

# ASSESSING THE TERROR THREAT LANDSCAPE IN SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA AND EXAMINING OPPORTUNITIES FOR COOPERATION

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OF THE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA  
BEFORE THE  
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## **ASSESSING THE TERROR THREAT LAND- SCAPE IN SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA AND EXAMINING OPPORTUNITIES FOR CO- OPERATION**

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**Thursday, June 26, 2025**

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA  
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,  
*Washington, DC.*

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:05 a.m., in room 2172 Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Bill Huizenga (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Mr. HUIZENGA. The Subcommittee on South and Central Asia will come to order.

The purpose of this hearing is to discuss the current terror threat landscape in South and Central Asia and examine potential opportunities for U.S. action and regional cooperation to address the terrorist threat.

I now recognize myself for an opening statement.

### **OPENING STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN BILL HUIZENGA**

Today we will discuss the current terror threats and the landscape throughout South and Central Asia and potential opportunities for the Trump administration to enhance our regional counter-terrorism strategy.

Since the Biden administration's ill-conceived and executed withdrawal from Afghanistan and the subsequent Taliban takeover, the terror threat landscape in South and Central Asia has changed dramatically.

Despite the Taliban's Doha Agreement's commitments, Afghanistan has once again become a hotbed for terrorists looking for safe harbor as they grow their ranks and abilities to project attacks across the region and, frankly, the world.

Threats from groups such as ISIS-K and the TTP, also known as the Pakistan Taliban, are higher than any time in recorded history and internally Pakistan has seen the highest rates of terror attacks in many years.

And, of course, the recent attack in Pahalgam reminded us all that the militant threat in Kashmir has not subsided.

For decades the United States has remained the global leader in the fight against terrorism and we have engaged our international partners through bilateral agreements and multilateral mechanisms that have supplied our allies with training and equipment

to ensure that they are able to stop the spread of terrorism from further poisoning our world.

However, the threat has persisted since the 2021 ISIS-K bombing at Abbey Gate which killed 13 American servicemen and 170 Afghan civilians and wounded many others, including one of my constituents from southwest Michigan.

The Taliban claims to be doing their best to eliminate the ISIS-K threat. However, while the Taliban claim victory ISIS-K continues to wreak havoc, conducting attacks that target everyone from innocent civilians to Taliban officials, all while continuing its effort to radicalize and recruit from diaspora communities across and even outside of Central Asia.

Last year we saw the growing ISIS-K threat manifest as hundreds were killed in attacks in both Moscow and Tehran and through the foiled plot to attack the 2024 Summer Olympics in Paris.

Nevertheless, the United States continues to display strong leadership, working closely with our partners such as the Pakistanis, who recently arrested a key planner in the Abbey Gate attacks. That individual has since been brought to the United States to stand trial for his crimes.

The Pakistanis themselves are no strangers to the terrorist threat that festers within their own borders. 2024 was one of the most violent years in over a decade for Pakistan.

Groups such as Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan and the Baluchistan Liberation Army threaten civilians and Pakistani security forces alike.

Rising violence from such militant groups and others pose a significant threat to Pakistan's internal security and has been the source of much friction between Pakistan and its neighbors in the region.

Most recently we saw the devastating attack on the Indian-controlled Jammu and Kashmir where 26 individuals, primarily tourists, were brutally and deliberately killed in cold blood by militants.

The attack led to a military conflict between two major nuclear powers, the first of its kind in years.

I want to be clear. I respect India's sovereign right to defend itself against rogue actors seeking to sow instability in the volatile region. But I support and encourage both sides to work earnestly to resolve the areas of conflict.

As we discuss the challenges emanating from the region it is essential to assess the tools that we have at our disposal to continue the fight against terrorism.

The Trump administration has a unique opportunity to find new ways to engage our regional partners and find a new path to stability and security.

So I want to say thank you to our witnesses, Ms. Curtis and Ms. Todd, for being here today and I look forward to a robust conversation.

With that, I yield back and I recognize Ranking Member Kamlager-Dove for 5 minutes for an opening statement.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF RANKING MEMBER SYDNEY  
KAMLAGER-DOVE**

Ms. KAMLAGER-DOVE. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to our witnesses today, I know one of whom just got in last night from the other side of the globe.

You know, I am glad that this subcommittee is having our first regional hearing on such a critical bipartisan issue, and just off script, you know, counterterrorism is not a Republican or a Democratic issue nor should it be, and it shouldn't be subjected to the partisanship that we are seeing in these halls.

I know that there are so many hearings that are put on for the culture wars and the clickbaits and this is not one of them, and I applaud the chair for working to get this back on the schedule.

Though I believe there are many reasons why we should be invested in the future of South and Central Asia, being an effective and credible partner on counterterrorism is particularly important.

Just 2 months ago we witnessed a terrible attack targeting civilians in Pahalgam, which set off a crisis between two nuclear powers.

The threat remains serious. The world's largest concentration of U.S.-designated foreign terrorist organizations is in Central and South Asia.

I want to focus in on particularly ISIS-K, the terrorist group that increasingly poses the greatest direct threat to the United States.

ISIS-K is the most lethal branch of ISIS and is internationalizing its recruitment to carry out attacks beyond the region.

Successful high-profile operations in Russia and Iran in 2024 demonstrated the group's growing ability to direct and inspire atrocities around the world. ISIS-K has increasingly targeted Europe with plots foiled in Germany, Austria, Turkey, and France.

I think we should all take seriously the U.S. intelligence community's warnings that the group's ultimate goal could include striking the U.S. homeland.

Although ISIS-K's operations in Afghanistan and Pakistan remain a serious concern, an important enabler of the group's expanding global reach is its ability to recruit and radicalize individuals from Central Asian states.

Political repression, lack of economic opportunity, community fragmentation from mass labor migration, and governance failures and corruption all create grievances among Central Asian nationals that ISIS-K is quick to weaponize.

Added to that, a lack of education and poor media literacy increases people's vulnerability to online propaganda that ISIS-K is aggressively disseminating.

Like many of the foreign policy challenges we face, addressing and preventing the threat of ISIS-K from ever reaching our shores requires the U.S. to be engaged and proactive, not isolationist and retreating.

Dealing with a challenge as complex and persistent as terrorism requires a multi-faceted and well-resourced foreign policy toolbox including security cooperation, public diplomacy, economic support, development, and intelligence.

Unfortunately, I am concerned that this administration has eliminated many of the tools we have used to address the terrorist threat in the region, removing lines of defense we have had in place for decades.

In fact, it is hard to imagine what resources will be left if U.S. foreign assistance is cut by 84 percent. How much of the remaining funds will even be devoted to South and Central Asia if it is all merged into an “America First” opportunity slush fund or whatever that is, or what personnel will be available to support counterterrorism efforts if we are firing entire chunks of the department including RIFs supposedly going out tomorrow to the counterterrorism unit?

But even if we ignore all of that, the administration has already taken actions that I am worried have sabotaged our ability to combat terrorism in the region: illegally dismantling the U.S. Institution of Peace, which was supporting the repatriation and reintegration of ISIS fighters to their home countries and breaking the cycle of extremism, and canceling U.S. assistance to civilians of Afghanistan, contributing to a worsening humanitarian crisis; terminating USAID’s countering violent extremism and economic development programs that were critical to addressing the drivers of radicalization in Central Asia; and then shutting down RFE/RL including its local Tajik network Radio Ozodi.

If this committee is serious about countering terrorism, and we should be and I believe this chair is, it is essential that we not only maintain hard capabilities but deploy the tools that help our partners address the root causes of terrorism and radicalization.

It is time for us to stand up and talk about these issues. I look forward to working with my colleagues on this important bipartisan issue.

And with that, I yield back.

Mr. HUIZENGA. The gentlelady’s time has expired.

We are pleased to have our distinguished witnesses with us here today.

First, we have Lisa Curtis, senior fellow and director of the Indo-Pacific Security Program at the Center for a New American Security and a former NSC senior director for South and Central Asia in the first Trump administration.

We also welcome Brianne Todd, professor of the practice of Central Asia—sorry, Central Asian Studies at the National Defense University.

So thank you both for being here today. Your full statements will be made part of our record and I request that each of you keep your oral remarks to 5 minutes so that we might have time for questions from our—from our members.

And with that, I now recognize Ms. Curtis for 5 minutes for your opening statement.

And please turn your mic on. Make sure that that red light is on.

#### STATEMENT OF LISA CURTIS

Ms. CURTIS. Thank you.

Chairman Huizenga, Ranking Member Kamlager-Dove, and other distinguished members of the subcommittee, it is an honor to

testify before you today and I will briefly summarize my written remarks.

The terrorism landscape in South and Central Asia is complex and it requires the focused attention of the United States to monitor and contain threats that impact the security of the U.S. homeland as well as broader U.S. national security interests.

The presence of ISIS-K in Afghanistan has become an increasingly global concern, especially since it claimed two major attacks last year in Russia and Iran.

ISIS-K operatives plotting attacks in the West have also been arrested in Europe and the United States, and U.S. officials have raised concerns about ISIS-K's capabilities and intent to target the United States.

While U.S. and Taliban interests converge on the need to counter ISIS-K, the two sides differ considerably on how to contain the overall terrorist threat in the region as well as on human rights and women's issues.

The Taliban can never be viewed as a counterterrorism partner. This is for several reasons.

First, the Taliban remains allied with al-Qaeda with whom it fought side by side for 30 years.

Second, the Taliban have opened tens of thousands of religious schools which are inculcating a new generation of young Afghans with their extremist ideologies.

Third, the Taliban has increasingly cracked down on the rights of women and girls. Afghanistan is the only nation in the world that forbids girls from going to school.

Now let me turn to India and Pakistan. The recent India-Pakistan conflict was precipitated by the April 22d terrorist attack in Indian Kashmir, which New Delhi has blamed on the U.S.-designated Pakistan-based terrorist group Lashkar-e-Taiba.

India retaliated on May 7th by striking the LET\_Lashkar-e-Taiba as well as at several other sites in Pakistan.

What transpired afterward was arguably the most serious conflict between India and Pakistan since their 1971 war. Following 4 days of Indian and Pakistani missile and drone strikes on each other's military installations, U.S. officials intervened to broker a cease-fire on May 10th.

Pakistan has long hosted terrorist groups that attack India. It has even backed groups like the Haqqani Network that conducted some of the most brutal attacks on U.S. forces in Afghanistan.

More recently, however, we have seen tensions between Pakistan and the Afghan Taliban over their harboring of Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan, or the TTP, which now conducts regular attacks inside Pakistan.

So how should the U.S. deal with this volatile mix of terrorist threats and conflict?

First, Washington should implement tailored counterterrorism cooperation with each nation of the region, especially Tajikistan given the increasing number of Tajikistan citizens susceptible to ISIS-K recruitment.

Second, Washington must continue to invest in the strategic partnership with India and improve counterterrorism cooperation

with New Delhi while avoiding trying to mediate a solution to the vexed Kashmir dispute.

Third, the U.S. should increase counterterrorism cooperation with Pakistan on mutual threats like ISIS-K but press Islamabad to crack down on U.S.-designated terrorist organizations like the Lashkar-e-Taiba that attack India.

Pakistan's dual policies on terrorism requires a delicate policy approach from the United States that makes careful distinctions between helpful and harmful Pakistani actions regarding terrorism.

Fourth, while it may be necessary to engage with the Taliban on ISIS-K, the U.S. must condition any movement toward recognizing or legitimizing the Taliban on their improving the rights of women and girls.

Additionally, the United States must continue assistance for online education as well as scholarships for Afghan women and girls to study abroad. These are inexpensive programs that help blunt extremist ideologies that fuel terrorism.

That completes my opening remarks. Thank you very much.  
[The prepared statement of Ms. Curtis follows:]



MAY 22, 2025

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS  
SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA SUBCOMMITTEE

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## **Assessing the Terror Threat Landscape in South and Central Asia and Examining Opportunities for Cooperation**

BY

**Lisa Curtis**

*Senior Fellow and Director, Indo-Pacific Security Program  
Center for a New American Security*

## I. Introduction

Chairman Huizenga, Ranking Member Kamlager-Dove, distinguished members of the subcommittee:

My name is Lisa Curtis. I am the director of the Indo-Pacific Security Program at the Center for a New American Security (CNAS). The views I express in this testimony are my own and should not be construed as representing any official position of CNAS.

The terrorism threat landscape in South and Central Asia is complex and dangerous and requires the focused attention of the United States to monitor and contain threats that impact the security of the U.S. homeland. In addition to protecting U.S. citizens against terrorist threats, it is in the U.S. national security interest to work with partners in the region to contain terrorist threats and target terrorist leadership, financing, technical and online capabilities, and training facilities to both stop the spread of Islamist extremist ideologies and prevent broader conflict in the region. While Islamist terrorism is one of many national security threats the United States faces—and the threat is less acute now than in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001, attacks on the United States—U.S. officials ignore the ongoing activities and attacks being carried out by terrorist groups in the region, especially the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISIS-K), at their peril. My testimony provides background and updates on the current terrorism threat picture in Afghanistan, Central Asia, and Pakistan (with a view on India-Pakistan tensions), the implications for the United States, and policy recommendations for managing these threats.

### Afghanistan

The presence of ISIS-K in Afghanistan has become an increasingly global concern, especially since it claimed two major attacks last year—the March 22 attack on a concert hall in Moscow that killed at least 140 people and the January 4 suicide bombing in the city of Kerman, Iran, that killed 95 people on the death anniversary of the former commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Quds Force, Major General Qasem Soleimani.<sup>1</sup> ISIS-K operatives plotting attacks in the West have been arrested in Europe and the United States in recent years, and U.S. officials have raised concerns about ISIS-K's capabilities and intent to continue to target the United States.<sup>2</sup> In October 2024, an Afghan national, acting on behalf of ISIS, was arrested in Oklahoma for planning an attack to take place on U.S. election day.<sup>3</sup> The Taliban opposes ISIS-K and has been fighting the group and eliminating its senior operatives, including the perpetrator of the August 26, 2021, suicide bombing in Kabul that killed 13 U.S. service members and 170 Afghans.<sup>4</sup> ISIS-K opposes Pashtun-dominated Taliban rule and considers the Taliban ideology as not sufficiently hardline.

