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TRANSCRIPT

"FIFTEEN YEARS OF FIGHTING TERROR: LESSONS FOR THE 2016 U.S. PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES"

A conversation with Larry Attree, Sarah Chayes, and Richard Fontaine

Moderator: Scott Shane

Recorded Feb. 1, 2016

ANNOUNCER:

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WENDY PATTEN:

On behalf of everyone here at the Open Society Foundations, I'd like to welcome you to our offices and to today's event on *Lessons Learned From 15 Years of Fighting Terror*. My name is Wendy Patten. And-- we are delighted to be co-hosting this event with Saferworld, which is a nongovernmental organization based in the U.K. and working in more than 20 countries around the world.

They also have a presence here in Washington. And their office is headed by David Alpher, who is here with us today sitting over there. Welcome David, and welcome to the whole Saferworld team. You will be hearing more from the panel about the release of their three reports today on Afghanistan, Somalia and Yemen.

And-- what I'm going to do is turn it over to our moderator. We are very pleased to have Scott Shane as our moderator today. Scott is a national security reporter at the *New York Times* where he has covered national security since 2004. And he is the author of three books, including most recently a book called *Objective Troy: A Terrorist, a President and The Rise of The Drone*, which is about the life and death by drone strike of Al Qaeda recruiter and U.S. citizen Anwar al-Awlaki. Scott will

introduce the session and our panelists. And he will moderate the discussion with the panelists and with all of you. Scott.

SCOTT SHANE:

Thanks, Wendy. So thanks to Open Society for put-- putting this together and to Saferworld for these-- three terrific reports. Let me just introduce our distinguished panel. Larry Attree is head of policy for Saferworld and actually is the author of one of the reports, the one on Yemen called *Blown Back*.

He is-- he's got more than 13 years of experience in conflict prevention and peace building and has played a role in civil society inputs into global negotiations, including the *New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States*, the Busan partnership, and the *Post-2015 Development Framework*. He's worked on peace security involvement with a variety of U.N. and other international agencies, N.G.O.s and the corporate sector.

Sara Chayes is now a senior associate in the Democracy and Rule of Law program and the South Asia program at the Carnegie Endowment. Many of you like-- like me probably remember her great reporting as the NPR correspondent in Afghanistan. But unlike the rest of us journalists-- she turned out to have other skills. (LAUGHTER)

And she's run a business in Kandahar. She's been special advisor to the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. She's an expert on South Asia policy, kleptocracy, and anticorruption, and civil military relations. And she's the author of a book called *Thieves of State: Why Corruption Threatens Global Security*. And she's particularly interested in the relationship between acute public corruption and the rise of militant extremism.

And on the end, on the other end there-- Richard Fontaine is the president of another Washington think tank, the Center For a New American Security. He's-- been senior advisor and senior fellow at-- C.N.A.S. from 2009 to 2012. And some of you may remember that he was foreign policy advisor to Senator John McCain for more than five years.

Prior to joining C.N.A.S., he worked at the State Department-- under Richard Armitage and in the South Asia bureau working on issues related to India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. He's also worked on the National Security Council and the staff of Senate Foreign Relations. So with-- with those introductions, I'm gonna turn it over to Larry who's going to give us sort of an overview as I understand of these three reports.

LARRY ATTREE:

Great. Well-- thanks very much-- Scott. It's great to be here. And thanks for joining us too, my fellow panelists. I-- apologize in advance. I'm probably a bit croaky today-- which is further evidence that when-- America suffers a blizzard, the rest of the world catches cold. (LAUGHTER)

So I've just flown in from Europe. And for the last few months, leaders in Europe have been-- having-- probably fairly familiar conversation about counterterrorism. Pushing for air strikes and military efforts to wipe out Islamic State. In the U.K.-- the focus has been on air strikes-- over Syria, and also whether the U.K. is going to go down the road of using drone attacks including on our own citizens. We've also been debating arming allies to fight, not only Islamic State but also-- groups like the Houthis who are now being branded as terrorists by the British government.

So it's been a polarizing debate-- over there. And-- and critics of tactics like these-- who have raised concerns also about feeding into the causes of terrorism have been branded quite readily as terrorist sympathizers. Basically, European leaders seem to be pushing similar rhetoric-- to a lot of what we had-- feeding into the global war on terror after the 9/11 attacks on the U.S. And it feels slightly odd.

It feels like coming to the U.S., actually people have been moving on in the conversation and learning things over the last few years. So-- we all know that Iraq and Afghanistan have proved much more complicated wu-- than was ever imagined-- at the beginning.

President Obama has also made efforts to shift the country off a war footing-- in the last couple of years. And then (COUGH) there's been this work by the White House on a countering violent extremism-- strategy, which has tried to shine a bit more attention on some of the causes of violent extremism. But you can also say, "Well, things haven't changed that much. I mean, looking from outside, the U.S. does also still seem pretty militarily assertive. So is the Obama approach really one-- f-- quite tough militarism confront and conceal, as I think it's been put-- in one piece of work.

There's also, you know, obviously a very clear-- focus on combating the terror threat as a top priority for the U.S. And with a new presidential debate-- kicking in in full swing-- many of the candidates believe the U.S. should be focusing more on terrorism and strengthening the military. So we're coming back to questions of whether a return to carpet bombing against Islamic State would prove more successful than ultimately approved against the Vietcong or in Cambodia.

Similarly, other takeaways from the last 15 years, that there weren't enough troops on the ground for long enough in Iraq or in Afghanistan. Or are we looking for lessons of a different kind, which ask us more fundamental questions about strategy? So this is what we're really getting at from Saferworld's point of view.

We're concerned that on both sides of the Atlantic, the conversations haven't really drawn enough on the evidence of, how is it working out, what-- what's been going on over the last 15 years. So-- we're-- we're putting on the table some evidence that asks the question about whether we need a better strategy which is really focused more effectively on achieving a lasting peace. And that's what these three reports that we're releasing today-- are about.

So we're looking at counter-terror stabilization and state-building efforts in Afghanistan, Somalia and Yemen. And in each case-- we did a four-step process. Basically we analyzed what's driving conflict in these contexts. We looked at

international approaches. Then we put the two together to say, "Okay, what have the impacts been of international approaches on the conflict drivers?" And finally, we pulled out some-- lessons and recommendations-- with policy implications.

So-- I'm gonna try and tell the story. There's a lot of material, but across the three, what are the common threads? So in all three of these case studies, counter-terror objectives were sort of in a prime position. And military approaches-- have predominated to the context. So that tends to have crowded out the focus on things like effective conflict management or human security and peace building.

And we've also seen-- the direct use of force-- to different degrees in each place, sure. But a pattern where, okay sometimes forces push back militants but in all three cases fail to defeat them and to secure peace. And also lots of evidence around the use of violence. So especially indiscriminate and undacoun-- unaccountable violence. But violence anyway has caused harm to civilians and created a lot of resentment on the ground.

So one example in Afghanistan-- the tactics like civilian casualties, night raids, house searches-- drone strikes, rendition, torture all created resentment among the population. And that contributed-- to support for the Taliban and associated groups. And then lessons were learned around that. So efforts to reduce civilian casualties. To switch to a Cohen strategy that was-- less just about the military, more about-- civilian tactics.

But the tension between military and non-military objectives never really absolved. Never really a sense that there's actually a really concrete political strategy underpinning what's going on for ending the conflict, and a focus on the things that are really driving-- the-- the problems that continue to make Afghanistan a dangerous place today. So after years of intense military efforts, the Taliban continues to achieve military successes in the recent months. I'm sure Sarah will tell you more about that.

And in Yemen-- and the drones-related aspects of the strategy. There have been air strikes-- for many years to attack Al Qaeda in Yemen, and they did kill some significant Al Qaeda operatives on the ground. But ultimately, even what is claimed to be that precision instrument for going after-- terrorists has-- generated huge resentment in Yemen and ultimately also fed into-- support for anti-Western militants.

And some of the dynamics around these strikes like-- local media describing drone attacks as massacres, jihadi online fora containing vict-- ims-- bodies graphically displayed. Al Qaeda grieving with victims' families, accusing the U.S. of war against all Muslims. Some really ne-- negative-- kickback against-- these tactics. So the military approach is not really achieving their aims. In the wake of them also I think a key strand across these reports is how crucial drivers of conflict were-- put in second place compared to going after-- terrorism and the military tactics.

So-- the way that all of-- you know, the Western partners have been operating in these contexts tend to have been about keeping partners on board-- by

compromising-- our abuse to-- our opposition to abuse, corruption and bad government. So-- one example of this is in Somalia where again the focus has been on defeating al-Shabaab militants.

