



**2016 Halifax International Security Forum
Plenary 4 Transcript
Because Syria: I'm Your Friendly Neighborhood Terrorist**

SPEAKERS:

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MODERATOR:

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Yalda Hakim: What an incredible video you've just seen there, a stark reminder of the year that we've just had, that the war in Syria and Iraq is not in some far away land, but it's actually come to the doorsteps of Europe and the western world. The war in Syria, you'd all agree, is an epic catastrophe. Almost half a million people have been killed. Half of the country's population has been displaced. The country now lies in ruins. Sectarian tensions have been inflamed across the Middle East.

Assad himself has been accused of war crimes. Even as we speak, the bombardment of Aleppo continues with reports that civilians, women, children and the elderly continue to be targeted. But Assad has also portrayed himself as an enemy of ISIS. Now, with the victory of Donald Trump, will we see a massive reversal of US policy towards Assad? For the past five years, Washington has maintained that Assad needs to step down. But just in the last week, President-elect Donald Trump said that he'll, is likely to rip up President Obama's policy book on Syria.

Well, we've got an extremely distinguished panel here today to address all of these issues. Joining us is General John Allen, Co-Director, the Centre for 21st Century Security and Intelligence, The Brookings Institute; the Honourable Ömer Çelik, Turkey's Minister for European Union Affairs; the

Honourable Jean-Yves Le Drian, France's Minister of Defence; and Senator John McCain, Senator from Arizona.

Because we've got this extraordinary group of leaders here who have firsthand experience with all the issues that the region faces, I'd like to actually open the floor up immediately to the audience and ask, for two people here to tell us what they'd like to get from the panel before we begin our session. Yes?

Question: Thank you, I'm Michael Bociurkiw, I'm former spokesperson for the OFC (ph) in Ukraine. And also, I'm a former spokesperson for UNICEF. A quick comment. A video like that really makes you shake. One of the things I used to say the worst thing that could ever happen is the world ever averts its gaze from the suffering of children. So just over the past 24 hours, Médecins Sans Frontières has said that the only specialized pediatric hospital in besieged East Aleppo has come under attack for the second time.

And also it's totally inoperational [sic] right now, and also two other hospitals have been hit by strikes. MSF said this is a dark day for East Aleppo. And one more quick comment here is, as I said, I used to represent UNICEF and just in October, Tony Lake, the Executive Director – I think many of you know him – said school airstrikes in Syria could be a war crime. We've never heard language like that from a UNICEF Executive Director.

My question would be, I hope the panel can address it, is what can possibly be done to end the suffering of children in, in Syria? We've seen unimaginable images, horrifying images from there, and it seems that most of the diplomatic levers have been pulled, many other instruments have been used. What can possibly be done to end it quickly? Thank you.

Yalda Hakim: General Allen, can we begin with you? I mean, what can be done to end the suffering of these people?

Gen. John Allen (Ret): Well, as the question implies, we have to do something with respect to the, the civilian population in Syria. It's a catastrophe, as you said properly. We had great hopes some time ago that the Russian incursion in September of last year would permit us to do three things. One would be to join forces together to fight Daesh. The second would be to reduce the suffering of the Syrian people by forcing Bashar al-Assad to pursue a different course, conceivably. And the third was to join us concurrently in some attempt for a political transition.

Of course, none of those things came to pass. And I, I don't want to just recount history because you asked me an important question: what can we do? The Russians saw that while there can be no military outcome in Syria, the outcome that will favour them politically can substantially be helped by military

activity. And so they stabilized a genocidal dictator and they have systematically begun to attack the very Syrians that we had hoped that we could empower to be part of the process for a political resolution in Syria.

To the extent today – and again your question is very difficult to answer – in our own attempt to take action in Syria, we sought to deal with Daesh as a military outcome. We had an aspiration politically for a political transition. We had no connective tissue between the two and the connective tissue was the Syrian people. And doing what was necessary to provide the capacity for the Syrians to defend themselves, both from the regime and from Daesh, but most importantly, to give them a voice at the table for political transition.

And until we're able to do that, we have very, very few options, and frankly, the Russians are holding most of the cards right now, because to, to his credit, Secretary Kerry has sought some form of a diplomatic way ahead, but frankly, I don't see that we're going to be able to change much in the short term, again, because the Russians are practically holding the cards.

Now, there is an option, and it's an option that's, that in many cases, is unthinkable, and that is is the United States prepared to raise the military consequences to the Russians and to the regime for this continued nearly systematic elimination of the Syrian opposition? That's a decision that the next President is going to have to make. The current President was unwilling to do that. But the options are very slim.

Or, or we can judge the next administration by its early decisions on how it may partner with the Russians. But I don't see that even deciding ultimately to partner with the Russians is, in the short term, going to reduce the horrific suffering of the Syrian people.

Yalda Hakim: Mr. Çelik, I mean, what goes through your mind when you see these horrifying images coming out of Aleppo, for example, and it's channel 3 Turkish to English.

Hon. Ömer Çelik: (translator) Living with a terrorist neighbor, we know it the best what it's like to live with a terrorist neighbor. We just watched the video. You saw terrorist attacks perpetrated in various cities across the globe. This sample was shown only once. Of course, there would be more cities and more minutes of this video. This is a very good video, but let's take a moment and try to understand all the terrorist attacks put together globally, in the past two years, Turkey endured them all, tens of terrorist attacks in a month, not just in Istanbul, also in Diyarbakır, (inaudible) and happened elsewhere in Turkey.