While U.S. and Taliban interests converge on the need to eliminate the ISIS-K scourge, the two sides differ considerably on how to contain the overall terrorist threat in the region, as well as on human rights and women's issues, which limits the extent to which the Taliban could or should be viewed as a counterterrorism partner of the United States. The Taliban remains allied with al Qaida (AQ)—with whom it fought side by side for 30 years—and AQ members hold leadership roles within the Taliban regime.<sup>5</sup> The February 6, 2025, United Nations Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team Report said the Taliban “maintained a permissive environment allowing al Qaida to consolidate, with the presence of safe houses and training camps scattered across Afghanistan.”<sup>6</sup> Al Qaida continues to be motivated to attack the United States and retains close links to other terrorist groups operating in Afghanistan; however, there are no signs that it is currently planning attacks against the United States from Afghanistan, perhaps in line with Taliban directives.

It may be necessary to engage in information and intelligence sharing with the Taliban to target ISIS-K, but this limited counterterrorism cooperation should not impact U.S. policies toward the Taliban's egregious human rights

record, especially regarding women and girls. The Taliban has increasingly cracked down on the rights of women and girls since they took control of the country in August 2021.<sup>7</sup> Afghanistan is the only nation in the world that forbids education for girls over the age of 12 and has shut its universities to women. Women are generally not allowed to work outside the home or move around freely without a male companion, and last year, the Taliban banned women from speaking or baring their faces in public.<sup>8</sup>

If the United States cuts its remaining education programs for Afghan women and girls, including online education and scholarships for them to study abroad, it will not only have a significant human cost, but will facilitate the Taliban's efforts to radicalize society and foster a socioeconomic environment conducive to the growth of extremism and terrorism. Unfortunately, the future of the American University of Afghanistan (AUAF) online education programs for nearly 1,000 undergraduate and master's degree students (70 percent women) and university scholarships for over 200 Afghan women to attend the AUAF Doha campus starting this fall are in limbo following large-scale cuts to U.S. foreign assistance.<sup>9</sup> AUAF's Transition to Success Program serving 1,300 high school students with online education in Afghanistan was terminated earlier this year as part of the aid cuts. Ending U.S. support for education programs for Afghan women and girls will only facilitate the Taliban's efforts to severely repress women and feed extremism in a country where dozens of international terrorist groups already operate.<sup>10</sup>

### Central Asia

While Central Asian countries have experienced few terrorist attacks inside their borders, the region has seen a disproportionate number of its citizens serving as foreign fighters in conflicts in Iraq and Syria and supporting and participating in ISIS attacks worldwide. Tajikistan is the poorest country in Central Asia, with a GDP per capita of \$1,280, and high unemployment and corruption. The country faced a civil war in the 1990s which involved armed Islamist opposition groups, and in 2015, Tajikistan President Emomali Rahmon banned the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan.<sup>11</sup> Tajikistan citizens in the United States, Europe, and Russia have been arrested or deported for their involvement in ISIS activity and attacks, most prominently following the March 2024 attack on Crocus City Hall in Moscow.<sup>12</sup> In late February, a man from Tajikistan, Mansuri Manuchekhri, was arrested in New York and charged with conspiracy to provide material support to ISIS-K, as well as illegal possession of firearms and immigration fraud.<sup>13</sup> Last June, the U.S. authorities arrested eight Tajikistan nationals for alleged ties to ISIS and apparently later deported them back to Tajikistan.<sup>14</sup> In January 2024, a Tajikistani migrant was arrested in Germany for allegedly planning attacks on religious sites in Germany and Austria.<sup>15</sup>

ISIS-K has called for the overthrow of Central Asian governments and threatened to assassinate the leaders of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.<sup>16</sup> ISIS-K propaganda simultaneously criticizes the Taliban's relationships with Central Asian governments and the fact that it is a Pashtun-centered movement that does not include ethnic Tajiks and Uzbeks. Uzbekistan and Tajikistan have developed different approaches to dealing with the Taliban, even as both countries are equally concerned about the threat posed by ISIS-K.

For its part, Uzbekistan has welcomed Taliban leaders to Tashkent and pursued various economic projects with the group, including signing an agreement for a railway project that includes Pakistan.<sup>17</sup> The Uzbek Special Representative for Afghanistan Ismatulla Irgashev has been actively seeking to build consensus among a host of countries for engaging the Taliban. Meanwhile, Uzbekistan has downplayed Taliban repression of women and girls and other human rights concerns.

Tajikistan, on the other hand, has shunned engagement with the Taliban and instead plays host to the National Resistance Front, an anti-Taliban resistance force led by Ahmed Masoud, son of the now-deceased leader of the former Northern Alliance. Tajikistani President Emomali Rahmon has said his government would not recognize the Taliban unless they include Afghan Tajiks in an inclusive government.<sup>18</sup> Like Uzbekistan, the Tajikistani authorities are

concerned about militants stationed in the border areas and have enhanced their troop presence along the Tajikistan-Afghan frontier. In the summer of 2022, reports emerged about a new militant group, the Tehrik-e-Taliban Tajikistan (or “Tajik Taliban”) forming in northern Afghanistan.

Reporting on Central Asia from the congressionally funded Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), especially its Tajik service, has provided valuable coverage on issues related to the radicalization of Central Asian migrants in Russia and Europe. It has also published in-depth investigations into several ISIS-related terrorist attacks involving Tajikistani citizens, as well as explored the social and economic factors that give rise to youth radicalization in Tajikistan.<sup>19</sup> RFE/RL, the only international broadcaster producing content in all five languages of Central Asia, as well as the region's common language Russian, providing fact-based, uncensored information on local developments and seeking to blunt the influence of Islamist extremist groups. For instance, following the March 2024 terrorist attack on the Crocus City Hall in Moscow, RFE/RL's Tajik service was one of the first media outlets to seek out information from family members about the alleged perpetrators.<sup>20</sup> Investigations by RFE/RL's Tajik service also identified Tajikistani foreign fighters who have taken new roles in Syria's government, exposing transnational extremist networks.<sup>21</sup>

#### Pakistan-India

Pakistan has long been a hotbed for terrorist groups that attack India and has backed groups like the Haqqani Network that conducted some of the most brutal attacks against U.S. forces stationed in Afghanistan. However, this support for terrorist groups as a regional policy tool has recently backfired on Pakistan. Even though Pakistan provided haven for the Taliban leadership and their fighters during the entirety of the 20-year U.S. mission in the country, tensions have recently flared between the Pakistani military and the Afghan Taliban over its support for the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), which conducts regular terrorist attacks inside Pakistan and seeks to overturn the Pakistani state. In fact, TTP attacks on Pakistan have grown by 73 percent in the last four years. The tensions between Pakistan and the Afghan Taliban have escalated to the extent that Pakistan has conducted air strikes on suspected terrorist hideouts inside Afghanistan's territory.<sup>22</sup> Pakistan accuses the Afghan Taliban of supporting and using the TTP as proxies against the Pakistani state.

In addition to the threat from the TTP, Pakistan has experienced a surge in violence from the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA), which is waging a campaign of attacks against military and civilian targets in the province with the aim of gaining independence from the Pakistani state. In March, the BLA hijacked a train traveling from Quetta, Balochistan to Peshawar in the Pakistani province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa that was carrying nearly 400 passengers. Following a 30-hour ordeal, the Pakistan military freed most of the passengers, except for 21 civilians who were killed during the siege. Pakistan says that the BLA is a proxy for India, although Pakistani officials have not offered concrete evidence to substantiate the accusation.

Despite U.S. frustration over Pakistani support for groups that attacked U.S. forces and undermined the U.S.-led mission in Afghanistan for all those years, recent signs indicate improvement of U.S.-Pakistan counterterrorism cooperation. For instance, during his March 4, 2025, address to the joint session of the U.S. Congress, President Donald Trump thanked Pakistan for its cooperation in apprehending and extraditing one of the ISIS-K perpetrators behind the August 26, 2021, suicide bombing in Kabul.

This emerging U.S.-Pakistan cooperation may be strained, however, by the recent India-Pakistan conflict, which was precipitated by the April 22 terrorist attack in Indian-administered Kashmir that India blamed on the Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Tayyiba (LeT). New Delhi will expect Washington to use its influence to press Pakistan to crack down on the LeT, as well as other Pakistan-based groups that target India, like the Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM).

On April 22, 2025, a group calling itself the Resistance Front (TRF) took responsibility (and then later withdrew the claim) for killing 26 civilians, mostly Indian tourists, in Pahalgam, located in Indian-administered Kashmir.<sup>23</sup> India claimed that the TRF was merely a front organization for the U.S.-designated LeT and retaliated on May 7 by striking the LeT headquarters in Muridke in the Punjab province of Pakistan. India also struck eight other sites in Pakistani-controlled Kashmir and the Punjab that it labeled as “terrorist infrastructure.” Supporting India’s claim of targeting terrorists, one of those killed in India’s retaliatory strikes was Abdul Rauf Azhar, a U.S. Specially Designated Global Terrorist involved in the 1999 hijacking of India Airlines flight 814.

What transpired after India’s May 7 military response was arguably the most serious conflict between India and Pakistan since their 1971 war. Following four days of Indian and Pakistani barrages of missile and drone strikes on each other’s military installations, U.S. officials intervened to broker a ceasefire on May 10. The ceasefire is tenuous, however, and tensions remain high between the nuclear-armed adversaries.

### Implications and Policy Recommendations

The overall terrorist threat landscape in South and Central Asia is complicated and does not lend itself to simple or straight forward solutions. It requires tailored policies toward each nation in the region that emphasize intelligence and information sharing, technical cooperation, counterterrorism training, and sometimes lethal action. As in the case of India-Pakistan, terrorist attacks can provoke military intervention, with potentially disastrous results for the region and world. The United States needs to maintain steady engagement in South and Central Asia to ensure it has strong intelligence networks to monitor and target, when necessary, emerging terrorist threats. Without a U.S. force presence in Afghanistan, Washington’s relationships with other regional nations have taken on greater importance. To manage terrorist challenges, the United States should:

- **Assist Central Asian states, especially Tajikistan, in building counterterrorism capacity.** The increasing number of Central Asian citizens susceptible to ISIS-K recruitment, especially from Tajikistan, requires Washington to prioritize developing closer counterterrorism partnerships with these countries. With the opening of tens of thousands of new madrasas (religious schools) in Afghanistan intended to inculcate a new generation of young men in the Taliban’s extremist ideology, the entire region will face increasing terrorist threats. Central Asian states are currently and rightly worried primarily about ISIS-K, but the terrorism threat is likely to broaden and will require the Central Asian governments to increasingly rely on U.S. intelligence and information sharing, training, and technical assistance to thwart its growth.
- **Enhance counterterrorism cooperation with Pakistan on mutual threats, while pressing Islamabad to crack down on U.S.-designated terrorist groups like LeT and JeM.** While the United States can benefit by sharing intelligence and working on joint operations with Pakistan on mutual terrorist threats stemming from groups like ISIS-K and the TTP, Washington must be clear with Pakistani officials that it cannot tolerate support for U.S.-designated terrorist groups. This will require U.S. policymakers to delicately balance a mixed policy approach that relies on both carrots and sticks and makes careful distinctions between helpful and harmful Pakistani actions regarding terrorism.
- **Avoid getting drawn into trying to mediate a solution between Pakistan and India of the decades-old territorial dispute over Kashmir.** While the United States played an indispensable role in getting a ceasefire between Pakistan and India and preventing the two nuclear-armed nations from engaging in all-out war, any attempt by Washington to mediate a long-term solution to the vexed Kashmir dispute would be counterproductive. New Delhi strongly opposes outside involvement in the Kashmir issue, and further efforts by President Trump to insert himself on the matter risk sacrificing Indian trust and confidence.

Moreover, any hints of outside mediation on the dispute could encourage unrealistic expectations in Pakistan and fuel support for more violence in India-administered Kashmir.

- **Do not sacrifice support for Afghan women and girls for cooperation with the Taliban on ISIS-K.** Washington must maintain the Biden administration's policy to refuse concessions to the Taliban, like diplomatic recognition, unfreezing of Afghan assets, or lifting of sanctions on Taliban leaders, until the Taliban improve rights for women and girls, especially when it comes to education. The first Trump administration also prioritized support for Afghan women and girls, such as in 2017 when former White House Senior Advisor Ivanka Trump facilitated the visit of an all-girls Afghan robotics team to the United States to participate in an international robotics competition. In 2018, while speaking at a conference on women's empowerment held in Kazakhstan, Ivanka Trump said, "Supporting women's empowerment is therefore fundamental to the future direction of Afghanistan. The status and disposition of women will determine whether or not Afghanistan will be a civilized member of the community of nations or will dissolve back into an oppressive and brutal society like that which we saw during the (previous) Taliban rule."<sup>24</sup>
- **Continue U.S. assistance for online education and scholarships to study abroad for Afghan women and girls.** It is in the U.S. national security interest to support educational opportunities, such as online learning or scholarships to study abroad, for Afghan women and girls. The more Afghan women and girls can access educational opportunities, the lesser the chance that extremist trends in Afghan society that fuel terrorism will flourish and grow.
- **Congress should continue to fund RFE/RL, whose uncensored and fact-based reporting is contributing to fighting terrorist and extremist threats in South and Central Asia.** RFE/RL local services continue to reach large audiences in Central and South Asia, including in Afghanistan, where more than half of Afghanistan's adult population accesses RFE/RL content through Radio Azadi every week. Without RFE/RL's continued service, the U.S. government will lose valuable insight and reporting in areas where terrorist threats are emanating. In addition, RFE/RL's Radio Azadi is one of the few local broadcasters in Afghanistan that consistently reports on the hardships women face under the Taliban regime, as well as their efforts to resist the Taliban's extremist agenda. Radio Azadi also hosts call-in programs that provide a unique opportunity for Afghan women to share their perspectives and make their voices heard. If RFE/RL is no longer able to spotlight Afghan women and hold up their voices, extremist perspectives and ideologies will gain ground and fuel terrorist movements.

<sup>1</sup> Francesca Ebel, "As Death Toll in Moscow Attack Rises to 143, Migrants Face Fury and Raids," *The Washington Post*, March 27, 2024, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2024/03/27/russia-terror-death-toll-migrants/>; Parisa Hafezi, Elwely Elwelly, and Claudia Tanios, "Islamic State Claims Responsibility for Deadly Iran Attack, Tehran Vows Revenge," Reuters, January 4, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/iran-vows-revenge-after-biggest-attack-since-1979-revolution-2024-01-04>.

