’ve learned their lessons well, and they’re innovative. And I’ve really – that’s probably the place that concerns me the most. I’d highlight, you know, we set out to do three things, right? Harden our borders, go overseas and attrite the enemy, take away their safe havens.
And three was to transition to a partner-led, U.S.-enabled – as opposed to the current U.S.-led, partner-enabled. I think what we’re seeing in West Africa is the template for the future. The French are taking lead, Brits are over there. The Defeat ISIS Coalition, a lot of them are there. EU’s there, NATO’s there. I think what we’re seeing there is probably the template for going forward.

A lot of people are like, it’s worse – there are more al-Qaeda and ISIS groups than there were in 2001. I’m like, obviously. We allowed the largest terrorist army in the history of largest history to be created in 2011-12 when we left Iraq prematurely. But with the disaggregation, where they’re all localized, that’s what we want.

Seth G. Jones: Well, it also doesn’t look like they’re plotting attacks against the U.S. homeland from West Africa, at this point anyway.

Christopher Miller: Right.

Seth G. Jones: So if you’re trying to prioritize where we should be most concerned, and we’re hitting targets in Idlib because there is a potential threat from areas like that into the West, I think part of this question that you must have to deal with is, where do you also prioritize where the U.S. should and should not be? And some of that, I would suspect, has to do with where we’re seeing direct threats, external operations, against the U.S.

Christopher Miller: Yeah. I’ve got three lessons I’ve learned in this fight. And they’re bumper stickers, so please excuse me. They’re not academically rigorous. You know, one is you have to maintain pressure on the terrorist networks so that they cannot create sanctuary. Now, the question is how much is that and what’s that look like? That’s a good discussion. Number two is, you know, don’t let states fail – (laughs) – because like we saw in Somalia, I mean, you’re going to take – it’s going to take 30 years and hundreds of billions of dollars to get back to where you were before the state failed. And of course, the third thing is bad policy doesn’t get better with age.

And so what the concern is in West Africa is we have the potential kind of for all three of those things to merge, and we’re back to now having to dig ourselves out of hole like we did in Iraq-Syria in 2014-15. So but the question that I have to struggle – I struggle with and deal with, with our partners – our foreign partners, our interagency colleagues in the United States government, is what’s that look like? And that’s where we are right now, trying to figure: What does that look like? And that’s a good problem to have, I’d argue.

Seth G. Jones: Yeah. Yeah. Moving on just briefly to the Islamic State, or ISIS, one of the things that we’ve done over the last year, the U.S. has done, is killed the leader of the Islamic State. In fact, I think there’s a photograph of you with the president in the Situation Room around the time of the strike against Baghdadi. So just turning to that for a moment, and then we’ll talk about the Islamic State more broadly, what went into the identification and the attack against Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi? And then the second part of that is what was the impact on the organization following his death?
Christopher Miller: Do you want the intelligence community assessment, or do you want my assessment?

Seth G. Jones: I’ll take them both.

Christopher Miller: (Laughs.) Tell you what, that was an epic, epic week. And the way that everything lined up – our counterterrorism forces with their partners had been working on this for ages. And it all – it all came together. And I guess it was amazing to be there and realize the risk that was associated with the decision to fly into contested airspace – I can’t remember how many aircraft went in; eight, 12, I can’t remember. I just remember sitting there and listening to the senior leadership talk about – our senior leadership – talk about when they crossed over into Syrian airspace and what was going to happen, because the Russians had air defense systems up, the Syrians had air defense systems up. And this isn’t like you’re flying through a jungle areas, where you could train, mask. It’s pretty flat, as you well know.

Seth G. Jones: Oh, yeah.

Christopher Miller: And I – the moral and the courage that it took to make the decision, not discounting the physical courage of the assault force. But the decision to do that, when it was determined that the Russians aren’t going to contest and the Syrians weren’t going to contest, it was, like, the most profoundly, like, we could breathe again. I’ll tell you what, we – that shook them to their core, that’s what I saw. And they have not been able to reestablish their command and control. And we’ve kept the pressure on. And ISIS, I feel, is – you know, using our vernacular – they’ve reverted to use Mao Zedong’s, you know, strategy. They’ve reverted to a clandestine cellular network primarily in the desert.