And that's the problem in Syria and the consequences of the problem we have to deal with. There is a big wave of migration. Turkey hosts three million refugees on her territory right now. Some are sick, injured, handicapped, tens of thousands of them and we're trying to give health care for them. And if it goes on like this, I am sorry to say but this is going to get only worse because right now, this is the bloodiest terrorist organization the world has ever seen.

We concentrated our efforts against Daesh, but Assad's regime itself paved the way for the rise of Daesh. How would we ended up here? [sic] We need to make an analysis to understand how we ended up here. When we were, at that time, we were talking to Assad, we suggested for him to make political reforms and release political detainees and he truly took some steps in this way. But later on, he turned to his people using weapons and arms. And do you know what happened in the meantime? At the beginning, Assad was told if he was to use chemical weapons, this would be a red line he was not going to be allowed to cross, but he did use chemical weapons.

And then he was told if he was to use air forces, that would be a red line, but he did at the end use air forces and massacred his people and international community remained silent. At that time, within Syrian territory, Turkey suggested to have a no fly zone or a safe zone in Syrian territory so we would be able to contain this way within Syria, but this was not taken on board, what suggested by Turkey.

Then discussion was who would be replaced by Assad? If it steps down, radicalism would stepping in, [sic] but that's not true. It was proven at the onset of the conflict. There were 3,000 or 5,000 Daesh militia at the beginning, and it, the longer Assad remained there, the higher Daesh militia's number grew. Right now, it's very grave.

If Assad regime continues to stay, then faced with the radicals, Assad will demonstrate and depict himself as an alternative, but by doing this, he is supporting the radicals and he continues to present himself as an alternative to radicalism and terrorism. Some states support some groups there, and just before our eyes what's unfolding is like revival of Afghanistan 30 years ago. This is the picture right now. So any terrorist organizations involved and implicated and there's, no one will be able to manage the situation right now.

What needs to be done is there needs to be a transition process. Assad regime has to step down. So we are in favour of political solution. That is why we supported Geneva process. But unfortunately, it's not working right now. The meetings were being held in Geneva but at the same time, in the meantime, Russia was bombarding the locations of the opposition. If there is a continued instability in Aleppo, in Mosul, if instability grows, do you know what will happen?

Now, we have three million refugees in Turkey. An equal number of refugees will flow to Turkey, to Mediterranean Europe and the western world if the instability grows. This is a big political crisis. This will be a big humanitarian crisis and a very deep terrorism threat. So what is wrong is we are right now discussing the consequences of the existence, the presence of the Assad regime. But that's not the root cause.

As long as Assad regime remains there, Daesh will, it will rise. Other radical groups will continue to establish themselves. PKK and PYD, they will get stronger and we will have even a greater humanitarian crisis. We need to understand the root causes, all the initiatives need to address the root causes. Assad regime was empowering Daesh and other terrorist organizations there.

Yalda Hakim: Mr. Çelik just said there cannot be a future without, with Assad still in place. But that doesn't seem to be the rhetoric of President-elect Donald Trump. He seems to think that he needs to work alongside Assad. In fact, just in the last day or so, President Assad has said that he sees President-elect Trump as a natural ally. I'm sorry, yeah.

No, I'm asking Senator McCain.

Sen. John McCain: Well, we don't know exactly what – do you want to go ahead? Go ahead.

Hon. Jean-Yves Le Drian: No, no (inaudible).

Sen. John McCain: We don't, we don't really know exactly what President Trump will do. Some of it depends on who his selection for both Secretary of State and Secretary of Defence are. So I can't predict that.

I can say that I would like to correct this gentleman. All hospitals in Eastern Aleppo out of action. Not just some, all. And you know who's doing the bombing? The Russians. And you know they're not using dumb bombs, they're using precision bombs. Some of the great acts of genocide in history are taking place while we discuss issues of far less importance. And I'd like to just mention that we should try to understand better what happened that brought us to this point today.

I believe it was two significant events. One was when the then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, then Secretary of Defence Leon Panetta, and then Secretary of – let's see, Panetta, the three, three of them and the, the three Majors came to the White House and recommended to the President of the United States that we arm and train free Syrian forces. The President turned it down. It was a seminal event.

Second seminal event was when the President of the United States said that if the Syrians Bashar Assad used chemical weapons, then he would cross a red line. Just a personal anecdote, he called me and Senator Graham over to the Oval Office. We sat there he said that's it, he's crossed the red line, and we will degrade Bashar Assad, we will upgrade the free Syrian Army and we will have regime change.

About a week later, I was sitting my office and saw on CNN that the President had changed his mind. So did other countries throughout the region. So did the Saudis, who had planes on the runway. They found out on CNN. By the way, now known as the Clinton News Network. But anyway, the point is, the point is that we allowed this to happen. We, the United States of America, and we lost credibility.

And now, this, this horrendous, this horrendous genocide that's taking place with the active participation and those of us who are interested in military tactics, we're now seeing for the first time in history aircraft taking off from a Russian aircraft carrier to launch strikes into a country in the Middle East. First time in history and they're doing it with precision bombings to kill as many innocent people as they can.

So what do we need? We need the same thing that was recommended to the President, although it's far more complex back in 2011, and we need a no-fly zone. And we can enforce it, not an entire no-fly zone over the entire country, but a no-fly zone, which would be protected and it would take some American troops on the ground and we can succeed in at least protecting some of the refugees and we can use it as a place to arm and train and equip moderate forces. It can be done.

On the other side of the coin, it would take, in order to take Raqqa, it would take about a 100,000-person force, 10,000 Americans, 90,000 of our friends and allies and we could go into Raqqa and take it in a very short period of time. As long as Raqqa is there, there's a caliphate, there's a centre for terrorism, they're developing chemical weapons, and doing all kinds of things, including exporting young men into the refugee flow to commit acts of terror in places all over the world.