<sup>2</sup> Tim Lister, "How ISIS Has Europe and the US in Sights After Deadly Moscow Attack," CNN, March 31, 2024, <https://www.cnn.com/2024/03/30/europe/how-isis-has-europe-and-the-us-in-sights-after-deadly-moscow-attack/index.html>.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of Justice, "Afghan National Arrested for Plotting an Election Day Terrorist Attack in the Name of ISIS," press release, October 8, 2024, <https://www.justice.gov/archives/opa/pr/afghan-national-arrested-plotting-election-day-terrorist-attack-name-isis>.

<sup>4</sup> Matt Seyler, "Taliban Kills Suspected 'Mastermind' of Bombing That Killed 13 US Troops, Officials Say," ABC News, April 25, 2023, <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/taliban-kills-suspected-isis-mastermind-kabul-airport-bombing/story?id=98833007>.

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<sup>5</sup> Bill Roggio, “Al Qaeda Leaders Are Prominently Serving in Taliban Government,” Foundation for Defense of Democracies, June 11, 2023, <https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2023/06/11/al-qaeda-leaders-are-prominently-serving-in-taliban-government>.

<sup>6</sup> *Thirty-Fifth Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team Submitted Pursuant to Resolution 2734 (2024) Concerning ISIL (Da’esh), Al-Qaida, and Associated Individuals and Entities* (UN Security Council, February 6, 2025), <https://docs.un.org/en/S/2025/71/Rev.1>.

<sup>7</sup> Tirana Hassan, *Afghanistan Events of 2024* (World Report 2025, Human Rights Watch), <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2025/country-chapters/afghanistan>.

<sup>8</sup> Maroosha Muzaffar, “Taliban’s ‘Dystopian’ New Rules Banning Afghan Women From Speaking in Public Widely Condemned,” *The Independent*, August 27, 2024, <https://www.independent.co.uk/asia/south-asia/afghanistan-women-taliban-ban-speak-read-b2602261.html>.

<sup>9</sup> Ruchi Kumar, “U.S. College Grants for 208 Afghan Women Are Cut, Then Restored—Now in Limbo,” NPR, April 23, 2025, <https://www.npr.org/sections/goats-and-soda/2025/04/08/101-57802/afghanistan-women-college-usaid>.

<sup>10</sup> Lisa Curtis and Hadeea Amiry, “Don’t Betray the Women of Afghanistan,” *Foreign Affairs*, March 28, 2024, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/afghanistan/dont-betray-women-afghanistan>.

<sup>11</sup> Parangis Najibullah, “Tajikistan’s Banned Islamic Party Claims Former Members Hit By ‘Wave of Arrests,’” Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, June 11, 2018, <https://www.rferl.org/a/tajikistan-s-banned-islamic-irpt-party-members-hit-by-wave-arrests/29283941.html>.

<sup>12</sup> Parangis Najibullah, “U.S. Arrest of Tajik Suspect Highlights Mounting Islamic State Concerns,” Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, February 28, 2025, <https://www.rferl.org/a/new-york-arrest-islamic-state-isis-manuchehri/33331826.html>.

<sup>13</sup> Najibullah, “U.S. Arrest of Tajik Suspect Highlights Mounting Islamic State Concerns”; Abdullah Bozkurt, “FBI Arrest in New York Exposes Turkey’s Role as Logistics Hub for ISIS-K,” Nordic Monitor, March 3, 2025, <https://nordicmonitor.com/2025/03/fbi-arrests-in-new-york-unveil-turkeys-role-as-a-logistics-hub-for-isis-k/>.

<sup>14</sup> Nicole Sganga, “Tajikistan Nationals with Alleged ISIS Ties Removed in Immigration Proceedings, U.S. Officials Say,” CBS News, October 6, 2024, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/tajikistan-men-alleged-isis-ties-removed-immigration-proceedings-us-officials/>.

<sup>15</sup> Sganga, “Tajikistan Nationals with Alleged ISIS Ties Removed in Immigration Proceedings, U.S. Officials Say.”

<sup>16</sup> Lucas Webber, “Afghanistan-Based Extremists Spark Terror Fears in Central Asia,” Nikkei Asia, June 10, 2023, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/Terrorism/Afghanistan-based-extremists-spark-terror-fears-in-Central-Asia>.

<sup>17</sup> Shanthie Mariet D’Souza, “The Cost of Uzbekistan’s ‘Pragmatic’ Taliban Policy,” *The Diplomat*, July 22, 2023, <https://thediplomat.com/2023/07/the-cost-of-uzbekistans-pragmatic-taliban-policy/>.

<sup>18</sup> “Tajikistan: Taliban Take Control of Consulate,” Eurasianet, March 27, 2023, <https://eurasianet.org/tajikistan-taliban-take-control-of-consulate>.

<sup>19</sup> The author has served as a board member of RFE/RL since September 2022 and as chair of the RFE/RL board since August 2024.

<sup>20</sup> “Exclusive: Who Are the Suspects in the Moscow Concert Attack? Here’s What Their Relatives Say,” RFE/RL’s Tajik Service, March 26, 2024, <https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-attack-tajikistan-suspects-relatives-families-hometowns/32878446.html>.

<sup>21</sup> Farzon Muhamadi, et al., “The Foreign Militants Among the Ranks of Syria’s New Rulers,” December 13, 2024, <https://www.rferl.org/a/syria-hits-tajikistan-northmacedonia-kosovo-albania/33237636.html>.

<sup>22</sup> “Pakistan Carries Out Strikes in Afghanistan: How Islamabad-Taliban Ties Have Deteriorated,” Firstpost, March 19, 2024, <https://www.firstpost.com/explainers/pakistan-airstrikes-afghanistan-islamabad-taliban-ties-deteriorated-13750422.html>.

<sup>23</sup> Yashraj Sharma, “What Is the Resistance Front, the Groups Claiming the Deadly Kashmir Attack?” Al Jazeera, April 23, 2025, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/4/23/what-is-the-resistance-front-the-group-behind-the-deadly-kashmir-attack>.

<sup>24</sup> Shane Croucher, “Ivanka Trump Wants America to Help Women in Afghanistan, a Country Her Father Wanted to Abandon,” *Newsweek*, September 7, 2018, <https://www.newsweek.com/ivanka-trump-donald-trump-afghanistan-women-war-1110305>.

Mr. HUIZENGA. The gentlelady yields back.

With that, Ms. Todd, you are recognized for 5 minutes for an opening statement.

#### STATEMENT OF BRIANNE TODD

Ms. TODD. Chairman Huizenga, Ranking Member Kamlager-Dove, and other distinguished members of the subcommittee, good morning and thank you for inviting me to speak with you today.

As the ranking member noted, I just returned last night from a counterterrorism seminar in Uzbekistan, so I am delighted to be here with you today and I would underscore that all of the opinions and views expressed are my own.

You have received my written testimony so today I will focus on three main points about the evolving terror threat in Central Asia and why U.S. leadership remains crucial.

First, the terror threat in Central Asia is reaching an inflection point. Central Asia has not historically been a center of terrorist activity but we are now witnessing some troubling trends.

The Islamic State Khorasan Province, also known as ISIS-K, is expanding its influence and exploiting regional vulnerabilities. Central Asians were involved in several high-profile attacks last year including the deadly Crocus City Hall attack in Moscow.

To attract recruits ISIS-K and its related affiliates have become more agile, more globalized, and more ideologically seductive to the marginalized. Today, they are radicalizing, recruiting, and directing attacks with unprecedented speed and precision.

ISIS-K has leveraged encrypted messaging apps, cryptocurrency platforms, and AI-generated content to coordinate attacks and disseminate propaganda as seen in its recruitment efforts following the Crocus City Hall attack.

Second, U.S. engagement in Central Asia is essential for our national security. I have asked them to project a map, and if you can see the map the region sits at a strategic crossroads bordered by Russia, China, Afghanistan, and Iran.

For over 30 years the United States has supported the sovereignty, stability, and security of these countries. Stable partners in Central Asia work with us to share intelligence, disrupt terror financing, intercept returning foreign terrorist fighters, and support the rehabilitation and reintegration of returning fighters' family members. They are key to preventing attacks against the United States and our allies.

Third, U.S. assistance has made a difference, but if the United States steps back then the region's needs will go unmet or others will fill the gap.

USAID programs like the Resilient Communities Activity and Employment and Enterprise Development Activity addressed some of the root causes of extremism by supporting rural economic development, youth opportunities, and civil society.

These modest investments produced real results. However, as these programs conclude our ability to bolster Central Asia's resilience is at risk.

Some may argue that U.S. resources are better spent elsewhere. However, the cost of inaction could be greater in the long term.

The Central Asian states have sought deeper ties with the United States because they value our partnership on security and development issues.

A vacuum left by the United States could embolden extremist groups as local governments may lack the capacity to counter evolving threats without our support.

Russia and China are also poised to expand their influence. China's Belt and Road projects have already increased Beijing's economic leverage and Russia's security agreements could limit our access to intelligence and regional cooperation.

Let me close by emphasizing that now is not the time to abandon our Central Asian partners. Sustained strategic U.S. engagement in Central Asia can advance our national security interests by working with the region toward long-term stability and preventing future terrorist attacks at home and abroad.

Thank you for your attention and your continued commitment to our security.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Todd follows:]

Statement before the

House Committee on Foreign Affairs  
Subcommittee on South and Central Asia

**“Assessing the Terror Threat Landscape in South and Central Asia and  
Examining Opportunities for Cooperation”**

A Testimony by:

**Brianne Todd**

Professor of the Practice of Central Asian Studies,  
Near East South Asia Center for Strategic Studies,  
National Defense University

June 26, 2025

Chairman Huizenga, Ranking Member Kamlager-Dove, Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the evolving terror threat in South and Central Asia, as well as the prospects for U.S. cooperation in addressing these challenges. The views expressed in this testimony are my own and do not represent those of the Near East South Asia Center for Strategic Studies or the National Defense University.

This testimony will outline the terrorist threats facing Central Asia, explain why sustained U.S. engagement is vital to our national security, and discuss current U.S. initiatives and opportunities to expand counterterrorism cooperation with regional partners. The bottom line is that Central Asia is a critical front in the global fight against terrorism. U.S. support for the Central Asian countries is essential to prevent ISIS-K and other extremist groups from exploiting regional vulnerabilities, thus threatening our homeland and our allies and partners. Proactive engagement is necessary now to prevent greater threats (and costs) from emerging in the future.

***Central Asia's Vital Importance to U.S. National Security Interests***

The Central Asian countries—Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan—are situated at a pivotal crossroads between major actors on the Eurasian landmass. Geography significantly influences many of their relationships and shapes their options for political, economic, and security partnerships. As a committed partner for more than 30 years, the United States has supported the countries' sovereignty and territorial integrity since they gained independence in 1991.

Through the C5+1 (five Central Asian countries plus the United States) platform, the U.S. government has facilitated regional cooperation through ministerial meetings, expert sessions, and working groups focused on enhancing security, economic resilience, and sustainable development since 2015.<sup>1</sup> A key C5+1 priority is strengthening security cooperation to address regional threats, including enhancing and sharing best practices in defense, law enforcement, and counterterrorism cooperation.<sup>2</sup>

Regional stability and security in Central Asia are not distant foreign policy concerns but a frontline defense for the U.S. homeland. By proactively supporting stable and sovereign partners in the region, the United States can help reduce the risk of terrorist attacks at home and abroad. Investments in regional security yield long-term benefits by addressing the root causes of instability that foster radicalization and violent extremist activity. The choice is clear: the United States can invest in its partners' stability now or face greater threats and potential costs in the future.

***The Evolving Terror Threat in Central Asia***

As the United States has provided increased support for a more stable and secure Central Asia over the past decade, global jihadists have also become more active within the Central Asian states. The region remains largely insulated from domestic terrorist attacks, but individuals

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<sup>1</sup> "C5+1 Diplomatic Platform," United States Department of State, 27 February 2023, <https://2021-2025.state.gov/c51-diplomatic-platform/>.

<sup>2</sup> "C5+1 Leaders' Joint Statement," The White House, 21 September 2023, <https://bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/09/21/c51-leaders-joint-statement/>.

from Central Asia have emerged as some of the most prominent actors in the operations of the Islamic State – Khorasan Province (ISIS-K).<sup>3</sup> Formed in 2015 by defectors from militant groups such as Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, ISIS-K pledged allegiance to ISIS and aspires to establish its envisioned caliphate in the historical region of “Khorasan,” which includes parts of Afghanistan, Pakistan, Central Asia, and Iran.<sup>4</sup> With Central Asians implicated in terrorist incidents in the United States, Russia, Europe, and the Middle East, their growing involvement with ISIS-K has raised concerns among both regional and international observers.<sup>5</sup>

This evolution is not the result of a sudden or spontaneous wave of radicalization within the Central Asian region. Rather, it is the product of a long-standing confluence of socio-economic, political, and psychological factors that continue to shape the region’s vulnerability to extremism. More than a decade ago, Central Asia was a significant source of foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq, with approximately 4,000 men and women traveling to join jihadist movements during the height of the Islamic State’s territorial expansion.<sup>6</sup> The collapse of the so-called caliphate in 2019 scattered these individuals around the world, and while some returned home, many did not. A large number resettled in migrant communities in Russia, Türkiye, and Europe, where they helped establish new cells and online propaganda and recruitment networks, often drawing on old grievances.

Several high-profile attacks last year demonstrated that ISIS-K is increasingly utilizing dispersed networks of Central Asian operatives to project force internationally. In January 2024, ISIS-K claimed the suicide bombing that killed at least 95 people at a memorial gathering for Qassem Soleimani in Kerman, Iran.<sup>7</sup> Tajik nationals planned the attack, including one of the bombers and the planner, who transited through Türkiye for training.<sup>8</sup> Turkish security services responded with sweeping crackdowns and arrested more than 350 suspected ISIS-K affiliated individuals, with the majority being from Central Asia.<sup>9</sup> The most devastating of these operations occurred in March 2024, when four Tajik nationals stormed Moscow’s Crocus City Hall in a deadly terrorist attack that killed more than 130

<sup>3</sup> Tucker and Lemon argue that claims that Central Asia is a “hotbed” of terrorist activity are alarmist since the region only accounts for approximately 0.001% of all terrorist attacks recorded worldwide since 1970. Noah Tucker and Edward Lemon, “A ‘Hotbed’ or a Slow, Painful Burn? Explaining Central Asia’s Role in Global Terrorism,” *CTC Sentinel*, July/August 2024: 20-25. <https://ctc.westpoint.edu/a-hotbed-or-a-slow-painful-burn-explaining-central-asias-role-in-global-terrorism/>.