But then-- local actors are able to capitalize on the currency that (COUGH) the terrorist label then-- get to in Somalia. And-- and the federal government of Somalia in particular has been able to secure lots of-- military security and aid resources-- as a kind of bastion against al-Shabaab. But in 2012, a U.N. panel accused the federal government of Somalia of basically diverting 70% to 80% of the resources it was receiving for purposes that advance partisan agendas that constitute threats to peace and security.

So big questions on the partnership strategy and the blind eye that's been shown to these levels of corruption and abuse. In Afghanistan, you have a similar story, so to establish stability. And the ministries of interior, defense, foreign affairs, and the national director of security were all given to known warlords in the first two post-Taliban administrations. And-- the consequences are in the report, but they're fairly obvious.

In Yemen-- again, a context where instability-- has really been driven over the years much more by abusive and corrupt governments than it ever has been by terrorism. And yet, years of working with-- deeply cr-- kleptocratic dysfunctional state to combat terrorism. And even after the transition came in to-- to solve all that-- public unrest and dissatisfaction that came in-- came out in the Arab Spring-- the tr-- transition government was given huge-- resources to carry on. It was gonna combat terror and address some of these grievances.

But ultimately it was quite inept in dealing with Al Qaeda and deeply corrupt. So the 2014 budget of the Yemen government was ten-- was three times greater than that of-- 2004. But most of it went into a black hole of spending, virtually nothing being spent on addressing-- public goods.

So in all of these contexts, the pattern is that by aiding and abetting abuse, corruption, and bad governance, Western actors fell into what we call the stabilization trap. Basically trading away a long-term focus on rights and governance for short-term stability, but ultimately guaranteeing abusive governance, chronic instability, and deep public resentment, the very outcomes that they were seeking-- to avoid.

Regional partners have also been problematic. So-- one quick example. But-- obviously Kenya as part of A.M.I.S.O.M., keeping peace on Somalia-- part of the efforts to combat al-Shabaab. And you would think that Kenya had a very clear agenda there on-- dealing with al-Shabaab. But a recent report alleged that the Kenyan defense forces-- the interim Juba administration and al-Shabaab were all sharing in profits from facilitating and taxing the Somali sugar trade valued at $200 to $400 million a year.

But because Western forces need access to-- Kenyan military facilities, they need Kenya on board. It's proved hard for them to challenge-- the counterproductive

behavior of the Kenyan military in-- in the way that-- that they might like. So I mean, across all these examples, the military side of things not really working. A blind eye to some of the core drivers of conflict in these places. The thing that really strikes you is lacking across all three case studies is consistent long-term engagement with society for them to shape this-- this-- the states and societies that they really want and need.

In Somalia, this has been really-- problematic. Many Somalis are skeptical and fearful of the state, for good reason. And-- it's really critical to allow then processes to find political accommodations, negotiation, reconciliation-- so that people can become comfy with the state structures that are being set up in Somalia.

But international pressure to complete peace building and state building processes quickly and on time has in some cases curtailed that time for reconciliation and negotiation. And there's been violence-- in several places over the establishment of-- new administrations. So what do we make of all this? Basically, what we're putting on the table for discussion-- here and I-- I hope to-- get into with you all in the panel are three takeaways.

We're suggesting that to actually advance the cause of peace in these places, we need a new approach to terror and security threats. And that approach needs to be less reliant on the military and more focused strategically on peace as the ultimate objective.

Secondly, we need to be more discerning about the partners that we're working with and tougher on abuse, corruption and bad governance, these core central drivers of conflict in all of the places we're looking at and indeed around the world. And thirdly-- to enable that, we need to be more focused on working with societies to achieve just and lasting peace. So-- there's much more detail to talk about around those recommendations. But I'll leave it there. Thank you. (APPLAUSE)

SCOTT SHANE:

Thanks Larry. That's a lot to-- chew on. You know, one of the things that impressed me about these three reports is, as somebody who's covered-- s-- the-- the so-called "war on terrorism" or the "campaign against terrorism--" for the duration since 9/11-- I-- it struck me how rarely the government has actually stepped back and said, "What is the net effect of all these different things that we've done?"

That's been true under Bush. It's been true under Obama. Sometimes I've wondered if it was-- because they were a little afraid of what they might find out if they did an-- such an assessment. And these reports might encourage that conclusion. (THROAT CLEARING) To start the discussion off, let me make an observation about these reports.

The-- sort of this is an impression that I got from all three. One-- it's-- sort of two different things. One is that the-- the view from the United States is so different from the view from within Somalia, Yemen and Afghanistan. And-- the U.S. view is so narrowly focused on U.S. security, perhaps inevitably. That's basically all we care

about.

And-- and that's why-- you-- you know, basically-- if you look at the presidential campaign, for example, nobody is talking about corruption or poverty in these countries. Everybody's talking, if they're talking about these countries at all, it's purely in a counter-terrorism context. And so-- so one of the questions would be, "How do you get away from that kind of mono-dimensional approach to these countries?"

And a related question. I guess I was also, when I got to the recommendations-- of all three reports, they're strikingly similar. And they're, you know, con-- very convincing, very laudable. But to wo-- the idea of working on a just and lasting peace, very few people are against that. But, you know, what do you do this afternoon? What do you do tomorrow? Cracking down on corruption sort of similarly, improving bad governance.

These are very-- these are taking on intractable-- problems that-- you know, apart from any security implications, they're enormous challenges. So-- I mean, to me it's a little bit like saying that if you want to k-- you know, reduce the number of homicides in American cities, you should really improve the public schools and tackle child poverty. All that's true, but it doesn't really give you a pragmatic-- program for the next president's first year. So I guess I'd ask all three of you to take a shot at-- the question of pragmatism and of what this stuff looks like from the-- from the U.S. And how you can get the U.S. to sort of think more broadly.

SARAH CHAYES:

Could I?

SCOTT SHANE:

Yeah, jump in.

SARAH CHAYES:

I-- I'd love to jump in, because-- because it connects to one of the ways I would have even slightly recast how Larry, and it's your reports, so who am I to recast them, right? But how you described-- these three reports, which I think are-- are remarkable and I think together present a really important body of evidence that affect kind of the three flagship countries in terms of terrorism.

But the way you were putting it-- Larry, almost seemed to reinforce the sort of U.S. national security terrorism on the one hand as one imperative versus the sort of peace and happiness of the local population imperative. I-- I don't think you meant that, but it almost that that's sort of how your-- that if we really cared about the wellbeing

of the-- the people in Somalia, we wouldn't focus so much on a military response to terrorism.

And-- and I don't think that's actually what the reports, I mean, they-- they-- they do also suggest that. But even more critically from a U.S. national security perspective, what they show is that by not focusing on these issues, the terrorism problem and the threat to the U.S. national security has increased rather than decreasing.

So that to me is the key takeaway from these three reports, is that the only way to improve-- to-- to reduce the terrorist threat against the U.S. homeland is by focusing on in particular the underlying governance issues of these countries and that in each case, the short-term terrorism-- imperative have-- has trumped those-- those concerns. And so in-- in, so-- so that brings a different light onto the pragmatism question. It's completely unpragmatic to not address these questions. Because what we're doing by-- by-- by putting so much-- energy, money, personnel, brain power into a variety of different ways of killing people.

And that's really what it comes down-- I mean, the only difference really between the Bush and Obama administrations, I'm gonna be really provocative here-- is not the degree to which we militarized the problem. It's just the way we militarized it. It's, you know, targeted and secret instead of big and-- and-- heavy handed. And so by d-- doing that has proven to be incredibly unpragmatic. Just unbelievably unpragmatic. It set the short-term security goal eith-- even further out of reach.

SCOTT SHANE:

Can I-- can I ask Richard to weigh in on that?

SARAH CHAYES:

Yes.

SCOTT SHANE:

Do you agree?

RICHARD FONTAINE:

Not necessarily. (THROAT CLEARING) And I guess that's probably why I'm here. You know, the-- the-- the reports try to make a case that not only has the terrorism problem not been solved by a security-focused approach in Yemen, Somalia and Afghanistan, but that it's actually been counterproductive. That-- that our security is, we are worse off from a security perspective.

That the terrorism problem is worse because of our actions. There's n-- I don't see in

the report any evidence-- behind that-- assertion. So I'd be interested in sort of what the evidence is for that. But I also think that's the wrong way to think about the analysis.

If you go in the first part, "Well, Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula still exist in Yemen; therefore, our activities have been either useless or counterproductive, if even worse. Well, the Taliban still exists in Afghanistan; therefore-- it's been useless or adverse-- counterproductive and so forth."