The concern is that we don’t allow them to mass force again. But I think they’re in a bad place. I mean, I’d love your view more than my view, frankly, because I get much more out of listening to you than me talking. However, the fact that they had that just amazing vision of the caliphate. You know, I wonder – I wonder what would have happened if they had decided not to just become so absolutely insane and violent. What would have happened if they actually established – they established the caliphate in Syria and just kind of let it go, and they didn’t become so outrageously violent and just perverted in their – in their orgy of violence?

But, man, hanging everything off that caliphate – what, 80,000 people went there, right? Eighty thousand people went there with this vision. And, boy, when it got perverted and our allies and partners took it apart, I think that pretty much ended the vision of ISIS. Although, I still think they have a very – their vision and their ideology still holds a lot of appeal. That’s what I’m seeing right now. Like, al-Qaeda, I – you know.

Seth G. Jones: When you look at ISIS right now online, would you say they’re still relatively active in running an extremism operation on Telegram and other places? I mean, do they still have – are you still concerned about followers on the virtual world?
Christopher Miller: Oh, remember the days at the height of the caliphate when they were pushing our hundreds of immediate products a day? Now they're just – I don't think they have any English-speaking capability. They're a shell. They're barely keeping their head above water. Absolutely greatest concern without a doubt is homegrown violent extremists, those that are inspired – that have seen, you know, Awlaki – I know that's al-Qaeda – but they've been exposed to this stuff online, and self-radicalized. Those are the ones that obviously – and FBI's – that's our concern. Because that's been the major threat against the United States.

Seth G. Jones: That has been the major threat. But there does look like there's been somewhat of a drop in the number of attacks, at least. I mean, we've obviously had – over the past couple of years – we've had Pulse nightclub in Orlando. We've had San Bernardino. But what is your broader sense of the threat to the U.S. homeland from – whether it's al-Qaeda, whether it's the Islamic State, or other jihadist groups – what's the threat, whether it's directed attack or whether it's one that's simply inspired in the U.S.? How serious of a threat is it today?

Christopher Miller: Still fundamental part of their doctrine, and their vision, and their purpose for existence. Obviously, I personally – I mean, I have my phone on me 24/7 waiting for, you know, the alert that something's happened. Of course, COVID-19's caused problems because nobody's traveling right now. That's been a benefit to help us catch up on some stuff. But you know, you have to be, like, logical. And you have to take – and it's hard, because of course it was the defining event of our generation, right? I mean, 2001 and September 11th changed our lives – yours, mine, a whole generation.

So it's very difficult for us to say, like, hey, let's look at this logically. Absolutely concerned about their ideology. Terrified that they are going to have a major attack. Remember, it took six years to plan 9/11. And we could be in year six for the next great thing. I'm very concerned about that. But when you look at it, they have not been able to project combat power. Our strategy is working. They are on the run. They're disaggregated. They're just trying to stay alive, but they're still aspirational. And, as you noted, the online space is kind of their key terrain right now. So very concerned about that.

Seth G. Jones: If you were sitting as the equivalent NCTC director in Europe, would you have the same assessment, or do you – is your judgement that the threat is higher, at least in some European capitals?

Christopher Miller: Absolutely, because they – we know they can project combat power into Europe. We know that. That – (laughs) – major concern there. Just a sidebar – there are some people – you know, we're in great-power competition in the United States right now. And that's all right. Counterterrorism is not that important. I'll tell you what, when I travel over there and I talk to my foreign partners, terrorism's still at the top of their list. Sure, they have to – there in Europe they have to think about Russia. I get that. China, they're like, oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. Unless you in Asia. But terrorism's still a major priority for them.

Seth G. Jones: I wanted to turn to an issue – you brought up Russia, for example. I want to turn to the issue of state ties. The National Security Strategy, the National Defense Strategy have shifted the focus of U.S. national security away from a major focus
on counterterrorism – that's the way the NDS phrases it roughly – to state-based competition. So what many people do when they see that is they say: We no longer care. We no longer care as much about counterterrorism, and we want to focus on what the Russians, the Chinese, the North Koreans, and to some degree the Iranians are doing – particularly at the conventional level.

But the reality, I think – and this is where I want to have a conversation about it – the reality is, when you look at the Iranians, the IRGC, particularly the Quds Force, is very active in working with Lebanese Hezbollah, very active in working with the Hashd al-Shaabi and the militia groups in Iraq, and the Houthis in Yemen. The Russians worked closely with Hezbollah in Syria, including around Aleppo. They were a major component of the ground – of Russian ground operations – in Syria.