<sup>4</sup> “ISIS-Khorasan (ISIS-K),” Terrorist Groups, Counter Terrorism Guide, National Counterterrorism Center, March 2025. [https://www.dni.gov/nctc/terrorist\\_groups/isis\\_khorasan.html](https://www.dni.gov/nctc/terrorist_groups/isis_khorasan.html).

<sup>5</sup> In March 2023, Uzbek national Sayfullo Saipov was sentenced to life in prison for the October 2017 terrorist attack in which he ran down eight people on a bike path in New York City. “Sayfullo Saipov to be Sentenced to Life in Prison for 2017 Truck Attack for ISIS,” United States Department of Justice, 13 March 2023, <https://www.justice.gov/usao-sdnw/pr/sayfullo-saipov-be-sentenced-life-prison-2017-truck-attack-isis>.

<sup>6</sup> Ekaterina Stepanova, “Foreign Terrorist Fighters from Russia in and after Syria and Iraq,” (Trans) National Trends and Threats, *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 46, no. 11 (2023): 2229.

<sup>7</sup> Aamer Madhani, “US Warned Iran that ISIS-K was Preparing Attack Ahead of Deadly Kerman Blasts, a US Official Says,” *AP News*, 25 January 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/kerman-us-warning-isisk-bombings-bcb47f04165b3eb7b9bc7b4868c8399c>.

<sup>8</sup> Turkish authorities later tied the perpetrators of the attack on Santa Maria Catholic church in Istanbul to the same transnational network behind the Kerman plot. Further investigation revealed that these attacks were coordinated by ISIS-K affiliates in Afghanistan, with assistance from diaspora-based logistics and recruitment networks in Russia and Türkiye. Eric Schmitt, “ISIS Affiliate Linked to Moscow Attack Has Global Ambitions,” *New York Times*, 25 March 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/03/25/us/politics/moscow-attack-isis.html>.

<sup>9</sup> Riccardo Valle, “Central Asia: Annual Threat Assessment,” *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses*, January 2025, 17, no. 1: 77-86. <https://rsis.edu.sg/ctta-news/article/central-asia>.

people and injured more than 140 others.<sup>10</sup> ISIS-K quickly confirmed the connection on its media channels, which published Tajik language content praising the attackers.<sup>11</sup> It was a dramatic illustration of ISIS-K's expanding transnational network and the pivotal role Central Asians play within it.

The appeal of ISIS-K to Central Asians lies in its proximity, ideology, and messaging. The group positions itself both as a vanguard of global jihad and an avenger of perceived injustices against Muslims by secular regimes. ISIS-K media exploits domestic policies, such as Tajikistan's hijab ban and suppression of religious education, to portray Central Asian governments as apostate oppressors.<sup>12</sup> ISIS-K's launch of its first Tajik language magazine, *The Voice of Khorasan*, following the Crocus City Hall attack marked a significant escalation in this strategy. Later issues were published in additional languages to target Tajik, Uzbek, and Russian speakers across Central Asia and the diaspora.<sup>13</sup>

Propaganda for Central Asians is no longer mass-produced but precision-targeted. After anti-Muslim incidents in Europe, ISIS-K quickly mobilized online followers and published calls to action in multiple languages.<sup>14</sup> What makes this messaging particularly dangerous is its resonance with marginalized individuals abroad. Migrant communities in Russia and Türkiye have become especially fertile ground for ISIS-K recruitment. When they are socially isolated, trapped in economically precarious situations, and subject to discrimination or xenophobic policing—as seen after the Moscow attack—many young Central Asians find a sense of identity, purpose, and belonging in jihadist narratives that is absent in their everyday lives.<sup>15</sup> Anecdotal accounts show that radicalization often begins not in madrassas but in labor migrant communities, prisons, or online messaging platforms, where violent extremists weaponize personal grievances into ideological commitments.

The internet has been the key enabler of this shift. ISIS-K's digital operations have grown more sophisticated as the organization has increasingly used encrypted platforms, coded language, and AI-generated content to evade detection and manipulate audiences. Terror financing has also transitioned into the digital realm. Central Asian operatives have adapted to new technologies, utilizing platforms such as QIWI Wallet, YooMoney (formerly Yandex

<sup>10</sup> Russian investigators initially attributed the attack to Ukraine before eventually admitting the perpetrators were affiliated with ISIS-K. “Russian Spy Chief Says More Than 20 Arrested Over Deadly Concert Attack,” *Reuters*, 24 May 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russian-spy-chief-says-ukraine-was-directly-involved-moscow-concert-hall-attack-2024-05-24/>. “One Year On, Hundreds Pay Tribute After Deadly Crocus City Hall Attack,” *Moscow Times*, 23 March 2025, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2025/03/23/one-year-on-hundreds-pay-tribute-after-deadly-crocus-city-hall-attack-a88450>.

<sup>11</sup> Uran Botobekov, “Crocus City Hall Attack: Deciphering Central Asian Jihadism and Russian Counterterrorism,” *The Diplomat*, 25 March 2024, <https://thediplomat.com/2024/03/crocus-city-hall-attack-deciphering-central-asian-jihadism-and-russian-counterterrorism/>.

<sup>12</sup> “Tajik Parliament’s Upper Chamber Seconds Law Banning Hijab,” *Tajikistan News ASIA-Plus*, 20 June 2024, <https://asiaplus.tj.info/en/news/tajikistan/power/20240620/tajik-parliaments-upper-chamber-seconds-law-banning-hijab>.

<sup>13</sup> Riccardo Valle, “Central Asia: Annual Threat Assessment,” *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses*, January 2025, 17, no. 1: 77-86. <https://rsis.edu.sg/cita-newarticle/central-asia>.

<sup>14</sup> In March 2024, German police arrested two Afghan nationals accused of planning an attack on Sweden’s parliament in Stockholm, after ISIS-K propaganda called for retaliation against Sweden over Qur'an desecrations. Amira Jadoon, et al., “From Tajikistan to Moscow and Iran: Mapping the Local and Transnational Threat of Islamic State Khorasan,” *CTC Sentinel*, May 2024: 1-12. <https://ctc.westpoint.edu/from-tajikistan-to-moscow-and-iran-mapping-the-local-and-transnational-threat-of-islamic-state-khorasan/>.

<sup>15</sup> “Russia: Xenophobic Crackdown on Central Asian Migrants,” *Human Rights Watch*, 18 March 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/03/17/russia-xenophobic-crackdown-central-asian-migrants>.

Money), Monero, and cryptocurrencies to discreetly transfer funds.<sup>16</sup> Investigators have uncovered schemes where seemingly charitable donations were funneled through encrypted apps and anonymous wallets to support ISIS-K fighters or their families. In one instance, more than \$2,000 was raised and transferred to perpetrators of the Moscow attack via online fundraising appeals disguised as humanitarian aid.<sup>17</sup> This growing digital sophistication in terror financing has forced the Central Asian governments to evolve their counterterrorism strategies beyond traditional law enforcement.

As they confront the risks posed by both virtual financial networks and returning foreign terrorist fighters, the Central Asian states have come to recognize that disruption alone is not enough. Preventing radicalization and fostering long-term stability also requires a focus on rehabilitation and reintegration, particularly for women and children who may have been victims as much as participants. As a result, the governments have increasingly engaged in the rehabilitation and reintegration of foreign terrorist fighters and their families. Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan have led these efforts with comprehensive repatriation programs—Kazakhstan through its “Zhusan” and “Rusafa” operations, and Uzbekistan through its “Mehr” initiative—that combine repatriation with mental health support, education, vocational training, and religious re-education.<sup>18</sup> Tajikistan and the Kyrgyz Republic have focused primarily on repatriating women and children, often favoring prosecution over rehabilitation and reintegration for male foreign terrorist fighters due to limited institutional capacity and heightened security concerns.<sup>19</sup> Despite resourcing challenges, the regional response reflects a growing recognition of the importance of reintegrating returnees as part of a comprehensive counterterrorism and domestic security strategy.

ISIS-K’s enduring appeal stems from deep-rooted socio-economic and political grievances. High unemployment, weak governance, and repression of legitimate religious and political expression create fertile ground for radicalization. This fragmentation highlights the urgent need for a holistic and unified approach that progresses beyond security-based responses. Long-term counterterrorism success depends on addressing root causes through structural reforms that promote education, combat corruption, and support community and economic development. Programs intended to reintegrate former fighters, expand religious literacy, and support migrant workers must be revitalized and sustained. Equally vital is the empowerment of moderate religious leaders and civil society actors who can provide credible alternatives to extremist narratives. A balanced strategy that reduces underlying discontent is as essential as tactical counterterrorist operations.

<sup>16</sup> Nodirbek Soliev, “The Digital Terror Financing of Central Asian Jihadis,” *CTC Sentinel*, April 2023: 20-27. <https://ctc.westpoint.edu/the-digital-terror-financing-of-central-asian-jihadis/>.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> “UNICEF Experts Agree that Kazakhstan’s Experience Repatriating and Reintegrating Children and Women Returned from Conflict Zones Serves as an Example for Many Countries,” UNICEF, *unicef.org*, 16 March 2023, <https://www.unicef.org/kazakhstan/en/press-releases/unicef-experts-agree-kazakhstans-experience-repatriating-and-reintegrating-children>. “Uzbekistan: UN Expert Applauds Return of Women and Children from Conflict Zones, Recommends Further Reforms,” OHCHR, 2021, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2021/12/uzbekistan-un-expert-applauds-return-women-and-children-conflict-zones>.

<sup>19</sup> “Syrian Kurds Repatriate 146 Tajik Women and Children from Camps Holding Relatives of IS Fighters,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 26 July 2022, <https://www.rferl.org/a/syrian-kurds-repatriate-tajik-women-children-is-fighters/31959893.html>. “United States Applauds the Kyrgyz Republic’s Repatriation of Women and Children from Northeast Syria,” United States Department of State, 19 July 2024, <https://2021-2025.state.gov/united-states-applauds-the-kyrgyz-republics-repatriation-of-women-and-children-from-northeast-syria/>.

Shifting regional and international dynamics complicates these domestic efforts. The Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan presents both a potential counterbalance to ISIS-K and a source of regional instability. Meanwhile, as Russia has reduced its role in the region to focus on its war in Ukraine, China has increased military-technical and counterterrorism cooperation with its Central Asian neighbors. Considering these evolving dynamics, the Central Asian countries are demonstrating growing regional cooperation. Establishing a more unified regional framework that encompasses intelligence sharing, coordinated border management, and contingency planning in response to potential regional instability remains essential.

Central Asia's stability and U.S. national security interests are deeply intertwined, particularly in terms of counterterrorism, homeland security, and strategic competition. Stable governments in Central Asia are better able to disrupt terrorist networks, secure borders, and share intelligence, thus preventing the emergence of ungoverned spaces that could serve as a base for attacks on the United States or its allies and partners. A stable Central Asia serves as a crucial buffer against threats to the U.S. homeland, but if left unchecked, ISIS-K and its affiliates could exploit conditions to plot and execute attacks. Investing proactively in regional stability through capacity building, intelligence sharing, and economic development costs far less than responding once a full-blown crisis or existential threat has developed.

#### *Current U.S. Initiatives and Opportunities for Future Cooperation*

The United States has historically played a critical role in countering radicalization, violent extremism, and terrorist attacks in Central Asia through a range of foreign assistance programs tailored to the region's complex socio-political and security issues. These initiatives recognize that effective prevention requires a comprehensive approach that promotes sovereign, prosperous, and secure Central Asian states. A secure and stable Central Asia supports U.S. efforts to counter terrorism, protect the homeland, and enhance economic prosperity globally.

U.S. foreign assistance has significantly enhanced American access in Central Asia by supporting security cooperation, economic development, and regional connectivity. Since the early 1990s, the United States has provided over \$9 billion in direct assistance to the region, focusing on peace, security, democratic reform, and economic growth, which has fostered stronger bilateral ties and enabled the United States to maintain a strategic presence.<sup>20</sup> Security assistance, especially after 9/11, provided secure access to airbases and logistical routes for operations in Afghanistan, deepening military and diplomatic engagement with the Central Asian states. Economic aid and development programs, such as those that USAID implemented, have promoted market reforms and infrastructure projects, creating resilient markets that benefit both the region and U.S. exporters. Educational and technical exchange initiatives have also built long-term relationships and increased U.S. soft power, while ongoing assistance has helped counterbalance the influence of Russia and China in the region.

Current U.S. security cooperation programs focus on combating transnational threats, securing borders, promoting the professionalization of security forces, and advancing respect for the rule of law. Under the International Military Education and Training (IMET) and

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<sup>20</sup> Maria Blackwood, "Central Asia: Background and U.S. Relations," Congressional Research Service, 24 September 2021, <https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/R46924>.

Foreign Military Financing Programs, the United States has provided border security and counterterrorism capabilities and training to the countries in Central Asia.<sup>21</sup> U.S. Central Command organizes an annual multilateral exercise, REGIONAL COOPERATION, which fosters collaboration among the Central Asian and other regional nations. Additionally, the National Guard Bureau's State Partnership Program has established long-term relationships between U.S. National Guard units and each of the Central Asian militaries, focusing on border security, counterterrorism, special operations forces' training, combat medical care, humanitarian aid, disaster relief, and officer development.

Security cooperation programs in Central Asia offer a high return on investment, delivering significant impact at relatively low cost in a decidedly competitive environment. Since the U.S. military withdrawal from Afghanistan, however, Central Asia has received less attention, with limited security cooperation resources increasingly redirected to the Indo-Pacific to align with broader U.S. strategic priorities. Given this shift, it is worth considering whether these resources could be more effectively utilized in lower-profile regions like Central Asia, where even modest investments can yield substantial security benefits.