I think you have to apply the counterfactual, which is to say, "Would Al Qaeda be launching more attacks from Afghanistan had the United States not toppled the government of the Taliban in 2001 and engaged in the security activities (UNINTEL PHRASE) there or not? And in Yemen, would Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula be-- more widespread and more active and more of a threat to the United States, had we not engaged in military activities there? Or-- or if we had sort of only-- pursued peace?"

And so I think that is-- is the-- the question with respect to this, the claim. But I do agree with Sarah-- about there is a false dichotomy that we shouldn't fall into where you have security on the one hand and governance on the other. The two have to go in hand and hand. And just as security measures in the absence of efforts to improve governance are not gonna stick, so too governance in the absence of security measures are not gonna be effective. Because if the security gets bad enough, you can' have basic governance. And we've seen this in a number of countries as well.

And so I think they have to go hand in hand, and we have to make-- decisions about-- whether to take either military or nonmilitary-- measures into account based on what we think a likely outcome is gonna be-- the way those two things interact.

SCOTT SHANE:

Larry, you want to-- Richard suggests that-- the reports may be wrong in-- in implying that-- you, you know, U.S. security-- mil-- military measures and security measures overall have been counterproductive. What-- what-- what do you think the reports say on that? What does your report on Yemen say on that, for example?

LARRY ATTREE:

Well, I think one of the difficult things in conflict prevention and peace building is that-- you don't necessarily have counterfactuals. So in the end there are-- value judgments that are needed to be made around-- strategy. But I think if you-- look for instance at the trends in Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula growing in size over the-- over the period when-- it was claimed that-- targeted killings would-- eliminate-- some of their people.

If you look at the policy of arming allies in-- in Yemen and what the arms were used for, as well as the fact that-- significant amounts of U.S. equipment supplied-- to face

off-- enemies of the government in Yemen are now in the hands of the reb-- rebel groups which the U.S. is arming, further allies-- to bomb.

And also, you look at Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula seizing weapons from multiple army (UNINTEL) in-- in-- in Yemen over the-- the last few months unopposed, I don't think the-- actual probative is on some of the critics of counter-terror policies to really prove that they haven't been successful. I think it's the self-evident-- facts that if the-- enemies in all of these contexts remain undefeated after all these years, we should be asking questions about whether we can have-- better approaches.

SCOTT SHANE:

Okay. So-- so-- so let me ask-- all the panelists a question, which is-- and this-- this is sort of to put the-- to-- to try to look at the 15 years in a way that we don't usually look at it, which is sort of collectively. And you started to do that. But you-- you know, we-- we started with a problem before 9/11 of-- certain number of people who believed the U.S. was at war with Islam, that they were at war with the U.S. and that violence was justified and-- you know-- 9/11 was the result.

I think, you know, most of who cover this field think the U.S. is actually quite safe from another 9/11-style attack because of, you know, huge amounts of money spent and changes made-- on many fronts. But-- you know, which again from the kind of-- singular American focus on-- on American security, Homeland Security, is a very positive thing.

But what would the three of you think about the question of the size of the pool of people who now basically agree with Osama bin Laden-- that the U.S. is at war with Islam and you-- you know, should be attacked? That Americans are fair game-- (THROAT CLEARING) that we're at war, and it's over religion.

And-- because I think in a way that's a way of getting at the-- the larger progress-- you-- you know, over the 15 years in-- on the security issue. I'd just be interested in the three of you, your how-- how you feel, how you would assess the size of the ideological enemy I guess you could call it, the-- the size of-- of the pool of people out there in the globe?

SARAH CHAYES:

I'd like to nuance that just a little bit, but let me start from the perspective of on the ground in Kandahar. So there-- the first really big civilian casualty event was in 2002. It was-- bombing of a wedding party in Oruzgan. And I drove up there and-- and, you know, I mean there were various issues.

And-- and, you know, I mean, there were various issues. Even later, I remember there was another pretty big one outside Kandahar in about 2000-and-maybe-7, something like that. And what was really interesting, so I ran a cooperative with men and

women and we were making skin care products. And we talked about everything that happened. And what was really fascinating was, the hospitals were overflowing with people after this event. And my cooperative members were basically saying, "How dare they come to our hospitals? These are antigovernment people. They're Taliban sympathizers. How dare they come running to the government?"

Meaning, there was actually even as late as 2006 quite a significant-- I want to say understanding that civilian casualties happen in war. Where it starts to turn is where the civilian casualties are experienced as not being part of something that is helping the people, and in particular is in-- on behalf of a government that is just as hostile to the people's interests as-- as the Taliban in this case where.

And so the-- how I'd like to nuance what you suggested is it's not, at least in my experience-- both on the ground in a number of these countries-- although not Somalia and Yemen, but Nigeria in particular, Afghanistan and a couple others. It's not exclusively, "This is war against Islam." It's that it's a kind of notion of command responsibility, which is a notion in humanitarian law. Which is we are, the United States and its Western allies, are to some extent-- co-responsible for the abuses perpetrated by the governments on behalf of which we are seen to be-- doing some of this fighting.

And so there-- there-- there can come to be a sort of straight religious, "They're doing-- they're doing war against Islam." But that's not the only dynamic. It's even wider than that. It-- it has to do with the degree to which we are associated with a whole raft of abuses-- on the part of the gov-- these governments.

And if you read even basic Al Qaeda-- literature, that's what Osama bin Laden was saying. Initially, it wasn't that-- it wasn't that he disliked the West because we weren't Muslim. It's he dislikes the West and the U.S. government for its role propping up the government of Saudi Arabia and other similar governments.

RICHARD FONTAINE:

Yeah we just had-- (THROAT CLEARING) I mean, I think what Sarah is getting at is fundamentally a question of legitimacy, right? We have to be-- supporting and be seen as supporting a legitimate government, or it's a fool's errand. And we can-- we have been in situations where we have been supporting what we believed to be legitimate governments.

But over time they lost legitimacy in the eyes of the people, not only because of civilian-- civilian casualties but a whole bunch of other reasons, corruption being at the very top. And, you know, the Taliban may be seen as less corrupt-- you know-- A.Q.A.P. may be seen as less corrupt. I.S.I.S. may be seen as less corrupt. It's not much, but it's something if everything around you is corrupt. Right?

And-- and so you have those kinds of problems with the, I mean, again this is another way of describing the governance problem. That I think the-- the big challenge is, you know, make them more-- legitimate. Make them govern better. How do we do that?

And so that, you know, again, I don't think it's a trade-off necessarily between, you know, we either do some security or we do some-- governance building. We have to do both. But the governance building's a lot harder.

(SCOTT SHANE: UNINTEL)

LARRY ATTREE:

Yeah, I mean, I think one of the things-- that always comes up when you start to raise these challenges-- like around the governance issues that are really driving the conflicts-- is that people say, "Okay, we know. We get it. Corruption, governance abuse. We know these are big problems in these contexts. But the security imperatives have to be dealt with. You can't drop the ball, so there isn't time to-- to work on those issues."

But I think, I mean, one of the questions you asked is about the extent of the emphasis in America with our security and terrorism. So-- couple of statistics here-- came out in December that-- your-- that there have been 1,000 people-- killed by firearms in the U.S. from-- from 2001 to 2013 for every one American killed by-- terrorism, both in the United States and worldwide across the same period.

So obviously terrorism is a serious threat. And-- and people are also worried about, okay if these groups get hold of a nuclear device or something like that. So they're looking at the future threats as well. It's not just about American casualties right now. But-- there's the sense of the disproportionality of the emphasis on terrorism compared to other threats.

And so that comes to set the whole strategy when you go into a context like Yemen. It's the terrorists first. Afghanistan and-- and Somalia. But another statistic. 99.4% of all terrorist acts committed in 2014 and all around the world occurred in contexts affected by conflict or political terror or both.

So a clear tie, if you want to deal with the terrorism issues to the conflict dynamics that they're part of. And a clear sense that, well, I mean, we know about conflict that statistically more peaceful countries are countries with higher level of political inclusion, human rights, respect and these things. Solving terrorism is about getting to grips with conflict dynamics and dealing with governance. And if we're less-- if we're able to have a conversation where we say, "The threat is less immediate," you start to get into a space where you can strategically say, "Actually, we have time to work on the real issues of governance, corruption and abuse."

And if you use that time and you really say, "Okay, systematically we're the U.S. We're in solidarity with societies that want respect for human rights. We're not going to channel aid through corrupt government systems. We're not going to give military aid to governments that govern in this way." I think you will start to see incrementally a change in some of the behavior of these governments. In the end, people want the U.S. to be a friend. And that's how you use your influence for conflict prevention.