But in the case of what's happening right now, it's horrendous. The United States has abdicated its leadership responsibilities and we are now complicit in one of the great acts of genocide, certainly in modern times.

Yalda Hakim: Minister Le Drian, I mean, would you agree with Senator McCain that the best option now is a no-fly zone?

Hon. Jean-Yves Le Drian: (translator) In the pictures I saw – is it okay now? Is the feedback gone? From the pictures I just saw, obviously, what struck me a lot also is the pictures of the attacks in France because we're celebrating right now the first anniversary of the terror attack in the Bataclan, and we're also, in my country, in a period where we have, we're permanently under threat because on our territory, our national French territory, right now, we're deploying 10,000 armed soldiers across our national territory.

It's unprecedented and that reflects the permanent nature of the threat from Daesh. And to go back to what was just said, I, I did not see, or maybe I was blind, but I didn't see Bashar al-Assad fighting Daesh. So tell me when he did fight against Daesh. Maybe once. But that would be really marginal and the arguments that are being developed according to which Bashar is fighting terrorism, well to me, I think it's a bare faced lie today.

So I wanted to remind everybody of that because those arguments have also been used a lot, both by Bashar al-Assad and by the Russians. Our enemy, the enemy of France, but not France's enemy alone, we would look at all the attacks that have occurred. Our direct enemy is Daesh. And as far as collaboration with the United States within the framework of the coalition against Daesh in Mosul or in Raqqa in Syria, I find that that coalition is working well. And that, the collaboration is close and I hope it continues in order to eradicate right to the, to uproot those terrorist groups under al-Baghdadi.

On another issue that was raised concerning Syria directly, I share an opinion. While not being ready to talk about the US choices, but clearly when chemical weapons were used by Assad against its own people, that represented a major break with international engagements. France was ready to intervene, and I think we should have intervened back then, because definitely there would not have been the excesses that were noticed after that, because this was before Russia became, intervened and became present in Syria.

Hon. Jean-Yves Le Drian: — contre le terrorisme. Je considère que la bataille de Mosul sera gagnée. Il faudra aussi gagner la bataille du Raqqa, faire en sorte que le dispositif qui a été mise en place puisse se dérouler avec beaucoup de vigilance parce que les situations sont toujours très, très complexes. Mais après, il faudra, nous allons être confrontés à trois sujets différents. Quand je dis nous, c'est nous tous.

D'abord, que vont devenir les combattants étrangers? Les foreign fighters de toutes nationalités qui peuvent ensuite essayer –

(Translator): who can then commit other acts of terrorism elsewhere.

Second of all, is there not a risk that a new caliphate can be set up elsewhere in a different area. And that brings us back to Libya. And thirdly, there may also be a virtual caliphate because the methods being used are often very technological methods or means which may encourage actors to get involved through these new methods of communication, and I think that has to be dealt with but at the same time, the serenity of our action, or collective action against Daesh is not going to be a total amount of serenity in relation to what is occurring now.

And there is no political solution being initiated at this point to try and ensure the security of the entire zone. The security of that zone means that we need an inclusive government in Iraq and in Syria, a transition period and the departure of al-Assad. And if all of those elements are not present in both Iraq and Syria, we will constantly be facing new threats of terrorism, including historically different types of terrorism and groups that could eventually come together. So the issues that are on the table right now are extremely difficult ones and if there hadn't, even though there haven't been many attacks recently, we know that we are currently under threat as well.

Yalda Hakim: Thank you. And apologies, the channels keep moving between channel 1 and channel 2. The Minister was just talking there about concerns about a caliphate moving elsewhere and General Allen, is that, you know, a real concern that, that actually even if they're eliminated in Raqqa or Mosul, it could shift elsewhere?

Gen. John Allen (Ret.): Well, you know, we've had this conversation for a couple of years here actually, at the Forum, that caliphate very quickly became, in essence, a three-headed creature. The first was what we call the core of the caliphate, which was in Iraq and Syria. The second was what they themselves called the distant provinces, the (inaudible), and there are many of them now around the world. And then the third element was the global network that has been created often in synchronisation with or in symbiosis with the global criminal networks.

So the caliphate is, is bigger than simply a single regional area or a couple of centres of gravity, Mosul or Raqqa. It's much bigger than that. And so, we have seen indications through the intelligence available to us that there has been a conversation for some period of time that elements of the leadership of the caliphate would attempt to move to one of the other provinces, potentially in Libya.

This is why the strategy has got to be a comprehensive strategy. This is not a military outcome that we're seeking, although the military outcome sets the conditions ultimately for what we have to accomplish. We're going to have to go after those principal (inaudible), those distant provinces, and very, very

importantly, and this is where the United States have suffered, where certainly Turkey and France have suffered and all the many other members of our coalition, it's not beyond a reasonable expectation that we will say Daesh attempt a strategic counter-attack.

And what that means is in the guise of the return of foreign fighters, some of them embedded in refugee flows, some of them simply through inspiration or direction in the home populations, to begin to attack us routinely through this network in our home capitals. And so while I really do believe, at some point, we'll defeat them physically on the ground, it is this network which I think we really need to bear down on, because it is the network that gives it reach, it is the network which gives it its capacity to recruit and it is the network that will give it definition for some period of time to come.

We have to hit all of these three simultaneously. The network is growing in its capabilities and it'll be along that network that we'll have to deal with it for a long period of time.