U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) programs in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, the Kyrgyz Republic, and Kazakhstan addressed some of the root causes of extremism, including weak governance, youth exclusion, and economic isolation. Programs like the Resilient Communities Activity (RCA), Employment and Enterprise Development Activity (EEDA), and Market Driven Rural Development (MDRD) project helped reintegrate returning foreign fighters, support vulnerable populations, and address rural poverty. Broad development projects, like AgroTrade in the Kyrgyz Republic, created jobs and reduced economic vulnerability, issues that are critical for countering radicalization. Regional initiatives, such as the Central Asia Media Program, strengthened media literacy and social cohesion, offering peaceful alternatives to extremist ideologies.

In 2023, U.S. aid obligations to Central Asia totaled approximately \$154 million, covering health, economic development, peace and security, and governance programs. However, by April 2025, nearly all USAID programs in Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan were canceled, with the Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan losing 69% and 78% of their USAID-backed programs, respectively.<sup>22</sup> This drastic reduction has raised concerns about the impact on local development, humanitarian aid, and U.S. soft power. The cuts reflect a strategic shift in U.S. foreign assistance priorities, with uncertain prospects for continued cooperation in the near term.<sup>23</sup>

Countering radicalization and violent extremism requires sustained investments in civil society, economic opportunity, transparent governance, and regional cooperation. In the short term, local partners have lost funding for initiatives that supported regional resilience. In the absence of U.S.-supported programs, extremist narratives could flourish, undermining societal cohesion and enabling extremist recruitment. In the long term, the United States will abandon this space to other actors if it ceases to be present. If the United States is genuinely

<sup>21</sup> "U.S. Security Cooperation with Central Asia," United States Department of State, 20 January 2025, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-security-cooperation-with-central-asia/>.

<sup>22</sup> Catherine Putz, "USAID Cuts Devastating to Central Asia Programs," *The Diplomat*, 28 March 2025, <https://thediplomat.com/2025/03/usaid-cuts-devastating-to-central-asia-programs/>.

<sup>23</sup> Sadokat Jalolova, "Cuts to USAID Leave Central Asia Facing Development Challenges," *The Times of Central Asia*, 21 May 2025, <https://timesca.com/cuts-to-usaid-leave-central-asia-facing-development-challenges/>.

committed to confronting terrorism at its source, then it must not cede its influence to adversarial powers or permit extremism to take hold in a region of vital importance to U.S. national security interests.

The United States has a critical opportunity to strengthen its role as a stabilizing force in Central Asia. With groups like ISIS-K expanding their influence, exploiting socio-economic instability, and leveraging transnational recruitment networks, the region requires decisive and sustained U.S. engagement to counter these dangers effectively. A strategic approach that bolsters bilateral and regional engagement, scales existing programs, and reinforces diplomatic, economic, and security cooperation can make a significant impact to reduce radicalization and violent extremism in the region.

One of the most immediate and practical steps the United States can take is to maximize current development and security programs already occurring in the region. Expanding foreign assistance initiatives focused on economic growth, public health, education, and youth engagement can help address the underlying conditions that fuel radicalization. These efforts are particularly critical in areas where high unemployment and political exclusion leave young people vulnerable to extremist recruitment. With the elimination of the State Department's Assistance for Europe, Eurasia, and Central Asia (AEECA) funding, support for such programs through the America First Opportunity Fund will be essential to make the United States safer and stronger.

Equally important is the opportunity to deepen bilateral cooperation with individual Central Asian states. Each country faces unique challenges, and the U.S. government must tailor its engagement accordingly. In the Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan, the United States should assist law enforcement officials and legal advisors with investigating and prosecuting extremist activity, while also supporting rehabilitation and social reintegration programs for returning foreign fighters and their families.<sup>24</sup> Uzbekistan presents an opportunity to support the government's reform agenda by offering technical assistance on religious freedom, promoting interfaith dialogue, and encouraging judicial reform. Even in Turkmenistan, the United States can maintain engagement through quiet diplomacy, focusing on technical cooperation in areas such as border security and youth engagement to preserve channels for future collaboration.

In addition to strengthening bilateral ties, the United States should intensify its regional security cooperation. Existing initiatives such as the State Department's Anti-Terrorism Assistance Program provide platforms for expanding intelligence sharing, law enforcement collaboration, and regional training exercises. Through U.S. leadership in the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF) and the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, there may be additional opportunities for burden sharing, particularly in intelligence sharing, counter-threat financing, and counter-radicalization programs targeting diaspora populations. Allies and partners, especially those that have experienced plotting or attacks linked to Central Asian militants on their soil, may be receptive to deepening intelligence and law enforcement cooperation. Increased coordination and collaboration could create opportunities for

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<sup>24</sup> "UNODC and Prison Service of Tajikistan Co-Operate to Address Foreign Terrorist Fighter Threats in Prison," UNODC, undated, accessed 23 June 2025, <https://www.unodc.org/roca/en/news/unodc-and-prison-service-of-tajikistan-co-operate-to-address-foreign-terrorist-fighters-threats-in-prison.html>.

Vagit Ismailov, "Tajikistan Launches Program to Reintegrate Convicted Extremists into Society," *The Times of Central Asia*, 24 April 2025, <https://timesca.com/tajikistan-launches-program-to-reintegrate-convicted-extremists-into-society/>.

corresponding sanctions regimes, synchronized prosecutions, and targeted capacity building in third countries that serve as transit or recruitment hubs for ISIS-K-affiliated networks. Through these venues, the U.S. government could continue to promote common standards, provide regional security assistance, and sponsor initiatives to disrupt the transnational logistics and online infrastructure used by Central Asian terrorists.

Finally, sustained diplomatic engagement remains critical. High-level visits, public diplomacy, and strategic dialogues reinforce the U.S. commitment to Central Asia and help align security and governance priorities. In a region where external influence is contested and local governments seek signs of long-term U.S. interest, such signals can be as important as material assistance. This ongoing engagement is especially important as regional powers—such as China—actively compete for influence in Central Asia and seek to fill any perceived gaps in U.S. involvement. Last week, Kazakhstan hosted the second Central Asia – China Summit in Astana. During the summit, Chinese president Xi Jinping cited the U.S. tariff rates as one of the ways in which China is a more reliable partner to Central Asia than the United States. The Central Asian heads of state joined Xi in launching a platform to promote free trade as well as cooperation centers focused on poverty alleviation, desertification, and education. Xi also pledged approximately \$200 million in grant assistance to the Central Asian countries this year to support employment and development projects.<sup>25</sup>

Without bold and sustained U.S. engagement, global jihadist radicalization in Central Asia will continue to spread, increasing the risk of new terrorist safe havens that threaten both regional stability and U.S. security interests. By acting now, the United States can help the countries in Central Asia resist these influences, protect their citizens, and develop regional cooperative networks to secure themselves in the future. Some scholars have described Central Asia's encounter with jihadism as a smoldering ember capable of reigniting under certain conditions.<sup>26</sup> Events have shown that the region is no longer a passive observer of global terrorism, but an active, if unintended, participant. Its citizens serve as operatives, fundraisers, and ideological vectors in a transnational network that stretches from Kabul to Cologne. Confronting this reality will demand that the United States exercise vigilance and utilize all available resources in support of its national security interests.

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<sup>25</sup> Xiuhan Chen, et al., "China's Xi Signs Treaty to Elevate Ties with Central Asia," *Reuters*, 17 June 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/business/media-telecom/chinas-xi-signs-treaty-elevate-ties-with-central-asia-2025-06-17/>.

<sup>26</sup> Noah Tucker and Edward Lemon, "A 'Hotbed' or a Slow, Painful Burn? Explaining Central Asia's Role in Global Terrorism," *CTC Sentinel*, July/August 2024: 20-25. <https://ctc.westpoint.edu/a-hotbed-or-a-slow-painful-burn-explaining-central-asias-role-in-global-terrorism/>.

Mr. HUIZENGA. The gentlelady yields back, and I—on a personal level I hope you had a lay back seat and were able to get a little rest.

But what it does underscore is, I think, the importance of the issue but your dedication to it and I just want to say thank you on behalf of everybody for your commitment to that.

So, Ms. Curtis, under the Doha Agreement of February 2020 negotiated in good faith by the Trump administration that you were a part of the last go around the Taliban pledged to prevent terror groups from using Afghanistan soil to threaten U.S. security and that of its allies.

Subsequently, the Taliban has claimed that it is fulfilling those counterterrorism commitments successfully fighting ISIS-K.

As I wrote this down I think you had said something along the lines of the Taliban can never be a counterterrorism partner but I would like you to clarify that and how do you assess these claims based on that? I think it is dubious—your view on that, and is the Taliban upholding its counterterrorism commitments?

Ms. CURTIS. Well, thank you for that question.

You rightly talked about the U.S. and the Taliban both wanting to counter ISIS-K and so I think it is reasonable to consider that kind of cooperation, whether it is information sharing, where we have mutual goals.

However, I think the point I wanted to make was that while we haven't seen any indication that al-Qaeda in Afghanistan is actively planning an attack on the United States they could at any time, and the U.N. Security Council Sanctions Committee has reported that al-Qaeda has established new training camps inside Afghanistan, which would be a direct violation of the Doha Agreement. Some—

Mr. HUIZENGA. Despite their claims, correct? I mean, the Taliban still claims that they are—the terrorist groups are not operating on their soil?

Ms. CURTIS. Well, they claim they are not allowing terrorist groups to actively plan attacks against the United States.

Mr. HUIZENGA. So is this a distinction without a difference, having planning and training camps yet not allowing the actual execution of the plan to happen?

Are you making that distinction? I mean, either way, it seems it would violate the—certainly the spirit if not the letter of the Doha Agreement.

Ms. CURTIS. Well, I think it violates the letter of the agreement because if you read closely the agreement says that they will prevent training, recruiting, and fundraising.

And so, clearly, if there are training camps there is training going on. So I think it is—

Mr. HUIZENGA. And who is operating those? Is it the Taliban government themselves or are they just turning a blind eye and allowing another?

Ms. CURTIS. I think—

Mr. HUIZENGA. Is it ISIS-K or who is it that would be operating?

Ms. CURTIS. Al-Qaeda. So I think it is a matter of the Taliban turning a blind eye and allowing this to happen.

So I would say that that is a violation of the Doha Agreement.

Mr. HUIZENGA. Long-time old friends?

Ms. CURTIS. That is right. In fact, some al-Qaeda members were at times part of the Taliban regime. They have held positions such as provincial Governors.

So, I think it is clear that they still have a close symbiotic relationship and we know that al-Qaeda still considers the United States an enemy and could decide to conduct an attack against the United States at any time, and I would argue that al-Qaeda's very existence poses a threat to the United States.

Unfortunately, I think the Doha Agreement had some loopholes and was a bit weak on these counterterrorism commitments. So I think the Taliban is exploiting some of the weaknesses in the agreement.

But as I said, I also think they are directly violating it.

Mr. HUIZENGA. Okay.

We are going to do some followup on that. In my remaining a little over a minute I want you to comment on after the Pahalgam attack India claimed that some in Pakistan and military and government supporting such groups as TRF and LET that you had referenced earlier.

As I noted in my opening remarks, I believe India has the right to defend itself and that the Pakistanis should make every effort to end any sanctioned or unsanctioned support for terrorist groups.

Do you believe that Pakistan is supporting or, rather, tacitly supporting militant groups operating in Indian-controlled territory?

Ms. CURTIS. Well, of course, the Resistance Front TRF is an offshoot of the Lashkar-e-Taiba, a U.S. designated terrorist group that is based inside Pakistan.

Mr. HUIZENGA. And TRF has not been designated as of such yet?

Ms. CURTIS. I think the U.S. Government is in the process of designating them.

Mr. HUIZENGA. Okay.

Ms. CURTIS. You know, these offshoots come up and then you have to actually designate that group. So I think they are in the process of doing that.

Mr. HUIZENGA. Last 10 seconds—what steps should Pakistan take to condemn terrorism and end its support for these military groups—militant groups?

Ms. CURTIS. So, first of all, they should throw terrorist leaders in jail. Hafiz Muhammad Saeed, the leader of Lashkar-e-Taiba, is only under house arrest. He is not in jail. The leader of Jaish-e-Mohammed Masood Azhar is not in jail. He operates freely inside Pakistan.

The Muridke Complex for Lashkar-e-Taiba is still open. This is one of the sites that India attacked. So there is a lot that Pakistan could do that it hasn't done yet to crack down on terrorists that attack India.

Mr. HUIZENGA. Okay. My time has expired.

With that, I recognize the ranking member Ms. Kamlager-Dove for 5 minutes and 30 seconds.

Ms. KAMLAGER-DOVE. Thank you, Mr. Chair. He is so kind.

So, Ms. Todd, USIP was supporting the repatriation and rehabilitation of ISIS fighters to their home countries in Central Asia.

Can you—so why are repatriation and rehabilitation efforts so critical to counterterrorism in the region and how will they suffer from the dismantlement of USIP?

Ms. TODD. Thank you for that question, Ranking Member.

So, first of all, I think USIP—I am not entirely sure what their current status is right now. It seems like they may be back operating.

But the point is they did have a program where they were working extensively with partners in the region on rehabilitation and reintegration of foreign terrorist fighters but more specifically their family members.

A lot of these individuals were in camps in Syria. That is not a place that we want them to stay. The conditions there are terrible, but also by having these individuals in a camp in Syria we are increasing the risk that they will be radicalized there.

Thus, we wanted to work with our partners in Central Asia to bring them home, help them get treatment, help them be reintegrated back into their communities, and that was a large part of what USIP was doing with their programs, working with local partners on the ground, both governments but also civil society organizations, but also doing it with support from the U.S. Government, specifically USAID.

A lot of these programs require just material support in terms of when these individuals return home many of them do not have jobs, do not have homes to return to.

So helping them get settled, find their footing, essentially, in their local communities and help them re-establish their lives.

Ms. KAMLAGER-DOVE. So that is a good segue to my next question because the President's budget request would zero out the existing account used to provide assistance to Central Asia and South Asia and redirect resources into one large America First Opportunity Fund, which would have actually no visibility from Congress, no guardrails.

When I was young people called it mad money and, you know, so I am—but both of your testimonies suggest that we should be looking at Central and South Asia and really doing what we can to support our partners, and you just also mentioned material support and other forms of assistance.