SCOTT SHANE:

So-- I want to cover a couple other questions before we open it to qu-- to-- to the audience for-- for questions. And one is-- sort of to bring this to a more practical ground. Everybody here agrees that corruption and governance are, have been neglected by the U.S. government in these efforts and are very important. So-- but-- you know, alas.

If anyone's-- heard, there's a presidential campaign going on. (LAUGHTER) And-- I don't remember-- you-- you know-- anybody on the Democratic side or the Republican side emphasizing corruption and governance-- as a solution to terrorism. And I do seem to remember something about making the sand glow.

So-- I wonder if you were advising the next president, whoever he or she may be-- you-- you know, you're asked to kind of brainstorm-- couple of things to do, you know, when you take office. Announce them, put some people into them, you know, what, how are you gonna steer this battleship in a slightly different direction? In-- in a practical sense. Richard, why don't we start with you and move this way.

RICHARD FONTAINE:

Well, here I actually do-- agree with-- the thrust of part of the reports. And I think part of the real value of them in-- in the-- in this sense. If you look at the Middle East right now, and you look at the problem of terrorism, it is not a coincidence that it is most acute in the four countries in the Middle East that are engulfed in civil wars. So Iraq, Yemen, Syria, and li-- and Libya. All either host Al Qaeda, I.S.I.S. or both.

That's not a coincidence, because they take haven in civil wars, and there's no one to seize the ground that they're on, et cetera-- et cetera-- et cetera. So-- pure-- narrow counterterrorism approach to that problem is not gonna be successful. And our counterterrorism approach to I.S.I.S. is not gonna be successful where we only try to-- use air strikes and targeted raids to take out people right now. And I.S.I.S. is being replaced at a one-for-one rate.

So they have approximately 30,000 the intelligence community assesses when we started our campaign, and they got 30,000 now. So that doesn't mean that the military tool is insignificant or counterproductive. I think it's absolutely necessary, but it's an incomplete-- part of this. What you have to do is try to bring some of these civil wars to a close. Now that is much easier said than done, which is probably one reason why-- presidential candidates have no better ideas about how to do that than anybody else does. And they sure are not gonna try to talk those up at town hall meetings. But nevertheless, as long as those civil wars rage, I think you're gonna have a problem with terrorism and that problem will affect the United States.

SCOTT SHANE:

Sarah?

SARAH CHAYES:

Three ideas. Number one, and this really is not presidential campaign material, 'cause it sounds really boring. But you guys are gonna love it. (LAUGHTER) Analyze. We do not systematically analyze. I mean, the-- the-- the countries that are in civil war, they're also, they-- they were initially or are now kleptocracies. We don't understand. We don't look at how kleptocracies function.

So, for example, all great k-- C.T. scholars and intelligence analysts know how to build a network diagram of a terrorist organization. The F.B.I. criminal division knows how to build a network diagram of an-- of a transnational criminal organization.

We-- there's nobody in the U.S. government who builds network diagrams that are horizontally integrated across government officials, private sector cutouts, including ones in the West like the banks and the law-- law firms that get used-- criminal organizations and terrorists. And in fact that's what these networks look like. And it means that all of these interventions are happening blind. So that's one idea.

Second, and this is another point that arises from these three-- papers, which is really interesting, is our use and dependence on regional proxies. Now we, the U.S., doesn't like to use the proxy, but that's-- that's what the la-- latest Obama-- C.T. speech was about. It's about using, you know, supposedly frontline militaries. Those are actually local proxies. And very often they are making the problem worse rather than better.

That means-- the security forces of the countries-- involved, and it also means the neighbors, Ethiopia in the case of Somalia. Saudi Arabia in the case of Yemen. And Pakistan in the case of Afghanistan. So that's number two. And number three on governance and corruption? Start at home. (LAUGHTER)

FESCOTT SHANE:

Hear, hear.

SCOTT SHANE:

Very good. Larry, you have a program for the president's first week?

LARRY ATTREE:

Well, that's a tough one. I would say it'd take longer than a week to-- to fix-- these

issues. I mean, I-- I-- I do think that a significant part of-- changing the-- strategy here, the responsibility, does rest with leaders to communicate more responsibly and proportionally about the threat. But I think that only happens if they're helped, with more people looking and bringing evidence to the conversation and journalists asking the right questions and giving space for the kind of conversation-- that needs to be quite-- different from now on.

I, again, I think in terms of macro strategy towards these contexts, I completely aglee-- gree with Sarah. The best-- selling point for-- Western countries into, going into these contexts is to remember their values. That they stand for justice, for democracy, for freedom, and-- for anticorruption. And I think there are-- leaders who are really putting these issues of corruption on the top table.

The U.K. government is doing that at the moment, not that they're brilliant on these issues either. But they are doing that. I think another thing that is-- is really important is to look beyond the brand of these terrorist organizations. And not to be drawn into their strategy for creating a civilization or-- kind of clash.

I think in-- in all of the case studies, you see that the movement that we understand is al-Shabaab, A.Q.A.P., the bad guys, they're the terrorists. They're the problem. I think if we look beneath-- that at what's going on in these movements, there are different people who are there for different reasons. Is it-- that people don't have any money? Is it they need excitement? Is it 'cause their cousin is part of the movement? Is it-- so-- it, well--

SARAH CHAYES:

Is it 'cause they have legitimate grievances. And they're, right, and they're.

LARRY ATTREE:

Yeah, so if you look at that, if you look and you find there are grievances that actually are consistent with your values and you can constructively address them, then that's number one on the strategy. But the other thing you can do is not to buy the branding.

So Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula in Yemen is made up of different tribal groups. They're starting to provide services in some areas. Are there people there that have an agenda of providing public goods, who actually want something positive for Yemen's people? Then you've gotta start talking to these people and work out if there are constructive ways to end the violence.

If all you see is the A.Q. brand-- you're not seeing these nuances. And connected to that is the point about seeing the failures of partners. If you're analyzing more impartially all the actors involved in creating conflicts, then you're able to see these failings for what they are. And your strategy includes trying to-- get regional partners to play a constructive role.

SCOTT SHANE:

I-- I particularly like your point about-- portrayal of the threat. And you know, I've written about this a few times. And-- when I, you know, depending on your, on what you judge to be jihadist terrorism-- you know, there have been about 45-- people killed in the United States since 9/11-- by jihadist terrorists, out of something like roughly I think 220,000 murders.

So-- it's-- as you-- as you say-- it's sort of a vanishingly small threat on U.S. territory. But you've seen this spike in fear-- associated with the san-- Paris and then San Bernardino. And the presidential race obviously sort of-- fanning the flames. And that's something that probably can't be pointed out-- by people like me-- often enough.

One last question before we open it to the audience. And that is, on the specific technology that's come to sort of symbolize the American campaign against terrorism. And that's the drone. When-- you know, it was created. It was developed essentially with the terrorist threat in mind.

And as I'm sure everyone here knows, and, you know, certainly-- Obama when he came in-- you know, he shut down the black sites. He banned torture. He-- he had campaigned against a lot of the Bush counter-terrorism programs, and he moved very sor-- and he pledged to close Guantanamo Bay. That got a little hung up. But-- but he didn't-- reject drones, and in fact, he was very drawn to drones. Why is that?

Because he was, he once famously said he was against, he was, "Not against all wars, he was against dumb wars." And I think he'd come to see the idea of sending 100,000 American troops to a Muslim country for ten years was not gonna be-- great thing for anybody. And he saw the drone as actually the right weapon for the terrorist target. Meaning, you can kill two people, five people, seven people without turning a country upside down.

So I think the goal and the-- the-- the dream, if you will, of the drone was that it would separate counter-terrorism from these much larger issues-- in these countries. You know, particularly I guess, this applies to Yemen. And Larry, you wrote the report on Yemen. But I'd be interested to know, how you think it's gone with drones.

And-- if you think they have not performed what, you know, Obama and others hoped they would, do they have-- do they have a future at all? Or would you-- you-- you know, would you-- advocate-- just sort of giving up on that-- on that approach. So Larry, you want to start with that one perhaps, since you've looked at Yemen in particular?

LARRY ATTREE:

Okay, yeah. Thanks. I mean, I think it's-- well observed that, you know, whereas Obama's viewed as maybe not-- that military-- assertive, there's definitely been an-- an embrace of this tactic of-- targeted killings. So I think a few of the-- the things

that-- come out of-- Yemen that are interesting on this.

So I talked about-- the fact that-- it generated so much resentment. So there's still these questions over, even if it's a surgical instrument-- is it relatively indiscriminate? And the evidence that people who have been targeted maybe they're quite low-level people. They're not an imminent threat. Or they're not even linked to Al Qaeda but mistakenly targeted. These have been really damaging when they've occurred.