Yalda Hakim: General Allen, I mean, the focus has been on, on ISIS, but Jabhat al-Nusra and various other groups, I mean, al Qaeda, we often talk about the death of al Qaeda, but al Qaeda's not dead.

Gen. John Allen (Ret.): No. Not, not by any stretch of the imagination. al Qaeda is a competitive organization in many respects. When, in Afghanistan, when I was the commander there, wherever we found al Qaeda enclaves, we went for it immediately because al Qaeda is a persistent threat.

And one of the blind spots of American policy with respect to Syria and I thought Senator McCain really detailed it quite well, was that while we sought to, to defeat Daesh as an entity in Syria, while we had no real substantive plan for our policy objectives in Damascus, there was a blind spot in the middle of our policy, which was that we left Jabhat al-Nusra, which is a very organic Syrian entity that is al Qaeda in its orientation, we left it largely alone, and we, we needed to incorporate that into the process by which we would put ourselves both in the context of defeating the radical jihadist elements on the ground, and setting the conditions for a political outcome. And only very recently have we begun to attack Jabhat al-Nusra.

Now, the problem, of course, is, as the Senator properly observed, many of the Syrians that we would otherwise have been able to empower years ago, both to defend themselves against the regime and to assist us in fighting Daesh, many of those Syrians have either fled elsewhere and our European partners know where they went, they have been eliminated and increasingly are eliminated by the attacks of the regime and now the carpet bombing of the Russians and the

use of precision weapons to achieve very specific psychological outcomes, or the worst is they have gravitated into the fold of jihadist organizations.

So our options really are very limited with respect to what we can do on the ground to support the Syrian population and unless we're prepared to up the pain that the Russians feel and up the pain that the regime feels by direct support to elements of the Syrian population, I just don't see that we're going to get anywhere. Al Qaeda is a threat, al Qaeda will remain a threat, and when the caliphate declared itself in June of 14, when Adnani declared the caliphate in the Grand Mosque, Nur al-Din Mosque in Mosul, al Qaeda criticized them immediately; al Qaeda said you went too soon.

We, we believed in the idea of a caliphate but you went too soon. And in going too soon, you have set yourself up now ultimately to attract the destruction that the western, the western coalition will bring down on your heads. And it's made it more difficult for us al Qaeda ultimately to achieve our objectives but if the west is ultimately exhausted in fighting Daesh and the caliphate, we will bide our time and we will be ready when our opportunities emerge. And that is, I think, where we find ourselves. Al Qaeda is still a very virulent capability. It has a global network and we must be conscious of that.

Yalda Hakim: Minister Çelik, I mean, General Allen's just spoken about the limited options that there are if Assad goes. If he does go, there is still a vacuum.

Hon. Ömer Çelik: (translator) Well, first of all, we need to pay attention to something. Islam caliphate being Muslim and jihad, these are the concepts that are respected by the Muslims, and we should not associate those concepts with terrorism because there are Muslims fighting against Daesh and they act on behalf of jihadism. Daesh is a terrorist organization. They are enemies to Islam and to humanity. And this is a terrorist organization. We should not associate that with a religion or with a sect.

We should not blame any religion and we should not name any religion together with those concepts because when we are fighting terrorism, the thing that is doing good for Daesh is that, is putting this case as a, an issue between Muslims and Christians, because the Daesh can just put a label on those who are fighting against them as being the crusades. And most of the time, from Turkey, we are saying that Daesh has nothing to do with Islam. They are just carrying out terrorist activities. We are saying this again and again. Therefore, Islam and caliphate and those concepts should not be used together with Islam.

And about the fight against Daesh, I have been reading all the plans. All those plans are focusing on military aspects but the main thing is to fight the ideology

of this organization. And by the way, military fight is not so good because we have seen that Daesh is getting strengthened and they're getting stronger. But we should know that the, some analysts in the west are blaming some sects, some particular groups. But when you look at the fighting strategy of Daesh in the last decade or so, whenever you attack Daesh in an area, they do not fight. They just withdraw and then wait, because in that area, where they withdraw, that area is occupied by some sectarian groups or the comprehensive state forces do not dominate that area. So ethnic groups and sectarian groups fight in that particular region, and when that is the case, Daesh finds the opportunity to go back to there. Therefore, we need to think about the ideological roots of that situation.

In Iraq and Syria, there are no models that are comprehending [sic] all the sects and ethnic groups. That is why Daesh can go back to those areas. And the main question is that, why are there so many people coming from the western capitals joining Daesh? Why is the reason behind that? [sic] Because if there are no integration models respecting their identities, and whenever they are given only the chance of assimilation if they are to live in those capitals, then they go into the fields of these radical organizations. The main thing is to fight the ideology of Daesh, to prevent those people who join Daesh.

And another issue is that in Iraq and in Syria, when fighting in Daesh, there is a traditional and organic structure. We should not distort that. I would like to attract your attention to one point. There is a big mistake. When fighting Daesh, PKK and PYD terrorist organization are cooperated with, with our allies in the west. And they are just taking advantage of this (inaudible) environment and they're seizing plans of, of the Arab. And even if you eliminate or destroy Daesh, those Arabs will fight those organizations and then, an organization, dangerous organization as Daesh or even more dangerous one, will find the roots to be established there.

Therefore, there should be more strategic approaches. Let me tell you an anecdote. In Tunisia, Ghannouchi, the leader of Ennahda, is a very wise person. And after the Arab Spring, he implemented very balanced policies, and one day, he told in Ankara that I asked my American colleagues where Osama bin Laden was killed, and they said everybody knows he was killed in Pakistan. And he said I, I said no, Osama bin Laden was killed in Tunisia. They asked me what do you mean?