So the question here is: What is your sense about this? Is there a false divide between great-power competition and counterterrorism? And how much of there is actually an overlap that some of our adversaries – maybe all of them – are working or will likely work with terrorist groups now and in the foreseeable future?

Christopher Miller: I love that question. We talk about that and argue about it all the time. I get the sense – you know, National Counterterrorism Center's supposed to be looking out a couple ridgelines. We're not supposed to be, like, looking, like, at the immediate threat, because we have – we have people that do that in the intelligence community, and the Department of Defense, and with partners. I got to think, if I was – no one would let me write this piece because, you know, I'm not a good writer. You know that. But I think where we are – if we project out five years the highlights that you just noted, I think we're going to see – you never want to be, like, we're going to refight the Cold War. I hate that too. We're not – we're not – shame on us if we refight the Cold War. That's kind of astrategic.

But I think we're going to see a greater connection. I think we're going to go back to the '70s and '80s where you had Baader-Meinhof, Red Brigades being supported by nation-states. You know, remember, we had East Germans, we had the Russians – (laughs) – Iranians of course not so much then.

Seth G. Jones: The Cubans, the Libyans.

Christopher Miller: The Cubans, Libyans, remember those days? Seth, I got to tell you, I think that's what we're going to revert back to, where – because we're not going to go force on force. That's ridiculous. Why would anybody fight us force on force? They're going to use these irregular tools and these irregular techniques to try to, you know, gain advantage on us. That's where I am.

Seth G. Jones: So what does that actually mean for the National Counterterrorism Center? Does that change the way you look or think or act? If you're – do you migrate away from only purely the counterterrorism of the post-9/11 years? Do you start to integrate the relationship between states and nonstate actors?

Christopher Miller: Our northern star, of course, is the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004 – got to throw that one in there. So, you know, we're
very much bounded by our remit, which is terrorism, counterterrorism. There's
talk, though. We've really mastered the ability to bring all these disparate
information sources together, all these different capabilities together for not just
planning but for identities resolution, for looking at future threats. And it seems
logical that we shouldn't throw all those things away in the things that we've
learned. A lot of them could be applied against other threat actors.

Let's use counter-narcotics, as the classic example. I mean, 71,000 Americans
are being killed every year by illicit drugs being – primarily coming in from
south of our border. You know, one could conjecture the things that we've
learned in the counterterrorism business – where we merge data and find
opportunities – could be applied to other things. But that, of course, would be a
discussion for Congress and others.

Seth G. Jones:

Yeah. One follow up along these lines is – and we talked about the Baghdad
strike earlier. The U.S. also targeted Qassem Soleimani, the head of the IRGC –
Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps – Quds Force, the paramilitary arm of the
IRGC. And, you know, there's been a debate about what the impact has been on
Iran, what the impact has been on the IRGC Quds Force.

There have been some that argue that his replacement, Ismail Qaani – who was
his deputy before that – has taken the organization in the same direction that it
was under Soleimani. They're continuing to operate with substate actors in
Lebanon, in Syria, in Iraq, and Afghanistan, and Yemen, and other locations.
There are some that have argued that it has impacted – at least at the
operational and tactical level maybe even strategically – Iran. It's deterred them
from conducting action. Where do you stand on the impact of Soleimani, and
what it's done, if anything, to the Iranians?

Christopher Miller:

Remarkable figure, wasn't he? I mean, truly charismatic, visionary. Took an
organization and really created this whole irregular warfare capabilities, pretty –
from just a strictly professional sense you have kind of be like, wow, he had – he
got it. His elimination, I think, has been very detrimental to the Iranian regime.
But remember, they still march on us. You talked about Lebanese Hezbollah.
What they've done – remember, the Shia militant groups that they're supporting
in Iraq are a direct result of our failure to maintain pressure on al-Qaeda in Iraq
when we withdrew in 2011.

And so you know, that's exactly what we're – what we need to – we need to pay
attention to. I find the Iranians – I think they understand, though. I get the sense
they understand that there's a line they can go up to, but if they cross that line, I
mean, it's all hands on deck. It's going to be really, really bad. I know that's
probably some deterrence theory thing. I don't know.