And there's also questions, sometimes drones have been used to target people who could quite feasibly have been-- arrested and picked up by-- law enforcement-- through other means. And-- and then, I mean, apart from the probli-- problem of-- resentment generated but drone strikes, you also have this-- observation that they're not really actually diminishing the groups.

Sometimes you get rid of a group's leader, great. But actually, the person who comes next has harder resolve. Or you miss the leader, and then they become even more ferociously-- aggressive-- in response. So there are real questions about the effectiveness of the drone policy. And I think there's that sense that, okay, there, you know, if you're dealing with groups that are actually trying to perpetrate-- genocide and harm people. And there are risks of mass atrocities, it-- it-- it's obvious that-- proportional use of force in some contexts may be needed to stop things like that happening.

But what these case studies show time and again is that terrorist groups are trying to provoke an overreaction, because they can use that overreaction to generate a wider conflict, which plays into their interests. Polarizes people, gets them support. Anything you can do to minimize force in your strategy for dealing with these groups is worth doing.

If there are ways to use-- to-- to avoid targeting the people, but stop the oil smuggling, stop the flow of money-- to negotiate with moderates. These are all options that have to be part of the table. And force is the last option that's there.

SCOTT SHANE:

Sarah, you have a view on whether drones have?

SARAH CHAYES:

Yeah. So just to underline what Larry just said-- defense one. I think last week or the week before *Defense One* I think last week or the week before had a wonderful article on I.S.I.S. arithmetic. And basically what it said was, "30,000 minus 20,000 equals 30,000." If you go back to U.S. government figures on how many I.S.I.S. fighters there are and how many were killed over the course of last year, the first is 30,000, the second is 20,000. Then you ask them, "How many I.S.I.S. fighters are there?" 30,000. So whether any of those numbers actually means anything, who knows?

But the result is quite clearly, according to the government's own-- statistics, this-- the largely drone campaign isn't doing much. I think-- also the suggestion that drones are able to surgically differentiate between fighters and civilians-- which I think is kinda at the root of the question, has also been proven to be-- n-- not at all conclusive. Partly because these are not bright lines.

It's not sort of like a team where you wear a uniform and you're on-- you're on this team, or you're on that team. And-- and-- but-- but most significantly, and this goes to Richard's point. (COUGH) Do I think that drone warfare-- exacerbates the idea that this is a problem that can be addressed exclusively through security means. And like Richard, I don't think there is no security component that has relevance for these types of environments.

However, the more you think that you can stand back here in the United States and pick 'em off from a distance, the more likely you are to commit the kinds of policy errors that these three reports-- highlight, in terms of ignoring governance, in terms of partnering with the wrong people and-- and therefore reinforcing them and therefore expanding the grievances and therefore ultimately expanding the number of militants rather than reducing them.

SCOTT SHANE:

So would you shut down the drone program? Or would you?

SARAH CHAYES:

No, I wouldn't. But I would-- make a significant effort. Number one, I would-- make the choice of targets-- more subject to oversight. And I would also subordinate it considerably to-- diplomatic and governance-- objectives with respect to these countries.

SCOTT SHANE:

Maybe let Richard go, or you want to jump in?

LARRY ATTREE:

It's just-- it's just a ten-second. The other thing I would do is make it much less secretive and transparent--

SARAH CHAYES:

Exactly. That's part of what I meant.

LARRY ATTREE:

So that people would feel like--

SCOTT SHANE:

Hear, hear--

LARRY ATTREE:

If you're doing something, you're holding your hand up and saying, "We did this because of this, and if it was wrong, we're accountable."

SARAH CHAYES:

Yeah, that's part of what I meant by gover-- by-- the decision-making process.

RICHARD FONTAINE:

Yeah. (THROAT CLEARING) I mean, I think-- drones are one technology-- that we are using in counter-terrorism operations, sometimes in combination with other things. Right? So the air campaign against I.S.I.S. is not primarily drones. It's primarily airplanes, although we use drones too.

In Yemen, we've used both air strikes and-- drones. So I don't know that to pick drones per se out. I think that the idea that you're getting at though is the idea that we can sort of have "them over there" involved in a war, and us not involved in a war.

And so, you know, the Obama administration has, I mean, Obama's engaged in military activity in seven Muslim countries. But he still has this reputation as a reluctant warrior. He doesn't really like war. He's shy about using force. Well, not really.

But and I think part of this is even built into our language. And so we don't talk about combat. You know, the war in Libya was not war, because you know, they were at war, but we somehow weren't. And I think that if you're gonna engage in violent military activity in any country, then you are a party to that. And you have to take it seriously-- with all of the implications that that draws out. Legally, morally, politically, everything.

And I think drones give us a certain distance that is attractive to a policy maker, because you don't have to incur the political cost associated with the increased risk. And-- and as a moral matter, you don't want to put people into harm's way who don't have to be in harm's way. But it also gives you a distance from the-- the conflict that you have to make sure doesn't undermine other-- other objectives you have,

including at the sort of operational level.

So, you know, I don't have a problem with drones in Western Pakistan taking out Al Qaeda leaders that are plotting attacks against the United States. I'm much more uncomfortable with signature strikes, which we don't know who we're-- actually targeting. But, you know, it's kind of near a compound that has been suspected of doing bad-- having bad people there in the past. And it's someone who's male in between the ages, as we can see through the feed, between 80-- 18 and 45.

You know, that I think has the potential at an operational level to actually undermine what we're trying to achieve. Because I think it does, that kind of thing does feed the sense of grievance among populations that think they're being targeted by someone who's not considering themselves a party to the conflict. And also has diplomatic problems. I mean, where we have run into problems with the Pakistanis is not when we've said, "There are these Al Qaeda guys and we want to kill 'em." It's when we've indiscriminate-- not indiscriminately, but we have much more liberally-- attacked people with signature strikes. So a few thoughts on that.

SCOTT SHANE:

Yeah, that's terrific. One f-- one follow-up point on all of that is, it's always struck me that the argument of Al Qaeda and I.S.I.S. is essentially that the U.S.-- specifically in American terrorism terms, the U.S. is killing Muslims around the world. And that this is a defensive jihad and you have to fight back. And that's the underlying recruiting pitch-- for both those organizations in-- in a bunch of countries.

And our solution to the problem has been l-- in lit-- in a literal sense, killing Muslims. And so w-- we-- we do at times seem to be in this sort of-- sort of chasing our own tail-- in that sense. And, you know, we're sort of running up against the limits of that approach. So let's-- throw it open to-- the audience. I think we have a microphone. So wait for the microphone to come to you and fire away.

SARAH CHAYES:

And say who you are.

SCOTT SHANE:

And say who you are, please.

(OFF-MIC CONVERSATION)

MARK SCHNEIDER:

Mark Schneider, International Crisis Group. It does seem to me that your question--

Scott was about what you would advise the president in the first week. It's a lot different from what you would advise a presidential candidate over the course of the next several months. And I'd be interested to hear some of that.

The-- the point that has been made about the use of drones, it does seem to me that you have to go back to the use of military means to deal with a problem versus drones as such. And-- we did a report on-- in Pakistan about three or four years ago that focused on the question of drones and Al-Fateh. And I think (SNEEZE) that-- that what came out was something to the-- what was mentioned, which is that when you're focusing on Al Qaeda leaders there really wasn't a lot of blowback.

And our recommendations were similar to here, or the signature strikes. And whether it's done by signature strike or drones or signature strikes of F-16s, they're still a bad idea. The other, on-- on-- Yemen. I think one of the things that hasn't been mentioned is that previous, that a lot of the terrorist groups, they focus on local grievances and they come out of local conflicts.

And when we don't deal with the political issues, we wind up in a very bad situation. In fact, in Yemen, the Houthis were one of the most effective force against Al Qaeda before we started bombing. So we need to think about this, both in terms of dealing with the underlying causes of conflict, dealing with the vulnerabilities of institutions corrupt, et cetera. And also recognizing that the ultimate end in all of these situations has to be a political solution.

SCOTT SHANE:

Thanks. You want to go right next door, while we're there.

JEFF ABRAMSON:

Hi. Jeff Abramson with the Forum on the Arms Trade. I think I'm gonna posit an observation and you can respond if it's interesting to you guys. As I look at the dialogue on this, I think Europeans-- feel it more closely and feel a bit more responsible for-- that region in a way.