And I said well, Osama bin Laden said the young people in the Islamic world that even if you are in power through democracy, there will be coup d'état and they will not allow you to be in the power. The western countries will not allow you to be in power. Osama bin Laden said this. But in Tunisia, as the Muslims, we took power through democracy and we are keeping that. And ideologically, we killed Osama bin Laden in Tunisia, he said.

And then afterwards, there was the coup in Egypt, and I asked Ghannouchi whether Osama bin Laden was revived after the coup in Egypt or not because if you just hinder people who are taking the power through a democracy, and if you do not allow them to integrate with the west or if you do not have a model which will be comprehensive for all the sects and groups and if you do not support those state organizations, then Daesh and similar and even more threatening organizations will have the opportunity to flourish in those areas. Therefore, military struggle, military fight is, of course, important but the main issue is the ideological fight.

Let me give you another example. Turkey has received a date for full membership negotiations with the EU in 2001. There, in 2003, in 2005, I'm sorry, and there were 600 journalists in the room, and the majority of them were coming from the Arab countries, most of them were coming from the Islamic world. So that was a great hope for the young people of the Islamic world. But right now, at the European Parliament, people are discussing whether or not to exclude Turkey from European Union.

So the main question is what kind of a message are European allies giving to the Islamic world? We think that the message should be a strong democracy message, a strong integration message, and the message that we are allies in developing models where we have democracy. Otherwise, Daesh will be strengthened or worse will come. Right now, Boko Haram in Nigeria and Daesh are getting stronger in the North Africa. Daesh is starting to flourish in North Africa as well.

Yalda Hakim: (off microphone) because just in the last year, or in the last two years, the latest figures show that 2,000 people from France, foreign fighters have gone, (inaudible – technical difficulties).

Hon. Jean-Yves Le Drian: Je n'ai pas de traduction. Je ne vous ai pas entendue.

Yalda Hakim: It's working?

Hon. Jean-Yves Le Drian: Non.

Yalda Hakim: No?

Hon. Jean-Yves Le Drian: Oui.

Yalda Hakim: Yeah.

Hon. Jean-Yves Le Drian: Oui, ça va.

Yalda Hakim: I mean, we're talking about, Minister Çelik here is talking about dealing with the root causes. I mean, just in the past couple of years, 2,000 foreign fighters have gone from France. I mean, it's fair to say that France has proven to be one of the most vulnerable western nations when it comes to the fight against IS. I mean, what counter-message is France, what message is France sending out to its people to counter the message and the propaganda machine of ISIS?

Hon. Jean-Yves Le Drian: (translator) I'm not sure that France is the country that has seen the largest number of foreign combatants. When you look at the information that we now have, I think it's much broader than that, although France has unfortunately been the subject of attacks from foreign combatants, French foreign fighters who have rallied to the cause of Daesh. And it's true that the global solution in terms of combating terrorism is not a political one.

It also requires the strengthening of integration and in those areas from which the fighters come. But I don't think we should engage in any kind of caricatures either. The breadth of the movement from France to Daesh, well I mean, in terms of the reasons for that, there's a certain ideology that's been accepted and it's come through those Islamic groups and has prompted that kind of engagement. But that can also affect very different categories of young people, not automatically those who are the ones who feel left behind.

That analysis applies to France, but to the other countries concerned as well, which prompts me to say, as was mentioned by my predecessor, that the solution is not a military one. It has to be ideological in nature and it has to be based on democratic principles. But coming back now to one of the things that was stated by General Allen earlier, I believe as well that we have not finished, even after the victory in Mosul, even after the victory in Raqqa, we're not done because there are other branches of terrorism, al Qaeda for one, which are still alive and well and France is engaged in Mali, where we're seeing reappear a number of groups that are associated with al Qaeda, even though we hadn't seen much of them, but they have emerged and they're there. They're there again.

And we know that the origin of that terrorism, the historical origin of al Qaeda and Daesh is a common cause. And just coming back to Syria, I'm not sure that the way the, Assad is fighting is not a source of recruitment. The people have not had the support they require in order to fight al-Assad and so they're looking elsewhere. And as I said, the two countries are indispensable and in the, and that goes for Syria as well.

And just about Jabhat al-Nusra, because General Allen referred to that, I, the fight against him is certainly just one, but we shouldn't associate it – which we seem to be – with what is happening in Aleppo under al-Assad. Certainly, there

are hundreds of people from that unit there, but they are not part of Jabhat al-Nusra necessarily. So I think it's important that we avoid any confusion and there are 250,000 people who are suffering from the barbarism of that regime.

But I don't think that's what General Allen was necessarily saying. But Jabhat al-Nusra could be Russia's argument to bombing the Syrian people.

Yalda Hakim: (off microphone) I just wanted to ask Senator McCain, I mean, Iran and Russia both want to see Assad remain in power for as far as the eye can see. And just this week, you've also said that any attempt to reset relationships with Russia is unacceptable as far as the United States is concerned.

Sen. John McCain: Well, what I've said is, and I believe that we must understand what Vladimir Putin's all about. And it's not just in Syria, as we speak. It is other activities, intimidations in the Baltics, dismemberment of Ukraine, and I am confident that he will be encouraged by what he sees to commit further acts of aggression, maybe small ones, but he believes, I know that he wants to restore the Russian empire. And that concerns the Baltics, concerns Ukraine. And so I believe that, that Vladimir Putin is what he is and as long as we understand and deal with him the way we dealt with the Soviet Union during the Cold War, the way we have dealt with other countries with which we have an adversarial relationship.