So can you talk about the risk that now we will have if we are not designating support to this region?

Ms. TODD. Yes, I will admit I have a lot of concerns about the America First Opportunity Fund. I think in theory it is a good idea but I think how it ends up being executed in practice is something I am concerned about because \$2 billion sounds like a lot of money but it really isn't.

And then when you open it up to global emerging priorities I think that there will be a lot of competition among countries, among issues, in terms of what does the U.S. Government fund.

One of the things that we are always emphasizing to our partners is that we do not fund one-off things, that we are looking to achieve long-term goals that require sustained engagement.

I think if we don't have dedicated funding for engagement with South and Central Asia we risk having funds diverted to other countries, other issues, as more emerging priorities come up.

So that is something that I am very concerned about. I think, too, as you pointed out earlier, with restrictions or reductions in personnel at the State Department I am a little concerned about how that funding will be executed in terms of individuals being qualified to do some of these programs.

If these are just not people who have been working in the region who don't have experience in things like public health, education, civil society, do we have the experts that we need to use these funds most effectively.

Ms. KAMLAGER-DOVE. Thank you for that.

Ms. Curtis, I have a question for you. Interestingly enough, the chair and I probably took the same note from your opening remarks.

The U.S. withdrew from Afghanistan but we continue to provide, you know, educational assistance and then those programs were terminated by this administration, and we know that women and girls are vulnerable.

In the last few seconds, you know, if we are terminating education programs that are even online, forcing women to go to madrassas where we know radicalization is happening, how vulnerable are these folks to the radicalization that is coming out from the Taliban and their partners al-Qaeda?

Ms. CURTIS. Well, I am glad you raised this point because I think this is a crucial point, that if we stop providing education programs for the women and girls in Afghanistan it is not only a humanitarian cost to those women, it also will help to fuel extremist ideologies in the country.

There will be no way that these women can get educated and it will make it easier for the Taliban to inculcate their extremist ideologies throughout the population.

So I think this is a national security interest and my hope is that the Trump administration will continue the programs that we have.

American University of Afghanistan, which is educating women now in Doha—that campus is now in Doha, in Qatar. Two hundred Afghans, including many women, were scheduled to start classes in the fall at the Doha campus and I have heard that that funding may be canceled.

So my hope is that the Trump administration will maintain these programs because they are important to protecting U.S. national security interests.

And I also would like to make the point—you raised Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. In the interest of full disclosure I am the board chair of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. These programs also are helping to fight extremism in the region.

We can talk about Central Asia where RFE/RL broadcasts in all five of the Central Asian languages. They report on extremism, terrorism. They report on trends in the region and they help to promote deradicalization and to fight extremist trends in the region.

And in Afghanistan—

Mr. HUIZENGA. I am so sorry. The lady's time has well expired by now. So you will be able to continue that in written form.

Ms. KAMLAGER-DOVE. Just adding it to another answer. Thank you.

Mr. HUIZENGA. At your discretion, at—yes, the gentlelady's time has definitely expired.

So with that, the gentleman from Pennsylvania Mr. Scott Perry is recognized for five.

Mr. PERRY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ladies, thank you for your presence here today.

Pakistan has been playing a game for a long time now, harboring terrorists and supporting terrorism funding or being in support of funding of terrorism, playing both sides of the same coin.

At what time—at what point do we consider putting them back on the Financial Action Task Force gray list? Is there a time? Is there—is there any action they could take that would prompt you to believe that that should take place?

Ms. CURTIS. Okay. I will—

Mr. PERRY. Either one.

Ms. CURTIS. Okay. Sure, I will take it.

Yes, I think this is something that should be considered. I think we should be looking at the links of the April 22d attack in Indian Kashmir to Pakistan-based groups and if those are, indeed, found.

I will note that the Indian media has reported that in Indian investigations they have found that three of the perpetrators of the April 22d attacks are Pakistani nationals, one with direct links to Lashkar-e-Taiba.

So I think—

Mr. PERRY. Surprise, surprise. So, again, you know—look, we got a limited amount of time to ask questions here. American tax dollars are at stake.

I think you are marginally or at least I could characterize you as somewhat critical of the President's agenda to curtail some of this funding to this region. I think it is a reasonable discussion to have with a rising China and their involvement there.

However, Americans don't want their tax dollars to be taken from them to support terrorism. So is there—like, that is a horrific attack and it is tied directly to Pakistan. What is the point?

Like, when do we say we have had enough—we are not going to spend American tax dollars on a country that supports—materially supports terrorism?

Ms. CURTIS. Yes. Well, I think the U.S. should demand that Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed, two U.S. designated terrorist groups, be completely shut down in Pakistan. This is—

Mr. PERRY. And if they are not then you would suggest put them on the—put Pakistan on the gray list or the black list?

Ms. CURTIS. I think that is a reasonable policy to pursue.

Mr. PERRY. Okay. We don't want to—and I think you might agree with this—we don't want to destabilize the region but is there something that we can do?

Many Pakistani—the elite in Pakistan—the military is running the show there. Has been for a long time. Enjoy sending their students to America or the West. Visas are included in that. Assets, of course—tuition.

Do you recommend using any of the control that we have in that regard to kind of encourage them to start doing the right thing regarding terrorism, I mean, down to the person?

Ms. CURTIS. I would not encourage restricting visas for Pakistanis, Pakistani students, et cetera, because I think that the relationship is still important for the United States, that we need to have a nuanced partnership where we work together, where we have mutual interests such as ISIS-K.

President Trump acknowledged Pakistan's role in helping to capture and extradite one of the perpetrators of the Abbey Gate bombings. So there are areas where the U.S. and Pakistan can work together.

We also don't want to see Pakistan wholly reliant on China. You mentioned China and I think—

Mr. PERRY. I would agree with that, but I feel like a targeted approach, if you will pardon the term, individual by individual that had been known to be in material support of some of the groups that you previously mentioned or terrorism in general might be an inducement to help them see the way and the path out of that.

We don't want China—obviously, you know, we are concerned about the China-Pakistan economic corridor and what that portends. We would like to see more, you know, regarding India and SAARC.

But let me in the remaining time—Modi's statements seem to depart from their traditionally pacifist—his recent statement—their traditionally pacifist stance.

What can the United States be doing to encourage more of a collaborative and reliable partnership with the biggest democracy on the planet which is, of course, India, given the careful balance that we are trying to strike?

India used to be a Warsaw Pact nation. There is some history there. What can we be doing now to encourage a better, stronger relationship as the United States vis-a-vis Pakistan and China?

Ms. CURTIS. Well, on India we should be investing in that strategic partnership across the board. India is one of the most important countries when it comes to countering China.

We have mutual interest in working together, and India is the fastest growing economy, fifth largest economy, fourth most powerful military.

Mr. PERRY. And my time has expired. I appreciate it. Thank you. I yield.

Mr. HUIZENGA. The gentleman yields back.

With that, the Congressman from California Mr. Bera is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. BERA. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Obviously, this hearing comes at a very timely moment. The issue of terrorism in South Asia was brought back into focus by the deadly Pahalgam attack in which 26 innocent civilians were killed in April of this year.

I want to join my colleagues in condemning terror wherever it originates from and whatever it targets. I also want to commend both the governments of India and Pakistan. You know, it was tenuous in May and a lot of us were worried about an escalation between two nuclear powers.

I have encouraged that both governments start a dialog, find the ability to come together in a tenuous cease-fire, and I think it is important for the United States to play a supporting role as this

tenuous cease-fire, hopefully, moves into something more productive.

Also, when I think about these two countries these are two very different countries on two very different trajectories.

You see India—Ms. Curtis, you just pointed out the fastest growing economy in the world—the importance of the U.S.-India relationship, you know, from the Quad to, you know, strategic geopolitical security in the region to countering the threat of China in the region. You know, this is a trajectory that is moving in a very positive direction.

You contrast that with Pakistan, a struggling democracy, the highest terror threat in the world in terms of domestic terror and, you know, certainly a cross-border terror threat to India. Struggling economy. You see climate change impacting Pakistan.

So both countries have two very different reasons for not wanting a return to war and, again, I think the United States has an important critical role supporting the dialog between these two countries, but it is a dialog discussion between the governments of India and the governments of Pakistan.

Ms. Curtis, and you alluded to this in your opening statement, but in an article you authored in “Foreign Affairs” in May you wrote that Trump, a self-styled dealmaker, may be tempted to try to permanently resolve the status of Kashmir but he should resist the urge.

Any effort by Washington to strike a final deal could encourage Pakistan to fuel further terrorist attacks against India. It will needlessly strain the U.S.-India relations and it will almost certainly not work.

Would you care to elaborate on that?

Ms. CURTIS. Well, thank you.

Yes. First, let me start by saying the Trump administration played an enormously important role in getting a cease-fire between India and Pakistan.

This was a very dangerous conflict between two nuclear-armed adversaries and I think the Trump administration deserves credit for working to get that cease-fire and prevent what could have been a nuclear catastrophe in the region.

The point that I wanted to make in my “Foreign Affairs” article is that there is a difference between the U.S. getting the two countries to back away from the brink of war and the idea that somehow the U.S. might be able to get the two sides to resolve this 80-year-old territorial dispute, which I don’t think is possible.

I have been following India-Pakistan relations for 30 years and it is not possible for the U.S. to be able to mediate a solution.

I know we are Americans—we have this can-do attitude, but this is something that only the two countries themselves can resolve. That was my point.

Mr. BERA. Right. And as I think about next steps, you pointed out identification of some of the folks that led some of these attacks in terms of cross-border threats.

It does seem, you know, from the Indian perspective if Pakistan were to address and arrest some of these individuals that may be a necessary next step to, you know, thinking about further dialog.

Again, I don't know what peace in this region looks like and I fully agree with you that it is going to take the two countries. I do think that America has a role in, you know, supporting that conversation.

What do you think those next steps should be, you know, both from Congress but also, you know, as we try to support a dialog between these two countries?

Ms. CURTIS. I think that is right. I think the U.S. does have a role in encouraging the two sides to get back into a dialogue because if they are not in a dialogue we are apt to have another crisis very soon.

But I would say that India is probably unlikely to agree to go back to a broad-based dialog until Pakistan takes active steps to crack down on terrorists on its own territory.

So I think we need to—as we are encouraging dialog we also need to press Pakistan to take tangible, concrete steps that show they are cracking down on terrorists that attack India.

Mr. BERA. Great, and I am out of time.

Mr. HUIZENGA. The gentleman's time has expired.

The delegate from Guam Mr. Moylan is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. MOYLAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Although the threat of terrorism from global actors has diminished from its peak it remains a clear risk to U.S. homeland and U.S. interests abroad and regional stability. Major terrorist groups continue to operate mainly in the Middle East.

However, according to the homeland threat assessment in 2025 by the Department of Homeland Security, ISIS regional branches in Afghanistan and Pakistan have been increasingly active beyond Afghanistan and now pose a growing threat to the broader region.

The recent example in India illustrates that terrorism and related military actions remain real threats to peace and stability in the region and that could impact global security.

The President's announcement that the U.S. mediate the ceasefire here demonstrates that the U.S. has vested interests in Central Asia and highlights the need to develop a comprehensive plan to contribute to the regional stability.

The U.S. has been engaging in counterterrorism cooperation with major regional player India through the Quad framework.

These four countries have been depending their collaboration on information sharing and countermeasures against the use of emerging technologies by terrorist groups, and since global terrorism needs to be addressed through multinational efforts the Quad framework has great potential to counterterrorism threats in the region.

So, Ms. Curtis, during your service—and thank you for your service at NSC—you contribute to expanding cooperation within the Quad and advancing the South Asia strategy.

Based on those experiences, how do you access current administration strategies for engaging with the Quad? Also, how can Quad enhance its collaboration to address terrorist activities in the region?

Ms. CURTIS. Well, thank you for that question.

Very proud what I did in the first Trump administration and, what President Trump himself did to revive the Quad after a 10-

year hiatus and it has now become a focal point for U.S. engagement in the Indo-Pacific region, and President Trump has committed to attending the Quad summit in New Delhi this fall.

So I think we can expect to continue to see the Quad expand and deepen its cooperation and this will be critical to meeting the challenge of a rising China.

I think we can expect to see expansion in technology cooperation, energy security, maritime security, across the board.

It will never be a military pact. That is not something that India wants to be a part of—a military alliance—but it can be everything just short of that.

It could be these four democratic maritime powers working together to shape a free and open Indo-Pacific region and it is a critical grouping and I think we can expect to see President Trump continue to grow and deepen the cooperation with these three other countries.

Mr. MOYLAN. Thank you for your push on that. Appreciate it.

Ms. Todd, you served at NSC as well, then as the Central Asia expert managing U.S. policies for the region across diplomatic, economic, defense, and intelligent domains.

From your perspective, what is the most serious recent development related to terrorism in Central Asia and how might it impact global security?

Ms. TODD. I think the most important development is there is a perception, particularly here in the United States, that China is only active in Central Asia in the economic realm. I am here to say that that is not true.

There is a lot of military cooperation going on between China and the countries in Central Asia, and I think particularly in terms of counterterrorism that is important to note because, increasingly, if we are not present, if we are not working with our partners in Central Asia on counterterrorism, they will be looking for other partners to assist them in those efforts and it is predominantly going to be China that is there ready and able to assist.

Russia has been very distracted by its war in Ukraine. Otherwise, it would be there and be doing more with the countries in the region.

Many of them are members of the Collective Security Treaty Organization but in the absence of Russia they will turn to China.

So I think that is something we need to be very cognizant of and I think that is the most important development in terms of counterterrorism in the region today.

Mr. MOYLAN. Thank you to the witnesses.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. HUIZENGA. The gentleman yields back.

With that, the representative from Texas Ms. Johnson is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. JOHNSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you both for being here and for the candor of your testimony.

You know, I agree with my colleagues that counterterrorism continue—must be a priority because we never know when it is going to rear its ugly head and so we must constantly prevent and prepare wherever we can.

As both of you highlighted in your testimonies, not addressing the root causes of radicalization can have tragic consequences.

Ms. Curtis, you referenced, for example, how ending education and scholarship opportunities for Afghan girls could encourage radicalization and I couldn't agree with you more.

Ms. Todd, you listed high unemployment and weak governance and religious political repression as determinants as well and I also agree with you.