And-- and I would say this in the sense that United States is liberally arming Saudi Arabia, for example-- whereas right now the-- sort of opposition in the United Kingdom is saying, "We need to review any future arm sales, which are still ongoing, but, you know, Saferworld is very involved in this process of-- maybe there are human rights. Maybe there are arms trade treaty obligations. Maybe there are other things going on that would impact our decisions.

Whereas I don't see-- it-- is-- is (UNINTEL) I and others try to raise this in the United States. They don't feel that U.S. Citizens say my arms, my training is going to this area and it needs to be used responsibly as much as I think Europeans do. That's just an observation. You can see whether you agree.

I would say, I-- I'm also interested in this presidential race. And I think you all have said, none of the candidates are saying the things you want to hear. But I wonder-- if you think any of them are closer to saying it or furthest from saying it. And we don't have to go through all 12 candidates right now. But, you know, that in your mind. And I wonder if there's something in the idea of amer-- any conversation about America being responsible to or for in some way the conflicts there. That would be a way that you could expect-- presidential-type language to be addressing this issue. And I'll stop there.

SCOTT SHANE:

Anybody want to-- talk about candidates-- (LAUGH)

SARAH CHAYES:

I'll take a whack, as always. I won't talk about candidates, but let me start with the first one on Europe. I-- my answer on Europe would be yes and no. So I do actually think that, you know, there is to some degree a greater alertness-- on the part of-- of European populations.

But what I experienced and continue to experience is a remarkable, and I-- I hate to use this word, but-- different variety of naïveté coming from Europe than you have coming from the United States, as follows. "We believe in democracy, we believe in multilateralism. Therefore, for example, we'll give all of our aid budget to the United Nations, and we won't exercise any oversight over whether that money is going to reinforce kleptocratic governments or not."

I had almost a worse time-- trying to train up European officers-- in Afghanistan, trying to explain that our pals over here in the Afghan government are actually making the problem worse. Because there was such an ideological desire on the part of Europeans to be there to support the democratically elected government of Afghanistan against the horrible, anti-female Taliban.

That they were even more-- I would say, almost-- antagonized by the argument that I was making that Americans were, or at least as antagonized. And so, I just feel like, you have to get really granular. I'll leave the candidates maybe. Why don't you talk about the U.S. presidential candidates? (LAUGHTER)

SCOTT SHANE:

Anybody else want to weigh in on that one?

RICHARD FONTAINE:

Let me just, well, I'll-- I'm gonna pass on the specific candidates, other than to say, I do think that-- to the extent to which-- this "keep Muslims out of the United States" is being taken seriously by anyone, is actively undermining our national security. It is undermining our ability to frame-- what we are doing as not against Muslims per se, but against a particular-- set of terrorist-- organizations.

I just want to pick up really quickly though on a point that Mark made. Mark, it's good to see you again. Been a while. And that is, on the-- the importance of the local politics in these countries. And it sounds almost, you know, "Okay, sure, yes," and banal. But it's actually really important. And it's important in a number of senses. But one that I have seen now repeatedly is-- is the United States construing our enemy as the enemy of the proxy that we are working with or the local whatever it is that we're working with.

And that is usually actually not the case, that there's a complete overlap in the way they see the world and the way they see their interests and the way they see their enemies and the way we do. And we have routinely run into problems with this. And right now, the future of counter-terrorism operations is largely working through proxies.

If we're gonna conduct military operations, we either do it ourselves, which we don't really want to do, we do it through proxies, or we don't do it at all. But what this has meant is, you know, the-- the-- the United States military forces in Afghanistan have moved out of areas and told the A.N.A., "All right, you guys now go do what we were doing." And sometimes they see who we were fighting as their enemies and sometimes they don't.

We ran into this with President Saleh in Yemen-- where, you know, the list of enemies that he wanted us to help take care of happened to be only his enemies, including some that we would not find as enemies. But they were politically-- offensive to him. And so understanding what's driving the local political interests I think is-- is-- it's-- it's-- it's a really important piece of all this.

SCOTT SHANE:

Okay. Next question?

RICHARD FONTAINE:

Oh, did you want to-- you can bring it--

(OVERTALK)

SCOTT SHANE:

Were you ready, do you want to weigh in more?

LARRY ATTREE:

I'm happy to, but I don't want to hold up for taking more--

SCOTT SHANE:

No go-- no, go right ahead.

LARRY ATTREE:

Okay. One of the things that we've seen portrayed is the-- the main strategic options-- as a sort of, you know, either we do things with our army and we're on the ground invading countries and keeping the piece. Or we're using targeted killings. Or we're gonna work via partners. And these are the main alternatives we have.

I think when it comes to say, "Okay, we're off the war footing, and we're gonna do all this stuff via these really questionable partners." And you can see-- it's viscerally problematic for all-- all-- all three of these contexts. I think what has to be brought in mind is that, if they do the same kind of, you know-- indiscriminate violence-- maybe much worse than the U.S., the consequences of that if you back them still come back to the U.S. and generate resentment with the U.S.

So the pattern in Yemen is that many of the groups that had legitimate grievances against the state-- came to define themselves explicitly anti-American (THROAT CLEARING) and anti-Western. Because the Western counter-terror assistance to the state was making it-- harder for them to get anywhere in their own struggles. So, you know, it's all-- it--

SARAH CHAYES:

Coming into responsibility.

LARRY ATTREE:

Yeah, it's from the-- the point from your book is-- it-- it-- it's really well made. And then, but what you say also about the fact that, okay, if you're saying we don't want to do all these military things, is aid programs? We-- we do governance programs. Right? Is that the answer? But if the modality, the mentality for doing them is-- that we're gonna back the institutions, national ownership. It's all about training and

equipping and building people buildings, this is also not getting to the roots of the problem which is about political change.

So is there a different strategy option here, which is about doing much-- much more to work with human rights defenders, to support dialogue, reconciliation, human rights monitoring, involving civil society in our analysis and strategy development, having relationships right across society and trying to champion what people in these contexts want? That's actually something we could really scale up, and it would make a lot of sense in a lot of these places. So I think there are more options on the table than we're being told about.

SCOTT SHANE:

Thank you. Another question? Far maybe, way back in the back.

FARI:

Thanks. My name is Fari Almsli (PH) and I am an analyst from Yemen. I can't (UNINTEL PHRASE) speak about (UNINTEL) stuff. In-- in-- in talking about the governments versus corruption and corruption, I want to mention an example that I have become very familiar with in-- in Abyan, South Yemen. Where Al Qaeda and the last few days have tooken over-- have took over the city again.

And-- I visited that area in 2012. And one of the locals told me that-- local Amir of Al Qaeda told them that, "If you steal just for the sake of stealing, I would cut your hand. You know, but if you steal because you're hungry, I'll cut the hand of the person in charge of your neighborhood." That is the most un-(UNINTEL) government I have ever seen. (LAUGH)

You know, the very own group doing the very right thing. Could there be a central government in power? And I think these are things. You know, this when we talk about governance, corruption versus non-corruption, this is a clear example of how it is. I want to push back a bit against the idea you can always say, you know-- if the U.S. didn't do more, it would have-- it would have been worse. I don't think so.

In 2009, before target killing became phenomenon in Yemen, we had around 200 members of Al Qaeda, according to (UNINTEL) himself. In 2011, we had around 10,000. And I think it doesn't take a lot of scientists to figure out that there has been something fundamentally wrong in that. And I think it is essential and-- and direct to the way counter-terrorism has been happening. And-- and the way-- and even the-- the weapons that have been given to counter-terrorism-- have been used.

In 2011, Al Qaeda took over again. And-- where was counter-terrorism unit for most of the (UNINTEL)? It was in Sana'a shooting at-- democracy protestors. I've spoken to leaders of counter-terrorism-- unit, and not a single bullet was shot at Abyan. Actually, you know, it-- it-- around 500 billions-- of arms-- were given to the Yemeni Air Force, just fall into the hands of the Houthis earlier this year. And I think, you

know, this is another example of how these guns and-- and this military support have-- have-- have happened.

Another problem have been is-- is how counter-terrorism have been-- one of the best cash cows on (UNINTEL) cows for government, but also even I think it goes off in the side of the U.S. In 2013, I testified at the U.S. Senate about my-- my home village, which was bombed actually and obviously, like, 99% contrary to what everyone thinks, it was civilians who were killed.

And I spoke with a high-level U.S. Officials who said to me, "Look. Since we started using drones in Yemen, there have been no single attack against the United States from Al Qaeda." And I said, "This is exactly the problem. Your ultimate goal has been not to have attacks in-- against the United States, not to end Al Qaeda. This is the problem. It has been, counter-terrorism has been deep-rooted to be part of terrorism itself.