It doesn't mean that we don't talk to him, doesn't mean that we cut off all relations, but it does mean that we understand Vladimir Putin, what his ambitions are and what he has done, the slaughter that's going on right now. What is happening in the dismemberment of Ukraine. And I believe that the, if you talk to our Baltic friends, you will hear of enormous pressures there. Apparently, according to news reports, I haven't been there, Moldova is now a pro-Russian government.

According to news reports, Bulgaria is a pro-Russian government. So there is no doubt that he is asserting what he believes is the historic role of Russia in the world. It's incredible that he's playing a very weak hand so adroitly. His economy is dependent on the price of oil. I've said several times that Russia is a gas station masquerading as a country, and I changed that. It's a Mafia gas station masquerading as a country.

So what do we need to do? We need to have a steadfast understanding with Vladimir Putin. We need to shore up our relations with our allies. We need to have much more of this European reassurance initiative of our troops rotating in and out and training, joint training, joint capabilities and also domestically, we've got to do away with the thing called sequestration. And we have to do more for our military. We are gradually reducing our military in the face of greater

challenges which is causing us great difficulties and great difficulties on the men and women who are serving in the military who we are asking to do more.

You'll see Army or military people around here with these little marks on their sleeve. That's the number of foreign deployments, of deployments they have made. You'll see as many as seven, eight, nine. And so, we have a lot to do to make sure that Vladimir Putin understands that we will stick by our alliances, we will stay with our friends, we will have a strong military and we will have a strong alliance. And I think he may understand that over time.

But he must be held accountable for what he is doing in Syria today. My friends, these are acts of genocide that are taking place, as we sit here discussing who's going to be in the next Cabinet, who's going to the next Secretary of Transportation. We've lost focus on what is going on in the world.

And I'd just like to make a comment to my Turkish friends, and I would mentioned that our relationship with Turkey has been the closest militarily in every way. I'm a student of history, I recall when there was Turkish troops that fought on our side in Korea in the Korean War. But now, I'm very worried, I'm very worried about the disappearance of certain institutions that are fundamental to democracy, whether it be shutting down media or whether it be arresting Members of Parliament because they happen to be Kurds or other activities that are taking place in Turkey right now.

And I think one thing that we found out through history, if you repress people, if you deprive them of the liberties they think they deserve, sooner or later, you face reaction to those kinds of measures which repress basic freedoms of people of a country that has known a great deal of democracy.

Yalda Hakim: On that note, let's open it up to the floor. Yes, just in the back there?

Question: Thank you very much. Mohamed (inaudible). I'm going to, a small comment. I'm sure that it might not go well with what we are discussing, but let's start with the, first of all, when we talk about Daesh and the threat and what have you, let's realize that Daesh is not just an enemy to a particular group or to a particular country, but it's an enemy to humanity.

And I think it's very important that you engage Muslim countries in being partners in this conflict, that you need people in the region to help in clean up this mess of Daesh that is a threat to everybody.

The thing that I wanted to talk about more is we have tried the last years, trying to resolve the Syrian issue, and we have been discussing and discussing and I think every year, it escalates and it's bigger and bigger and the snowball keeps

getting bigger and bigger. I personally think that the new administration, let's give it a chance. I mean, there hasn't been a plan in the previous years where the new administration will disrupt this plan. There is no plan.

We are complaining that the Russians are bombing. So what's the solution? I think the solution is let's look, I mean, the new administration has been saying they have a plan. Get the Russians engaged in any kind of dialogue. The area needs rest. The area needs peace because if we continue on this cycle, the more wars we have, the more Daesh we will see, the more new groups we will see. And so we will just continue in this cycle. I think this is a time that we should really think seriously and think what other options that we have.

I think the options that the area, the people of the area see right now, and I'm one of them, is that let's give this new administration a chance and let's evaluate things within the next five to six months to a year, see where we're heading. There is nothing else to lose. We have been losing all this time and just criticizing, criticizing and nothing has been done at all. So let's hope that something else will happen.

Thank you very much.

Yalda Hakim: Thanks (inaudible).

Sen. John McCain: Let me just remind you of the lessons of history. And that is that thanks to two of the greatest leaders that this nation has ever produced, David Petraeus and Ryan Crocker, and thanks to the courage of then-President Bush, we started the surge. The surge succeeded. We defeated, General Allen will attest to that, we defeated al Qaeda. Al Qaeda then moved to Syria and became ISIS. And then we decided to pull everybody out of Iraq, leaving behind "in the words of Barack Obama, the freest, most democratic, peaceful Iraq in history. Not to worry because ISIS was the JV not fit to wear Kobe Bryant's shirt and, and then of course, when that vacancy occurred, we then saw al Qaeda move to Syria, become ISIS and the rest is history.

You can defeat them militarily and that is not the only answer, but first you have to defeat them militarily. Then all of the other ideological, all of the other things that make for this, that caused this discontent such as economic conditions, such as joblessness, such as all of the things that played many of the economies of the Middle East. Then we helped them. We helped them with martial plans. Once we had defeated them, but, and will they spread radical Islam throughout the world? Yes. But as long as they have a caliphate where they can have things like chemical weapons factories, where they can call in young men as we speak and say join the refugee flow, and here is an encrypted app, contact us when you get to Paris.

Then you've got to take out their caliphate, and then you take out these other things and this is a long, maybe decades old struggle with this radical form of Islam. And all of us are going to have to work as hard as we can to improve the economies and the lives of the people in these countries so that they will have an opportunity besides becoming radicalized and going out and taking their own lives in order to take the lives of others.