So I am presuming that we can all agree that it is fundamental for the United States national security that we continue to tackle the underlying drivers of radicalization and continue to use the soft power of the United States in this region and it is critically important.

Is that correct?

Ms. CURTIS. Yes.

Ms. JOHNSON. And so I presume that you all both also agree fundamentally that the administration's reckless dismantling of USAID and these programs in there is a complete compromise of our national security and is making us vulnerable. Is that true as well?

Ms. CURTIS. Yes.

Ms. JOHNSON. Yes. I appreciate that because the thing is that we have had lots of hearings in Foreign Affairs and you are not the first two witnesses to come before this committee and say that the reckless dismantling of USAID by this administration is putting our Nation at risk.

But yet, the Republicans in Congress consistently fail to do anything. I would love to see, Mr. Chairman, a bipartisan letter from this committee to the administration to tell them how important USAID programs in Afghanistan are to educate women and girls for our national security.

I would love for the bipartisan area of this committee to tell this and make this—move this forward, but instead we have hearing after hearing where witnesses as highly educated and trained as yourselves come before us to say these programs are harming America if we cut them, and yet the administration is still recklessly cutting them, making our Nation less safe.

And you brought up something that was really important to me also was Radio Free Europe. You agree, don't you, that it is critically important that the United States have free Voice of America, Radio Free Europe—all of these programs that disseminate the values of democracy in this part of the world, don't you?

Ms. CURTIS. Yes, I do.

Ms. JOHNSON. Yes, and I really appreciate that because yesterday we had to endure Kari Lake coming to our committee to tell us how they are dismantling the entire program.

But it is a valuable program. You are intimately involved with it and it is not a program that solely disseminates Chinese propaganda, is it?

Ms. CURTIS. Absolutely not.

Ms. JOHNSON. Yes. So her testimony yesterday was completely false when she comes to this committee and says that Voice of America and American investment in these programs is not effective.

That is wrong, because you are on the ground and you were part of the Trump administration and so—and you have come to this committee honestly with accurate candor to tell us just how important these programs are in keeping America safe, and it is so troubling to me that this administration has so recklessly abandoned U.S. role.

And I really appreciated both of your comments when you implied that if we leave the space who is coming in? When we abandon our partners we abandon these programs of education and economic opportunity, creating people the ability to grow their own food.

I mean, these programs are vital to keeping people out of a radicalized, militarized, terroristic bent of their mind frame. Isn't that right?

Ms. CURTIS. Yes.

Ms. JOHNSON. Would either one of you care to elaborate?

Ms. CURTIS. Yes, if I could just expound on Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's work.

They also still broadcast to Afghanistan through Radio Azadi and, you know, half the Afghanistan population listens to this reporting which provides a U.S. perspective on global developments.

Also, Radio Azadi reaches Afghan women. It has a call-in show where Afghan women's voices can be heard—their concerns can be heard.

Ms. JOHNSON. That is so important. It is so important to have these perspectives and these ideas and these values broadcast and communicated to these countries because if they don't hear it from us they are not hearing it from anywhere, right?

They are just hearing the opposition. They are hearing the voices of anti-American propaganda if they don't hear these programs.

Ms. CURTIS. Russia and China invest billions in getting their propaganda and disinformation out and the U.S.—

Mr. HUIZENGA. The gentlelady's time—

Ms. CURTIS [continuing]. Will lose out if it does not have international broadcasting.

Mr. HUIZENGA. The gentlelady's time has—

Ms. JOHNSON. I really appreciate you both being here. Thank you so very much. I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. HUIZENGA. The gentlelady's time has expired.

With that, the Congressman from Indiana Mr. Shreve is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. SHREVE. Thank you, Chairman Huizenga.

And I would just lead off by saying that I appreciated the remarks that the ranking member led off with. I don't think this is a bipartisan or messaging hearing. I think we all care about stability in the region authentically.

I am not trying to lead Ms. Curtis in this question, but in your view or the view of your centers how would you characterize the difference in the approach of the Trump administration as it relates to its approach to security in the region relative to that of the Biden administration?

In broad strokes, a characterization of the difference here.

Ms. CURTIS. Well, I think the Biden administration's withdrawal from Afghanistan was a disaster. It was a chaotic disaster, com-

pletely unplanned and, you know, resulted in the horrific terrorist attack at Abbey Gate where we lost 13 U.S. service members and almost 200 Afghans.

So I think that a major difference that I have seen is more thought given to protecting United States' interests by the Trump administration and thinking about the security of our service members as well as Americans on the ground. So I think that is one difference.

I think that the Trump administration also showed that it could calm down tensions between India and Pakistan and that it was capable of intervening in a positive way to get a cease-fire between the two countries.

Even though we didn't see such an India-Pakistan crisis during the previous administration, I am sure that they would have had the ability to get the two sides to pull back from the brink.

Mr. SHREVE. I appreciate that.

The intervention that resulted in a quelling of the tensions that came to a crescendo just recently there in the region, was that a consequence of the President leaning in between the two parties at nearly the level that he did just recently with Iran and Israel, although we clearly didn't take a military interventionist role there?

Did you see that direct intervention from the chief executive in quelling the peak of tension just recently in India and Pakistan?

Ms. CURTIS. Are you asking about the resolve of President Trump in trying to bring a solution to a problem in the region? Is that your question?

Mr. SHREVE. Yes. It is just he leaned in so directly principal to principal in Iran and Israel. And did you see that in your—from your close-in perspective in India and Pakistan?

Ms. CURTIS. Yes. Well, so I am not in the administration now so let me be clear. I don't know exactly what happened behind the scenes.

From what I have understood by talking to people the U.S. did play a role in getting the two sides to a cease-fire but I don't have the details on President Trump talking directly to leaders but I do know that U.S. officials were talking to leaders inside India and Pakistan and helping them come to the cease-fire agreement.

Mr. SHREVE. Thank you.

Ms. Todd, you noted that China's engagement in the region wasn't just economic but also military. Would you characterize their approach as being agnostic? They will sell to anyone or have they picked sides in terms of who they are keen to trade with in the region?

Ms. TODD. I think it, on the surface, looks agnostic in terms of you have these five countries to the west of China. It is a great neighborhood. They are seeking partners. They are going to go forth and work with whoever they can there.

On the other hand, they very clearly have targeted the countries that immediately border China so that would be Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, and Tajikistan.

I think, first and foremost, China is most concerned about its own security so, certainly, they want to work with the countries that they see as their most immediate partners in dealing with their own internal security issues.

I think that is part of the reason why we have seen so much co-operation with Tajikistan in particular. They are very concerned about the area bordering both Tajikistan and then that little piece of Afghanistan, the Wakhan Corridor.

So insofar as they can work with their Central Asian partners to address their own needs that is their foremost priority.

Mr. HUIZENGA. Sorry, the gentleman's time has expired.

Mr. SHREVE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

Mr. HUIZENGA. Yes, and we are—these are great issues and we are looking at potentially a second round here as well that we might be able to explore some of those a little more in depth. But we do need to get through our folks right now.

So with that, Congresswoman Jayapal is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. JAYAPAL. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to our witnesses for being here today.

Our country's foreign policy has long suffered, in my view, from an over reliance on military interventions and reactive security measures and often, importantly, taken without congressional approval as our Constitution says.

I have been quite consistent in calling out both Republican and Democratic presidents who have taken actions that amount to war without approval from Congress just as I did recently with Donald Trump in calling out the dangerous and escalatory strikes on Iran that I think put us on the brink of another forever war and risk the safety of American service members and civilians.

I certainly hope that the cease-fire holds and that we can get back to a negotiated agreement to ensure that Iran does not develop nuclear weapons.

I think we have to recognize that radicalization and repressive regimes don't develop in a vacuum. These are dangers that arise from extremely complex and multifaceted socioeconomic drivers and to truly address these issues I think we have to be proactive and confront root causes instead of adopting that purely reactionary posture.

I am deeply concerned that our ability to address radicalization and extremism including with our soft power tools has been decimated in numerous ways by this administration including the cuts to USAID programs throughout the region.

I worked in international health and development for more than a decade before coming to Congress and really saw the effect that the United States can have on both the relationship between two countries but also on the, you know, substantive issues that are on the ground that may lead, if unchecked, to more radicalization and repressiveness.

Trump's State Department has maintained a level four do-not-travel advisory for Afghanistan, noting risks of civil unrest, crime, terrorism, risk of wrongful detention, kidnapping, limited health facilities, including specific threats to dual nationals or green card holders who previously supported the U.S. mission in Afghanistan.

Despite these dire conditions, his administration recently announced the end of temporary protected status for Afghans.

Ms. Todd, how does the termination of this designation and possible repatriation of Afghan nationals who supported the U.S. affect

our ability to recruit individuals on the ground to work with us to combat terrorism?

Ms. TODD. Thank you for that question.

I think that it is a sign to both our partners on the ground but also Americans working with them that we may not always be a reliable partner for the long term.

If you go back to our engagement in Afghanistan and look at the withdrawal, whatever your opinion is of how the withdrawal was executed there were a number of U.S. military officers and veterans who worked very hard with Afghan partners to support them during that period and following that, everything from #AfghanEvac to women working with the Female Tactical Platoon.

I think that the Afghans that we worked with are really struggling now because if they are here and they were brought in under humanitarian parole there is a risk that they will be repatriated to Afghanistan.

I think for Americans working with these individuals there is great concern because these are our allies. These were our partners. We worked with them for 20 years, and what message does it send if we abandon them now?

Ms. JAYAPAL. The expansive foreign aid cuts represent a short-sighted and deeply irresponsible approach to counterterrorism. Since the disastrous cuts extremist threats have grown, and in Pakistan after the elimination of a \$40 million program targeting youth in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa the Tehrik-e-Taliban has increased recruitment by 37 percent.

It is particularly concerning in the wake of the May 6th terror attacks in Pahalgam Kashmir, which I condemned in no uncertain terms at the time.

I wonder if you can give me more context for the negotiation that has been interrupted by those Pahalgam attacks. The Indus Water Treaty—over the weekend Indian Home Minister Amit Shah stated that India will never restore the Indus Water Treaty with Pakistan, which Pakistan relies on for 80 percent of its agriculture and a third of its hydro power.

How could a lack of reliable water source impact cross-border violence between India and Pakistan?

Ms. TODD. I would certainly defer to Ms. Curtis on the details for South Asia. But in terms of water insecurity, that is a major driver of conflict both in Central and South Asia.

I think if you look at the Indus River Treaty it is an agreement that has held up during previous issues that the two countries have experienced. The fact that it may now be at great risk is very concerning, I think, for all parties involved and I think also—

Mr. HUIZENGA. Your time has expired.

Ms. TODD. Thank you.

Mr. HUIZENGA. All right. The gentlelady's time has expired.

And as I was trying to gently say, we may get to another round of this so if we could keep it to 5 minutes that would be helpful. So all right.

With that, Representative Baumgartner is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. BAUMGARTNER. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you for holding this important hearing.

I want to start by joining my colleagues in unequivocally condemning the terrorist attack—recent terrorist attack on India.

Every terrorist attack should be condemned and it is imperative that all countries take every measure to fight back against terrorism, particularly terrorism that originates within their own borders.

While I have enjoyed this committee hearing I have been a little surprised how much of your testimony has relied or been germane to sort of the softer sides of counterterrorism.

I agree that things like girls schools are important. Having important information operations or media operations are important. But it has been a little light on some of the intelligence and kinetic discussions that are important for that part of the world.

I am wondering about Central Asia specifically. Could you maybe get into which countries there you feel are the most robust in counterterrorism and which are the least robust?

And I understand the Afghan situation is a little different so let us leave Afghanistan out of it. But just talk to me about Central Asia and who is the best at counterterrorism and who is the weakest.

Ms. TODD. So I think there is a question of both capacity within the specific militaries but then also how they address counterterrorism. I think there is a long held view that Kazakhstan has the most professional military, which could be true.

But I think in terms of counterterrorism probably our best partner is Uzbekistan. They have a border with Afghanistan. They are very actively working with us on things such as intelligence sharing, partner training in terms of military capability.

I think the one that we would like to do more with, as Ms. Curtis pointed out in her testimony, is Tajikistan. I think the main obstacle there is just capacity in the Tajik military and also the fact that they have partnerships with other countries.

They are a member of the Collective Security Treaty Organization, which means they do a lot of training with Russia. Also are working very closely with China. But that is certainly a partnership that we should continue to support.

Mr. BAUMGARTNER. And with respect to those countries how would you rate their biometrics analytical programs and their surveillance programs?

I mean, certainly, China has used a lot of those programs and we are seeing them across the region in places like the UAE and others. But do you have a read on their biometrics?

Ms. TODD. I think that they will work with us in terms of when we are able to provide them both training and equipment, and that is something that we have sought to do.

However, you also have the Chinese training and equipment that can be provided. So insofar as we are able to work with them in our way of working that is certainly the preference.

Mr. BAUMGARTNER. And how much different would our counterterrorism or the capability of our counterterrorism operations be there if we had a forward operating base at a place like Bagram versus running operations out of Qatar?

Ms. TODD. I don't think I am qualified to make that determination at this point, but I think having a forward operating base in

the region certainly poses particular potential benefits but also risks at the same time.

Mr. BAUMGARTNER. Can you speak to the terrorist attack on Russia from Islamic terrorists originating from that region and what is the Russian response then, and how are they working with those countries?

Ms. TODD. Initially, the Russian response was that Ukraine was responsible for that attack. We know that that was not, in fact, true—that it was very much individuals from Central Asia who had been radicalized by ISIS-K who executed that attack.

I think initially then the Russian response was to crack down on all individuals from Central Asia. That has been a very unpopular response both in Russia among the migrant communities but also in Central Asia as well. As a country with which many of the Central Asian countries have had long-term partnerships.

It was—it has been viewed very negatively.

Mr. BAUMGARTNER. And I do want to return to Afghanistan, just quickly, in my remaining 40 seconds and look at this really quick.

Obviously, we have deep fundamental differences with the Taliban government but how would you rate their efforts at the moment to prohibit transnational terrorists?

Ms. TODD. I don't think that we should trust the Taliban. Yes. Yes.

Mr. BAUMGARTNER. I get that. But are they prohibiting transnational terrorists?