Seth G. Jones:

It is.

Christopher Miller:

So very concerning. And I think they still feel like they owe us payback for
Soleimani. But we haven't seen that, other than the missile attack into –

Seth G. Jones:

That happened right after.

Christopher Miller:

Yeah.
Seth G. Jones: Yeah. Now, how about the Russians? There’s been concern about the Russians. They have a relationship with Hezbollah. They worked – the Russians conducted strikes from aircraft and Kalibr cruise missiles from maritime vessels. And Hezbollah, among others, were on the ground in and around Aleppo. There’s also been – there have been accusations that the Russians have worked with the Taliban, among others. To what degree are you seeing the Russians increasingly involved in these kinds of activities? Lots of – I should add – lots of Russians popping up, including private military contractors in Libya and Central African Republic. So, to what degree do you see the Russians increasingly involved in these kinds of activities as well?

Christopher Miller: I find them very opportunistic in seeing places where they can play a really, really bad hand of cards and try to get some benefits out of it. I think we saw that in Syria. You know, Putin clearly has set up a competition within his own, you know, services to see who can do more. So whether it’s a monolithic approach or whether it’s opportunistic, I dare say I – you know, if you’re working for Wagner I probably wouldn’t mass forces and go against Westerners or Americans if you’re in Syria, because that had a very deleterious effect on their force structure when they decided to challenge us.

Seth G. Jones: They lost about 300 – Wagner Group contractors.

(Break.)

But as you look at it right now, is there always a clear distinction between domestic and international? The reason I ask that is some of the groups that I just mentioned, or networks that I just mentioned, have people in – have relationships with others in Europe. We’ve seen attacks in New Zealand, and they communicate with each other. How much of a distinction is there now between international and domestic?

Christopher Miller: I mean, that’s the – is it $68,000 question? Is it – or is it – is that the right one? That was a TV show. Remember?

Seth G. Jones: It can be whatever you want to put on it.

Christopher Miller: That’s – that’s’ the big question that we are hyper-focused on that, to determine – because our remit – FBI’s got domestic, all the law enforcement. We support FBI, Department of Homeland Security when requested. What we really hyper focus on is what you just brought up, was the links. And this explosion of media, primarily social media and collaborative communications platforms, has fundamentally changed how we do things. Where back in the day, you know, probably in the ’70s or ’80s, none of this is new. We know that, if we look at our history. Domestic violence for political goals is, well, heck, one could argue the republic was created that way. That’s not to say – not – you know, supporting any violent acts. That’s not my point. You know, I have to be really careful about that.

However, you know, in the old days they probably had a xerox machine, or they had one of those mimeograph machines – ka-ching, ka-ching – and you, you
know, sent your self-addressed stamped envelope to some whack job group. And they communicated that way. Well, now obviously they just get online. So we do see some connectivity. What we haven't seen yet is organized – like, where you see foreign terrorist organizations supporting or directing domestic groups. We have seen some instances of Westerners going over, Russian Imperial Movement. They've been designated as a state-designated terrorist group. So when the intel backs it up, those places are going to get designated.

Haven't seen monolithic, though. Haven't seen something that is deliberate, strategic, organized in that fashion. But obviously one would think, if you're an irregular warfare genius sitting in Russia someplace, you probably think about whether you could exploit that.

(Break.)

Seth G. Jones: You know, there have been some accusations that the Russians have trained some number of extremists in areas like eastern Ukraine or have been involved in highlighting messages. To what degree have you seen the Russians involved in this area at all?

Christopher Miller: That's it. That's the question, right? Whether it's being directed or controlled by – formally by the government, or whether it's just this kind of leaderless thing that we predicted for years, and Sageman and others predicted. You know, obviously it was "Leaderless Jihad," but that's kind of where we are. I think a lot of these groups recognize the worst thing they could do is have an office on Rhode Island Avenue, and a Post Office box, and a financial, you know, bank account. So, they obviously have modified their organizational structure and how they do things. But that's the key thing that we're trying to keep our eyes on. Haven't seen it yet.

Seth G. Jones: So when you look at the threat – the threat of terrorism to the U.S. homeland, in the United States – how do you rack and stack your concerns when you look at al-Qaeda, the Islamic State, some of the Shia groups including Hezbollah, when you look at these kinds of domestic organizations – again, anarchists, Atomwaffen, The Base? How do you rack and stack which ones you consider today – and potentially over the next five years – the most concerning? What should Americans be most concerned about in the broader milieu of terrorist groups?