Yalda Hakim: I'm just going to take two more questions, then we'll come back to the panel. Yeah, just one here, and then we'll go there.

Question: Hello, I am (inaudible) from University of (inaudible), Mexico.

The most recent issue of Global Tourism Index came out just yesterday or two days ago, and it shows once more that the main driver of terrorism is actually instability, as it has been discussed. It is the main driver of terrorism. So if we assume that there will, according to what has been said, there will not be a stable Syria or stable Iraq soon enough. Then we also need to fight some of the instruments of terrorist organizations. And one of the instruments is in another sphere, the area of the communications and the area of the internet and the Twitter and all those, all those places where it seems to me that we have been really slow in understanding.

For example, as we have started before, the discourse from al Qaeda used to be very complicated and used to be difficult to understand. The discourse that ISIS uses is much more simple, it's a discourse designed for youngsters. They use infographies, [sic] they use always Twitter and posts that can be easily understood. So according to what has been said, this is also an area that must be fought.

So my question to anyone in the panel is if you, if you believe that this has really been understood and is there anything being done? Are the things, the proper things being done to stop this communication era that has been spread through the message of ISIS or it can reach anywhere in the world as fast as, you know, in just seconds, and then inspire lots of people and also direct, directly manage different attacks?

Yalda Hakim: And I'll just take one more question and then we'll come back to the panel. Yeah.

Question: Thank you. I'm (inaudible) from Lebanon. I ask you please to include one more actor in the game: Iran and policy towards Iran. There is something that is not clear right now with the policy of the new President-elect Trump, so at the same time trying to get closer to the Russian position in Syria, I, which is the fact of closer to the Iranian position in Syria, while at the same time,

criticizing the nuclear deal with Iran. How will he balance between these two positions and how will this affect the situation on the ground?

And if we move to France, which is also getting ready for elections, if we listen to what is being said specifically right now during the French right-wing primary debate, there is also a perception that things are moving in the same direction as Mr. Trump. So how will this affect the perception among the Sunni population in the Middle East, and Syria in particular, that their lives matter less and the price of stability is to accommodate the strongest powers, Assad and his Iranian supporters? Thank you.

Yalda Hakim: Thank you. So first, the communications question, General Allen, you know, do you agree that there needs to be a war on dealing with the social media propaganda machines as well?

Gen. John Allen (Ret.): Yeah, there's no question. And I think I implied that earlier. It goes to the issue that I've talked about, this global network that has emerged. And the global network rides on the back of the internet of things, and it is facilitated, as Senator McCain talked about, by these commercially available point to point encrypted phone applications that give you the capacity to do strategic organization, regional movement and tactical employment.

I mean, we had these improbable environments where the, the enemy – and I'll use that term broadly for all of the terrorists – where the enemy conducts an attack and the communication system over which they're conducting that attack is more secure than the first responders of the nation that comes rolling up onto the objectives and gets shot up as it attempts to respond as first responders.

So within the context of the counter ISIL strategy, there was, or there remains a line of effort with respect to the communications and strategic communications. But that's not enough. We, this could be for Peter, this could be a subject alone in the next forum, and that is to the point that Senator McCain made, we have to take a very large step back because much of the conversation we're having today is about the military defeat of Daesh and tracking down the individual foreign fighters and whether the refugee flows are going.

We have to take a step back to determine whether we are the community of nations ready to embark on a generational endeavour fueled by something that looks like a martial plan to get at the fundamental underlying causes that radicalize hundreds of thousands of men and women in the world today, because that radicalization is what pushes large segments of those populations into the arms of these extremists.

And until we are willing to invest in that kind of a, what we'll call getting to the left of radicalization, until we're willing to do that, then we're going to fight Daesh, and we're going to fight son of Daesh, and we're going to fight al Qaeda. We're going to be in perpetual conflict forever. And we do okay at that, but look at the political crises that we have created within the community of nations today. And until we're willing to go after systematically these underlying social, economic, political and religious causes, we're just going to see this recurring over and over again.

But to the, specifically to the question, it is the global network facilitated both by messaging and the means for communications that is facilitating, I think the longer term existence of Daesh and related organizations. And if you don't like how Daesh did it this time, wait till the next organization comes up because it will more impressively employ the emergency of technology today in ways 10 years ago we could not have imagined al Qaeda.

Al Qaeda has not surfaced using the technology that Daesh is using every day. Next organizations are taking a page out of that book and they're going to be more virulent, they're going to be more dangerous, they're going to be more difficult to detect and until we systematically go after the global network and start to chop that up and eliminate the means for them to communicate, we're going to have a long-term problem here. And it's only going to get worse, and it's going to get worse in our capitals.

Yalda Hakim: And the second question, there was, there needs to be a discussion about the policy towards Iran, so whoever, Senator McCain.

Sen. John McCain: Well there's no doubt that Iran is the elephant in the room, and probably should have been an integral part of this discussion when we began it. There's no doubt that the reason why Bashar Assad is still in power today is because Hezbollah, the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, Qasam (ph), Solomani (ph) came to his rescue when he was about to fall in the view of most observers. There's no doubt today, for example, in Lebanon, the latest news is that General Aoun is now the President of Lebanon.

The fact that Hariri is a Prime Minister makes it a little complicated but the fact is Aoun is a supporter of Hezbollah. Hezbollah played a major role in propping up Bashar Assad. I think when we look at the role that the Iranians have played in Iraq, I think most observers would agree that Iran is a greater influence in Iraq today than the United States of America, which goes back to our total withdrawal.