I want to finally push back against the idea of saying the Houthis are, have been effective in fighting Al Qaeda. Militias do not fight each other. They feud with each other. Just like the drones, you know, sectarianism. Just like the drones, the Houthis have been the best thing that can ever happen to Al Qaeda. And depending on any militias to fight another militia is another, you know, at the best (UNINTEL) by also misleading policy. Thank you.

SCOTT SHANE:

Thank you. Anyone want to weigh in on that? I think that was mostly a statement. And very-- very well-- well taken to. How about against the wall there?

PETER SALISBURY:

Hi there. My name is Peter Salisbury. I'm associate fellow at Chatham House and-- like Fari, I'm a Yemen analyst. So there are lots of Yemeni analysts. One thing that I wanted to jump into really-- really quickly-- was the constant use of the word governance and then we move on. Governance in and of itself is a deeply complex question.

And one point I want to pull out of governance is that of justice. And one of the issues that I encountered again and again in Yemen was an expectation that people wanted to be paid fares, given work. But one of the key things that came out of a lot of my work, including work for Saferworld on the drivers of conflict in Yemen, was this question of justice and the effect that the war on terror had on conceptions of justice.

Particularly with respect to policing versus military action. There's one particular case, which was the droning of a gentleman named Adnan Alkari (PH) in Sanhan from the village of former president Ali Abdullah Saleh, where his own brother had taken him to the police two times before. But in the third case, he was killed by a

drone strike.

And the question among a number of people in the North of Yemen became, is police action possible in these cases? And in areas where people were killed, where civilians were killed, we heard of blood money being paid to people on the basis that we not use the formal court system-- to-- for (COUGH) redress.

And that feeds into a wider sense that the government and U.S. government are divorced from the societies in which they are propagating these policies. And that becomes deeply problematic and creates this us versus them question. So I suppose first I'm-- I'm asking the panelists, "Do you think you could expand on this question of governance and what the U.S. can do in terms of governance?" And secondly, "Do you think that it's fair to say sometimes C.T. policy undermines the sense that governance is there at all?" Thank you.

SCOTT SHANE:

Well, Sarah, by turning the governance question back on the United States itself-- talk about American governance, I sort of said the last word. But it-- does anybody want to weigh in on governance and justice?

SARAH CHAYES:

I'd just love to jump on justice for a second. I think you're absolutely right. And I actually think-- and this is one of the places where I might have just a hair's-- deviation from some of the findings-- or at least recommendations of some of these reports. Access to justice is not really the issue here. It's justice, which is much deeper.

Access to justice is like a public service, sort of like clean water or vaccination programs. And in the end, in most of these places-- the ability to resolve disputes among evenly matched people is relatively well provided. I mean, there are traditional systems. There's just a myriad of ways that people. That's not the justice issue.

The-- justice issue is the people who have power and access to the instruments of force versus ordinary populations. And we tend to get behind the-- the sort of institutions or governments that are using force often to the detriment of their people. And so the people almost naturally are attracted toward an alternative-- organization that discloses a force that can potentially redress this balance a little bit. And that's a lot of where the attractiveness of some of these insurgencies-- or it's-- it's a piece of the attractiveness.

SCOTT SHANE:

Anybody else?

RICHARD FONTAINE:

I-- I largely agree. I think-- you know-- taking into account the role of justice is important again, because it gets back to legitimacy of whoever it is that you're trying to see prevail on the battlefield and therefore to your counter-terrorism approach. But-- and-- and so, you know, that's-- but that's a broad category.

It's not just judges and training Afghan judges in the United States or-- or, you know, or investigators-- with F.B.I. trainers in Kabul, of which we do some work. It's also gets back to the corruption thing too. Because, you know-- I mean, I remember-- between 2005 and 2009 making repeated trips to Kabul. And each time you would see more and more mansions in the mountains around Kabul.

And then the number of Karzais who seemed to have houses in Dubai began to increase too. And that was, you know, not lost on-- an occasional visitor. Well, it's certainly not lost on the occasional Afghan, right? And so long as they feel like that is an unjust system, then they're not gonna want to support it.

And they're gonna support an alternative if there is a better alternative in their-- in their view. So all of that said, (NOISE) it-- it's hard to know what the United States should do. I mean, there are different programs and things like that. But-- you know, sort of giving a country justice is not easy.

SARAH CHAYES:

Just one more secure-- security related-- did-- we've been talking about extremism here, because that's the kind of focus of the-- of the reports. But if you add in the Arab Spring and Ukraine revolutions and the Kyrgyzstan-- revolu-- you know, revolution of 2010-- you're starting to get a significant proportion of the-- massive security crises the world has confronted in the last decade that you can really call-- I mean, those revolutions were justice revolutions.

SCOTT SHANE:

How about one over here on the-- on-- on?

KAY GUINANE:

Thank you. I'm Kay Guinane with the Charity and Security Network. I wanted to-- raise a question-- I haven't heard discussed yet, which is how countering violent

extremism efforts fit into all this. Because it seems to have been presented as-- an alternative to the failed strategies-- of the last 15 years.

But the way it's been rolled out in the U.S. and in other places is so security oriented that it seems to be bringing along with it all the flawed assumptions and problems. Yet it-- it d-- it could possibly go in the direction that Larry mentioned of enabling civil society in conflict resolution. But you can't counter violent extremism when it's currently-- criminal act punishable by 20 years in prison to try to train-- violent extremism in peace-building skills. So what can we do to change that?

LARRY ATTREE:

So this is a real dilemma I think for people in the peace-building community. Because here you have a discourse on countering violent extremism which may be does seek to-- realign some of the strategic focus, some of the excesses of the sort of military first and worry about the rest later kind of approach, towards something that is thinking more about, how can you engage constructively?

And maybe look at, you know, livelihoods on the ground community level-- work. Maybe improve-- community security force relations. And I think many of these-- kind of-- programs are worthy in themselves. It's obviously worth working on trying to shift people out of violent patterns of behavior toward something more constructive.

But I think one of the big-- big things that these reports put on the table is that you've got conflict problems, and you enter with-- sense that it's the extremism or the terrorism, ultimately our security interest that matters in this context. You're gonna get your peace-building approach wrong, 'cause there's gonna be gaps in it.

And so there's a suspicion around C.V.E.-- the idea of it, that-- if it's nothing more than cheerleading from the mainstream kind of security-first approach and doing some good stuff on the side, it may actually be more like part of-- war strategy or a military strategy than solving a problem. And I think there are critical gaps here.

So you can't change people's motivation to in the end get involved in these groups. Some of the groups, it's almost certainly people signing up for almost certain death. But they're-- they're angry. If you want to engage with that problem and try and achieve peace, you have to actually engage in changing the reality of those people's lives. So the idea that it's about narrative and messaging and convincing people not to be violent, but you're not changing their reality, it's not gonna go anywhere.

And so if C.V.E.'s gonna really work, it needs to be about creating political channels for people to be able to express their grievances in constructive ways that come into the political space. And not just about sort of more effective messaging to change their mindset, but really talking about all of the things that these conflicts are about.

And these are transnational conflicts. If you-- and-- and people are angry about things that people are doing in multiple countries to Muslims as a community. Like,

all of these grievances and the policies that go with them, the behaviors of the partners that we've mentioned are so problematic, need to be on the table for discussion so that people feel they really have a way to-- change things. And if that's not on the table with C.V.E., then it's not gonna work out for me.

SCOTT SHANE:

S-- so, let's take a couple more questions, and then we're gonna have the last word fr-- from each of the panelists if they want to give one. Nadwah (PH)? (LAUGHTER)

FEMALE VOICE:

Thank you for seeing me. It's always a challenge to do that. So-- my question is-- the assumption has always been-- when-- when the U.S. and militia governments work-- on counter-terrorism, the assumption has always been that these, the security problems and extremism-- happen because the central government was too weak.

And in my opinion, that's misleading. That the-- the problem is not in the, that the, these governments are weak, although that's a problem. The problem is that they're-- they're too centralized and they're extremely corrupt and that-- and that the national (UNINTEL) elite have literally hijacked institutions including security and military institutions, who then become like personal property for-- for some of the (UNINTEL). And that's the case in-- in-- in Yemen, which I am familiar with.

So-- Ali Abdullah Saleh used the-- used-- the-- U.S. support and other support to-- solidify his family's grip over power, to marginalize his opponents. And that has created a lot of-- grievances that became-- creating-- became-- or created-- recruitment ground for-- for extremist-- groups-- and also created a lot of-- instability.