Christopher Miller: We're chartered for international. Domestically the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Department of Homeland Security has a long – well, FBI has a long history of interdicting and taking care of domestic threats. I have all the confidence in the world that they will continue to do that. Foreign-wise – I guess my major concern is not so much – I'm kind of group agnostic. I'm more concerned that we're going to let up too soon. We're going to disinvest of this – we hope to be at a transition point, you know, to go from the strategic offensive to the strategic defensive, which I noted earlier. We're not quite there yet. We still have – there are still groups that can project terrorist attacks into the United States or against United States interests. But eventually, if we continue down – continue to apply the resources that we are now, we are going to put them in a place where they can no longer conduct a catastrophic attack against the United States.
My concern is that we're going to disinvest too soon. We're going to – and you
know how the United States government is. You've worked – (laughs) – as well,
where, like, next shiny object, OK, where's the money going to go? Oh, now it's
carrier battle groups, I imagine, or the F-35, or something like that. Our
investment is so small that we do not want to let what – we've got to maintain
pressure until we're in a position where we can create an enduring defeat and
we don't have to deal with this anymore.

Seth G. Jones: So along those lines, the last question is – where were you on 9/11? Were you in
Afghanistan? Or you were there not long after?

Christopher Miller: Fort Campbell, Kentucky, with the special forces group.

Seth G. Jones: And then when were you in Afghanistan first?

Christopher Miller: Thanksgiving Day, 2001 I took the last group over from fifth special forces group.
On the 5th of December we had a friendly fire incident in southern Afghanistan
with Hamid Karzai who was there. And I went in to replace the element that had
been destroyed.

Seth G. Jones: So if you go back to that time period in November of 2001, and then you fast-
forward to today, would you say you'd be relatively happy where we are today in
the protection of the homeland from the threat of terrorism? We're doing a
pretty good job?

Christopher Miller: I think we don't give ourselves enough credit. I think we owe it to the American
people to give them an honest assessment. I can tell you, I'm very comfortable
and confident in what we've done. There is – you know, we talked, this is going
to be a generational war. We all agreed that. The goal is not to be a
multigenerational war. I think al-Qaeda's senior leadership will be destroyed
soon. You know, there are command and control cells in Tehran. Does that – I
find that amazing, but, you know, we have to deal with the situation –

Seth G. Jones: Folks like Saif al-Adel and others?

Christopher Miller: Yeah. I mean, what the – I mean, a Sunni-based insurgent group, Seth, is being
hosted by their archenemy?

Seth G. Jones: The enemy of your enemy is your friend?

Christopher Miller: I'm glad you brought it in. You know, I tried the Sun Tzu one. And then you
brought in – like, that's like – what is that Confucius or something?

Seth G. Jones: I don't know.

Christopher Miller: That was good.

Seth G. Jones: If it's not, it should be.

Christopher Miller: That was good. So but, you know, we can't – we've developed this world-class
 capability to protect us. They're going – there are going to be attacks again,
right? I mean, it’s inevitable. They just have – what’s that – I know the terrorist dilemma is somebody else. Our terrorist dilemma is, what, we have to be right every time. They just have to be right once. But you know what? The American people are resoundingly resilient. And I think they recognize that. The point is, we cannot allow them to conduct a major attack that changes our way of life. And I feel very confident right now that I can say the United States government, with great partnerships from likeminded people around the world, I think we’re in a good place. But we can’t give up the fight. We have to keep the pressure on.

Seth G. Jones: Well, Director Miller, thank you very much for taking the time, really appreciate your insights. And I think if we were – we were to look back at this time period, we – the U.S. is – should – the U.S. population should be very appreciative of the work you and the rest of the interagency is doing to protect them from terrorism. So thank you for what you're doing, and thanks to all of the team members. In my experience, it's all the team members that actually don't get credit, don't want public credit, don't want their names to be identified publicly, they're a lot of the ones who are working day to day. And thanks to all of them as well.

Christopher Miller: Thank you for hosting this. And thank you for your continued support as we go on with this. So really appreciate it, Dr. Jones.

Seth G. Jones: Thank you.

(END)