And that cannot be a good thing for the United States of America. For example, if Shiite militias are in the liberation of Mosul, which will come, and they are freeing "liberating a Sunni population, there is every possibility that there could

be gross mistreatment of the Sunni residents of Mosul that, that remain. So the Iranians really have a tremendous increase in their influence and now fueled by \$100 billion or so.

And if I might make a comment that I make because of my background and history, when I see pictures of Iranians putting American sailors on their knees with their hands clasped behind their heads in gross violation of all international law, and the Secretary of State of the United States thanking them for releasing them is something that I find absolutely intolerable.

So the Iranians are obviously a very major factor in all of our calculations in the Middle East. I think that the Congress and the administration will be reviewing the Iranian deal. Now how much of that I think is also dependent to some degree on Iranian behaviour. There have already been violations, although they have not been large violations, of, of the agreement.

So I think that it will be one of the issues that the Congress and the administration will want to review. I can say exactly what we want to do, because a lot of it depends on what the Iranian behaviour is. But the prospect of in about 10 years under this agreement we now have a nuclear weaponized Iran is something that should give pause to all of us. And obviously we think people like the Israelis examine their options as far as nuclear weapons are concerned and not just the Israelis, I think literally every nation in the region.

Yalda Hakim: Well, we've got about two minutes left. So I can probably take one quick, one more quick question. If you can give it to us in 30 seconds and I'll get someone from the panel to, to respond in about 30 seconds.

Question: My name is David Smolansky, I'm a mayor of El Hatillo, one of the towns of Caracas, Venezuela.

What about the expansion of Assad, the regime in Syria, visited our country a few years ago. Some high officials of the Government of Venezuela are linked to this regime, are allegedly linked to trafficking terrorism and we're having now a difficult situation with this (inaudible) system that just denied an election from the opposition. So it's on the priority for the international community, specially the United States of America, the European Union, even Turkey, the President Maduro went to Turkey a few weeks ago. The expansion of Assad in Latin America, specially in Venezuela, that it could become a threat to the region. Thank you.

Gen. John Allen (Ret.): I don't think Assad's going to be much of a threat to the western hemisphere, frankly. But the one thing I think your question does point out, and it's very important, and I don't hear much conversation about this, and

it really deserves more attention, is the role of the global criminal network and the global drug

network as it relates to the global jihadist movement. Because many of these terrorist groups, and I've had little experience with about four or five of them, it's very difficult to tell the difference on any given day as to whether they are a heavily armed criminal network or whether they are in fact a terrorist network.

And the, the symbiosis that they, that we can observe by their supporting each other is very concerning. And as globalization continues to pull more population into the cities, the big cities, where big chunks of cities go off the grid, who's going to be governing those ought to be a very substantial concern to all of us. So your question's important. Terrorism, global criminality, fueled by the drug trade is something we need to spend more time looking at, because on any given day, there are very vague and blurred differences between them and they really help each other.

And that's part of this global network I've been talking about. Daesh has been facilitated in its capacity to move and to strike by the global criminal network and we'll be, want to be watching that.

Hon. Ömer Çelik: (translator) Earlier on, there is one thing particularly important. It's, one may raise many criticisms like Iran, Russia, Syria. Iran had many mistakes in Syria, led to the death of many people. But the question is criticizing Iran and Russia on its own listing down the wrongdoings perpetrated by Iran and Russia, is it a good way of doing politics? I don't think so. Let's ask this question. We are the NATO allies, us. We, do we have a commonly agreed Syria policy among the NATO allies? Do we have a common policy?

Let me put another question. Last July, Turkey endured a coup attempt and half of the Generals in our Army were implicated in this coup attempt in Turkey and in one month's time, after the coup attempt, our Army went into Syria and we liberated the stretch of border, the stretch of land between Azaz and Jarabulus. What does this mean? For the first time, we cleared NATO borders of Daesh. We liberated the borders of Daesh.

So was Turkey given enough solidarity from her allies? Senator McCain, I listened to your remarks. Our biggest ally, the USA, biggest ally of Turkey and Turkey has this national threat, PYD, the arm of PKK. Our biggest allies cooperate with PYD. Is this a right strategy? What needed to be done instead of, well we criticize Syria, we criticize Iran but Iran led Hezbollah into there and perpetrated many terrorist attacks. How about us, NATO allies? Did we sufficiently support free Syrian army? Did we sufficiently Syrian opposition? No.

Every country individually, of their own (inaudible) is supported as (inaudible) group on the territory. I'll give you an example. Quite recently, we captured a militant who was intending to perpetrate a terrorist attack in Turkey. This person was implicated in PKK in the past, right now has a Facebook account where he is posting his pictures with Daesh. But at the same time, this PKK person has connections with the intelligence services of one of our ally countries. This is so complicated.

Syria, we're referring as a terrorist neighbour. Turkey is the country who has a say in this. We suggested to have no-fly zone, but this was not taken on board. We suggested to have a safe zone. This was not supported by allies. We want to fight against all terrorists, we're not supported.

Yalda Hakim: (off microphone) 30 seconds. I'm getting a call.

Hon. Ömer Çelik: (translator): But because we're neighbour of Syria, we, we need to mention this, we need to be given this opportunity. Day and night, Turkey is being criticized but the thing is how to support strength and free Syrian Army. Have to strengthen the Syrian opposition, and how we can liberate this area from Daesh. Just criticizing Iran and Russia, it's not enough. We need the good solidarity and Turkey needs good solidarity too. That's the picture.

Yalda Hakim: (off microphone) thank all the panelists here today for their insights and the discussions (applause) (inaudible).