Comes 2011-- 2012, the United States analysts also provided unconditional support, similar to-- to Saleh, to President Hadi, who was himself still very corrupt and has failed to take even the slightest measures to-- to implement reforms at the local level, despite the many opportunities that came up. Whenever I say that to-- policy makers, they always come up, they-- they always say, like, "Well, we can't work with local authorities. We have to work with the central government."

So how do we resolve this? And how can I can sell my argument to the policy makers in the U.S. and the West? The second point that I have to raise, also-- I second Sarah-- some-- someone here said that Houthis-- are very good at fighting Al Qaeda. And I can tell you from experience and research is-- it's the exact opposite.

I wrote a piece (COUGH) and the title of the piece is my-- the friend of-- *My Friend Is Al Qaeda*, and if you read that piece, you'll understand what I mean. And I wanted to raise that, because I hear this-- over and over and over in D.C. and I think it's quite misleading. Thank you.

SCOTT SHANE:

Thank you. Okay, maybe the gentleman right there, the last-- last-- last one. And then we'll turn to the panel and let you guys.

JAMES COHEN:

Thank you. James Cohen from U.S. Institute of Peace. Building on your first-- point about working with local authorities or local-- presences, this issue of-- corruption versus security. It's not just corruption and security. It's also corruption and trade, corruption and humanitarian work. Corruption always seems to get bumped--

SARAH CHAYES:

Exactly.

JAMES COHEN:

To the side, because it always interferes with the humanitarian aid getting through. We have to let them be corrupt or else we can't get through to dying people. The-- the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act gets in the way of American business. Look at China. They don't care about it. Who-- we-- you went on about mechanisms, what would you tell the president.

Who are the other actors you would go to? What are the mechanisms here in D.C. or in-- in Brussels, in Ottawa where I'm from-- that you would change-- to get corruption actually up front and change the mindsets and also on the ground? Because it's usually the embassies on the ground are so politically restrained from speaking out.

And the first thing I hear whenever s-- "We've gotta work on corruption." Everyone's mind goes straight to, (SNEEZE) "Well, what? Are you gonna walk in the door and call everyone corrupt?" No, you also don't walk in the door and call them "human rights violators." You work at it and you don't split. So tangibly what are the things--

SCOTT SHANE:

Anybody have (UNINTEL PHRASE) with tangible idea about how to address corruption?

SARAH CHAYES:

I got lots of 'em. (LAUGH) And it's kind of like-- I love that one. I could've, I mean,

you know, we're obviously mind melding. Every single thing that you said-- is things that either I've experienced or I-- or I say. And so-- I do think the business community is really important to address.

I mean, if we take-- if we extrapolate from these new reports and say that the reinforcement of this kind of abusive and corrupt regime is part of what is expanding terrorism in these countries, which is I think, emerges from the reports and certainly emerges from my work, well then what does that mean for corporate social responsibility, right?

C.S.R. right now is basically pay-- you know, build a little hospital in a village to try to keep the villagers off your back. Right? No. I mean, if the way of businesses interacting with the government is actually creating conditions that expand terrorism, that business better really start thinking about this in a different way.

And so I think corporate-- the corporate world has a lot to think about. And the aid community. I mean, every time I try to have an event with U.S.A.I.D. folks on this topic, what happens? I'll invite the big program heads, and then I get the anticorruption people. Well, I don't need to talk to the anticorruption people. They get right, I mean, they get it. (SNEEZE)

Who I need to talk to is Power Africa, P.E.P.F.A.R., you know-- The Global Fund. And ex-- you know, really talking through, how do some of these foreign civilian assistance streams reinforce a situation where you have polio again in Pakistan. Or you ha-- in other words, yes, I get it. You have to go in and do emergency work when there's an Ebola outbreak. But unless some of these issues are addressed, you're not addressing the likelihood of the next Ebola-- Ebola outbreak. So thanks for that.

SCOTT SHANE:

Thank you. Thanks Sarah. So-- so-- I think we're just gonna wrap up and give everyone an op-- on the panel-- an opportunity to sort of say a final word. And-- mine will be that-- that I keep hearing I think that extremism and terrorism are symptoms of m-- of a bunch of diseases that go-- much more deeply into these societies. And that by focusing exclusively on these symptoms we're sort of missing the boat. Richard, you want to start and come this way?

RICHARD FONTAINE:

Sure. (THROAT CLEARING) Let me just-- thank-- the report authors, particularly the narrative from in each country of how we got where we are-- is-- even for-- folks who-- had some exposure to this along the way is-- is really a useful summation of the-- the challenges and-- and all of the activities that the U.S. at least-- and others have been involved in.

On the corruption-- side of things, I mean, Sarah obviously spoke to this. (SNEEZE) But, you know, weeding out corruption is a tough thing. But I think we could start by

not fueling corruption ourselves when we're en-- engaged in these countries. So, you know, part of this is-- is being realistic about what the absorptive capacity of nonmilitary aid in these countries is before we continue to just sort of dole out the billions of dollars in the hopes that this is gonna sort of help gain traction.

And the other is the contracting aspect of this. I mean, we want to hire local people to carry out programs in different countries. But you can set up very quickly-- not just corruption but this kind of destructive dynamic where if you worked with a foreign N.G.O., you'd get the big salary and all this other stuff. You work for the government, you don't. And that's a problem, gets back to legitimacy and everything else.

The final thing I would just say is, you know, we touched a little bit on whether the-- whether the national response to the threat of terrorism is proportional enough. And a lot of people made the argument, you know, if you were to look at how many people get killed on the highways every year-- compared to how many get killed by terrorism, then we should ship all the money out of counter-terrorism and move it into lights on the highways and we'd save a lot more lives.

Which isn't tr-- is true, in so far as it goes. But terrorism is about more than just the number of people killed. It's designed to terrorize people. Right? I mean, it's-- it-- the broader victimization of 9/11 was not the people in the Pentagon and the World Trade Centers only. It was the-- the feelings and the political reaction of an entire country that suddenly felt vulnerable and traumatized. And so I think that, inevitably you're gonna have-- greater reaction to a terrorist incident than just the number of people who are killed or injured in that ax-- in that-- in that incident.

And knowing that in advance, and knowing how democracies and particularly the United States have tended to respond to these things with crackdowns on civil liberties and-- and other things like that-- that actually does justify a robust approach-- to-- countering threat of terrorism. And I also think that this phenomenon is not going away anytime soon. So the lessons learned-- aspect of this, which these reports-- started to draw out, I think is gonna be a critical-- aspect of trying to get this right going forward.

SCOTT SHANE:

Thanks. Sarah?

SARAH CHAYES:

I was planning on not saying anything, but I have to pick up on the second-to-last thing you just said, which is that terror-- terrorism is designed to terrorize. That's right. And therefore, it is the job of our political leadership to dial it down, instead of dialing it up. And I think that's something that you suggested. But I don't see that happening at all.

SCOTT SHANE:

Larry, last word.

LARRY ATTREE:

Okay-- we think there's a whole sort of connection-- train of-- of-- of how to turn this around, which is-- you know, it starts with the media conversation and the labels we're using. I think-- one of the really-- really important things is reporting on violence and abuses on all sides of conflict. So we're not just seeing the Garissa University attack. But we're also seeing villages bombed from the-- air in-- in Somalia.

We're also seeing not just the-- killings in a school in Peshawar-- but we're also seeing-- how the Pashtun families are being dealt with by the Pakistani military. I think we're seeing a really one-sided picture in these conflicts. And so the terror threat becomes all encompassing. And that feeds into the fact that we're labeling these conflicts as terror problems and we're using that label.

And I think the-- the way forward, getting to grips with some of these issues with corruption is, as Sarah said, you know, really strengthening analysis, seeing what all actors are doing in the context. Understanding that it's not just a question of good and bad guys, but really difficult behaviors and all of them that (UNINTEL) imposing.

At the moment you-- you-- you set your strategy for security capacity building in complete isolation from the conflict dynamics. But they need to be actually connected to an analysis of who wields power in this context. How's corruption in the security sector working? It needs to become much more political and-- and with improved analysis.

I think there will always be options for finding, incentivizing and working with real reformers. Rethinking support for abusive-- corrupt actors. Channeling resources in more creative ways. Linking to people on the ground. You know, more staff at embassies who are in charge of aid budgets and not being put under pressure to put them all in massive trust funds that help the government.

But work with a real range of people across society. Find out who stands for constructive change in this context. Scale that up. If you've got an analysis that tells you governance and corruption is the problem, make that the first thing on your list. And devote more of your resources to that. We can't change these things overnight, but we can do a lot better.

SCOTT SHANE:

Thanks to all the panelists-- to Saferworld for these three excellent reports (APPLAUSE) and to Open Society. And to all of you for showing up.

* * *END OF TRANSCRIPT* * *