Ms. TODD. I don't think they are doing it to the extent that we need them to.

Mr. BAUMGARTNER. Thank you.

Mr. HUIZENGA. The gentleman yields back.

With agreement with the ranking member we are going to go into a second round. I am actually going to forego going first and I will do followup and go last.

And with that, I recognize Congressman Perry for 5 minutes.

Mr. PERRY. I thank the chairman.

I just want to address the questions or the comments maybe about the Voice of America and Pakistan and the region generally, and just point out that the Voice of America could do great things and I think many of us, especially those of us a little bit older, believe that it has over time done great things.

Unfortunately, there is a different experience in the recent past and it is important that we acknowledge that so that we can fix that.

And I think that while Ms. Lake, who was here yesterday testifying, acknowledged those things also said that those programs could be rolled back up into the State Department where they originally existed, where there could be some oversight, because there is none now. There is none—there is none now and it is evidenced just by a couple examples.

And we will go beyond the Voice of America and USAGM but I will just remind everybody in the room that Sesame Street Pakistan, which was \$20 million neck deep in corruption, finally ended, thank goodness, when it was exposed.

That is just one of the many things. There was a—and I don't even know how this happened but the fact that a transgender

cross-dressing man reporting for the VOA in Pakistan, I mean, I just thank the good Lord that the man is able to stay alive because those parts of the world usually don't see that as something that they approve of, and I don't know how that helps promote America's core interests abroad but we spent money on that.

We also wasted \$100,000 on a cricket team sponsorship in Afghanistan. The Voice of America did that. That is the Voice of America.

So while I agree with the gentlelady Ms. Curtis that it could do great things, but I would say it has not done great things and it has been on too many occasions antithetical to America's interest at a time—and I don't know what time is good but we don't have extra money to be blowing on transgender reporters in prohibited areas of the world to promote whatever that agenda promotes in Pakistan and we don't have the time or the money for Elmo over there.

We have got serious adversaries that are working in that arena and we should be working on that. But, furthermore, because we are just talking about, generally, the area and U.S. funding, not necessarily or directly USAID or USAGM, which, clearly, has a problem.

USAID spent \$840 million in the last 20 years on Pakistan's education-related program including \$136 million on building 120 schools of which there can—there are no reports that any of them were built.

I mean, that is a great goal. American taxpayers went there. But, I mean, the insult to the injury is not only that the money was spent and American taxpayers earned it and sent it to Washington and we sent it there, but not that the schools weren't built but we don't even know where the money is.

I mean, it is likely because Pakistan supports terrorism the money was all grifted away and likely went to agencies, industries, organizations directly opposed to America. Directly opposed to America.

USAID spent \$21.5 million on the political party development program in Pakistan, and according to the inspector general's report the project was a complete failure. It was a complete failure.

The partner did not ensure compliance with Federal financial requirements. It is another way to say that the money was lost to corruption and, unfortunately, in Pakistan corruption equals terrorism.

So while we are here to get your opinion on things and we want to make sure that we are countering China, we certainly want to do that.

We think that India will be a great partner. We think that Pakistan could be a great partner like the VOA could be a great tool.

Right now neither one of those are the case and we better get serious about getting after it so that those things are the case, and spending this money willy nilly and throwing it away and—or even worse allowing it to fall into terrorist hands is wholly and completely objectionable and unacceptable to the American people.

I yield.

Mr. HUIZENGA. The gentleman's time has expired. With that, the ranking member is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. KAMLAGER-DOVE. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

You know, I had to take a shower immediately after the hearing yesterday because I had had my fill, and my hope was that I would not have to do that today after this one because it is an opportunity for us to have a substantive discussion about opportunities that we are leaving on the table and that we could grab back.

So I appreciate thus far the discussions we have been able to have. I hope we can recalibrate. I am asking us to recalibrate back to the important topics at hand.

So, Ms. Todd, you were talking a little bit about what would happen if Afghans are repatriated and so, you know, in my mind it is like we have sacrificed people who actually helped keep some of our people alive.

Could you be a little more specific about what could, what might, happen to Afghans that are repatriated?

Ms. TODD. Sure. I think that there are differing views on what the situation is currently in Afghanistan in terms of reprisals against former government officials and military personnel.

So, certainly, if we were to repatriate those individuals I think there might be some assessments that they would be fine—that the Taliban would leave them alone. There are other assessments that they would be at great risk.

I think that is one issue. For women in particular, I am very concerned both in terms of how women in Afghanistan are being treated today.

But as I mentioned, the Female Tactical Platoon these were women who specifically helped our Special Operations forces by being able to go into places that men could not go in Afghanistan as we were conducting military operations.

If we repatriate those individuals not only are they women in Afghan society, they are women who helped the U.S. military. I think that that will put them at extreme great risk.

Ms. KAMLAGER-DOVE. Thank you for that.

Ms. Curtis, I know we have talked a lot about Radio Ozodi. Specifically, could you give examples about how the independent news reporting actually has helped counter extremist narratives in Tajikistan?

Ms. CURTIS. Yes. Well, I think there is a couple of examples here and I would point to some reporting that the Tajik service did—the RFE/RL Tajik service—in exploring the social and economic factors that give rise to youth radicalization in Tajikistan and also the fact that they are reporting in the languages of the region, providing a U.S. perspective is important.

I think there has also been reporting where the RFE/RL reporting in Tajikistan on the family members of the perpetrators of the attacks in Moscow on the Crocus City Hall.

So they did some in-depth reporting on the actual attackers that came from the family members. So they were able to do that. They are on the ground. They have good sources.

So a lot of really good investigative reporting that is helping us figure out the sources of extremism and terrorism in the region.

Ms. KAMLAGER-DOVE. I am going to—I am going to cut you off because I have limited time and I don't want the chair to hit the gavel on me.

But quickly, in your view what kind of assistance or cooperation should the U.S. be providing to help support stability in Bangladesh?

Ms. CURTIS. So I think the U.S. does need to be engaged in Bangladesh, and the U.S. was doing important work that was being carried out by organizations like the National Endowment for Democracy and the International Republican Institute working with political parties encouraging election participation.

These are all very important activities, like democracy promotion. Bangladesh is at a crucial stage in its, democratic development. They overthrew Sheikh Hasina. There were student protests last year that overthrew the government and they now have an interim government.

So this is not the time that the U.S. should be disengaging from our assistance programs in that country.

Ms. KAMLAGER-DOVE. I have 30 seconds left and I want to give the last remarks to Ms. Todd. You flew all this way.

How can the U.S. support economic development and resilience in Central Asia, real quick?

Ms. TODD. Even if we can't restore all of the programs we were doing previously I think we need to go back and relook some of the programs that had the most impact in the countries that need that assistance the most.

We have mentioned Tajikistan repeatedly. Certainly, we should be doing more in terms of economic development with Tajikistan.

Ms. KAMLAGER-DOVE. Thank you. And I yield back, Mr. Chair.

Mr. HUIZENGA. The gentlelady's time has expired.

I will recognize myself for 5 minutes and let me start by saying I actually share many of the concerns that the ranking member brought up about the shift in the approach toward the resettlement of our Afghan allies.

I have heard from veterans who are concerned about that in the district and I just wanted to put that out there. I think there is many of us up here that are making a distinction between those Afghan allies and who have helped us and put their lives at risk.

I want to move on a little bit because I would love to hear about Tajikistan and China, where—you know, where is our main challenge there.

But also I do feel like I need to get back to Afghanistan, and I sit on the Financial Services Committee as well and do a tremendous amount of work on sanctions.

It has been an interesting intersection both there and here with this committee, and sanctions are only as good as the willingness to enforce them and we have seen, in my opinion, a lax or a relaxing of many of those enforcements.

And I think the question that I have—and I have a bill actually that would prohibit any payments to the Taliban government for any taxes, fees, fines—anything—from U.S. dollars.

We did pass a version that was going to create a report earlier this week. I applaud that. I think we could go further.

I think ultimately the question is what is the risk of diversion in Afghanistan? In Pakistan? You know, the Congressman from Pennsylvania was bringing up some of those diversions.

If we are building schools, pick the country around the world but we are talking about Central Asia here and we have no evidence that those projects, especially hard infrastructure projects, are being done.

How are we not supposed to look at this a little differently? So just talk to me about what types of programs will actually help people and then how do we guarantee that that money is actually getting to those folks in a manner that, one, promotes the interests of the United States and, two, helps the folks that are there.

So, Ms. Curtis, I will put you on.

Ms. CURTIS. Yes. Look, I share your skepticism, particularly when it comes to Afghanistan, we should not be providing any support that goes to the Taliban who, you know, are still supporting terrorist groups like al-Qaeda, who are repressing—severely repressing the women and girls of that country.

Mr. HUIZENGA. While we are on that, Okay, so we have got—we know that they are severely repressing these folks, yet we did \$10 million in a condominium—a condom distribution program. Do we know that that actually happened?

Do we know how it benefited either the United States or Afghanistan? I think that is the criticism that many of us have had about some of the programs and the aid programs and the effectiveness of that.

Ms. CURTIS. Yes, I agree with you.

I don't know anything about what—the program you mentioned but, you know, I would agree with you that we need to enforce sanctions on Taliban leaders both within the U.N. Security Council but also within the U.S. Government. Those sanctions need to be enforced and restricting their travel—their ability to travel.

With regard to what are the programs that we can support that would help us fight terrorism and extremism, I have already talked about some of the international broadcasting, which I think is important.

I have talked about scholarships for Afghan women. But we can also talk about providing counterterrorism assistance to partners.

I think Pakistan is one of those partners. As difficult as they are and as much as we need to press them on support for some terrorist groups, they can also help us fight other terrorist groups like ISIS-K.

A country like Tajikistan also needs our counterterrorism training. They need some of our technology to be able to stop terrorists from coming across their border in Tajikistan to make sure that Tajik citizens are not joining ISIS-K and participating in terrorist attacks.

So there are ways to provide counterterrorism assistance to our partners.

Mr. HUIZENGA. I was going to—I will give you the last word, Ms. Todd. Fifteen seconds.

Ms. TODD. Yes. I really want to address the issue that you raised about, like, how do we hold these programs accountable for delivering real results.

The good news is I think we have those structures in the U.S. Government. I happen to have with me two reports that I found

very interesting—the most recent OIG report as well as the most recent SIGAR report.

These are organizations that have been regularly reporting quarterly on programs that we have been doing with Afghanistan in terms of are they delivering the results that we need them to deliver. If not, why?

And I think that that is the kind of program that you need specifically for Afghanistan. But it also looks at how does that affect countries like Pakistan or the Central Asian countries as well. So those mechanisms are in place.

Mr. HUIZENGA. My time has expired. I will point out I am familiar with the SIGAR report and it is not all rosy and glowing. There are problems—significant problems—including that \$10 million that I was just referencing, or nearly \$11 million, that is paid to the Taliban.

So with that, I deeply appreciate your time and your willingness and especially as we go through multiple rounds. I have a little housekeeping here about the ability for our members of the subcommittee if they have additional questions for the witnesses.

We ask that they are submitted to the chair. We will pass those along and ask that you respond to those in writing.

Pursuant to committee rules, all members may have 5 days to submit statements, questions, and extraneous materials for the record subject to length limitations.

And without objection, the subcommittee stands adjourned.  
[Whereupon, at 11:32 a.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]



## **APPENDIX**

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MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE HEARING RECORD



*Chairman Brian Mast*

**COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS  
SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING NOTICE  
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6128**

**Subcommittee on South and Central Asia  
Bill Huizenga (R-MI), Chairman**

June 19, 2025

*Rescheduled*

**TO: MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

You are respectfully requested to attend an OPEN hearing of the Committee on Foreign Affairs to be held by the Subcommittee on South and Central Asia at 10:00 a.m. in Room 2172 of the Rayburn House Office Building. The hearing is available by live webcast on the Committee website at <https://foreignaffairs.house.gov/>.

**DATE:** Thursday, May 22, 2025  
Thursday, June 26, 2025

**TIME:** 9:00 a.m.  
10:00 a.m.

**LOCATION:** 2172 RHOB

**SUBJECT:** Assessing the Terror Threat Landscape in South and Central Asia and Examining Opportunities for Cooperation

**WITNESSES:** Lisa Curtis  
Director, Indo-Pacific Security Program  
Center for a New American Security

\*  
The Honorable Nathan A. Sales  
Distinguished Fellow, Middle East Programs  
Atlantic Council

Brianne Todd  
Professor of the Practice of Central Asian Studies  
National Defense University

\*NOTE: Witnesses changed/added.  
\*\*NOTE: Witnesses may be added.

**By Direction of the Chair**

*The Committee on Foreign Affairs seeks to make its facilities accessible to persons with disabilities. If you are in need of special accommodations, please call 202-226-8467 at least four business days in advance of the event, whenever practicable. Questions with regard to special accommodations in general (including availability of Committee materials in alternative formats and assistive listening devices) may be directed to the Committee.*

**COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS**  
MINUTES OF SCA SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING

Day Thursday Date June 26, 2025 Room 2172 RHOB

Starting Time 10:05 Ending Time 11:32

Recesses        (\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_) (\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_) (\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_) (\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_) (\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_)

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Presiding Member(s)

*Chairman Huizenga*

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*Check all of the following that apply:*

Open Session   
Executive (closed) Session   
Televised

Electronically Recorded (taped)   
Stenographic Record

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**TITLE OF HEARING:**

*Assessing the Terror Threat Landscape in South and Central Asia and Examining Opportunities for Cooperation*

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**COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:**

*Attached*

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**NON-COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:**

*None*

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**HEARING WITNESSES: Same as meeting notice attached? Yes  No**   
(If "no", please list below and include title, agency, department, or organization.)

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**STATEMENTS FOR THE RECORD: (List any statements submitted for the record.)**

*Attached*

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TIME SCHEDULED TO RECONVENE \_\_\_\_\_  
or  
TIME ADJOURNED 11:32

*Meg Wagner*  
Full Committee Hearing Coordinator

Committee on Foreign Affairs  
Subcommittee on South and Central Asia  
119<sup>th</sup> Congress

## ATTENDANCE

Meeting on: Assessing the Terror Threat Landscape in South and Central Asia and Examining Opportunities for Cooperation  
Date: June 26, 2025

Date: June 26, 2025

