**Chairman Adam Smith**

**Full Committee Hearing on “Evaluation of the Department of Defense’s Counterterrorism Approach”**

**Opening Statement (Prepared)**

**February 6, 2019**

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*Video link to Chairman Smith’s opening remarks here*: (<https://armedservices.house.gov/hearings?ID=FB85FE17-B0F5-41D6-8582-ACE18ABB36E5>)

Good morning. The purpose of today’s hearing is to understand the Department of Defense’s global approach to counterterrorism – what is the Administration’s strategy to confront the threat of terrorism, how does this approach nest within the Department’s own, larger National Defense Strategy, and how does this approach compliment the activities of other departments and agencies for a more effective “whole-of-government” approach?

To help us understand, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations/Low-Intensity Conflict, Owen West, and the Vice Director for Operations from the Joint Staff, Maj. Gen. James Hecker, are here to testify. Thank you for very much for being here.

To begin, I’d like to know what the Department’s plan is to *effectively* confront the threat of terrorism. What exactly is the strategy? Where are the greatest threats? What locations should we be focused on? What groups? How does the Department plan to approach the threat of terrorism, while positioning itself to confront future threats? What risks should we be willing to accept?

In my view, there are concerning disconnects between the National Defense Strategy and the National Strategy for Counterterrorism. The unclassified summary of the former includes only small mention of counterterrorism. The latter appears to prioritize all threats, which almost certainly will lead to a counterterrorism budget that accepts no risk and attempts to fund a wide net, and in doing so, fails our troops and makes us less safe. By failing to prioritize the threats, and allocate resources based on those priorities, I am concerned that this Administration has no meaningful strategy to confront terrorism in a sustainable way.

Further, since the start of the Trump Administration, there has been an observed increase in strikes on terrorist targets. What have additional strikes accomplished? What is the accuracy of these strikes and has there been a change in the number of civilian casualties? What impact has such an approach had on U.S. interests to degrade terrorist threats and prevent threats to U.S. interests?

From the lessons of the last 18 years of conflict, it is clear that the current approach needs adjustment. For example, military action alone is insufficient to defeat terrorism. We cannot shoot or bomb our way to a victory over extremist ideology.

Former Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis made it clear that “national security is much more than just defense.” This is absolutely the case. The Department’s counterterrorism activities should nest within a wider whole-of-government policy that includes non-military lines of effort. There must be a balanced investment in the “3Ds” of diplomacy, development, and defense. Military might is not the only way to confront terrorism. Holistic approaches through diplomacy and development, such as coordination with allies and partners, also address the political, economic, and social conditions that drive instability and insecurity. So, how is Department the coordinating it’s approach to complement diplomatic and development programs and activities, and what risks are there to our counterterrorism missions if those programs and activities are not properly resourced? Pursuing a whole-of-government approach has become more critical than ever as the Department attempts to execute the National Defense Strategy, which requires sustainable solutions to address terrorist threats, that will allow the military to recover the readiness and lethality of our force to defend against our strategic competitors.

Finally, if you look around the world, it is incredibly clear, even if there is a coherent strategy that prioritizes missions and allows for informed resource allocation decisions, the elephant in the room remains. This Administration has not demonstrated a coherent national security policy. It is most apparent by force reduction decisions and shifts in counterterrorism missions that are made at the whim of the President via tweet. There may be strategies on paper but we have seen time and again the President undermine his own Administration’s plans and policies with his unpredictability. I need only mention Afghanistan and Syria. This leads me to ask the obvious. What is the strategic rationale for the drawdown in Syria? How can we contain the threat of ISIS in light of such a reduction? In Afghanistan, the terrorist threat remains as well. With a reported reduction of up to 7,000, how will U.S. interests be protected? How can the Department sufficiently plan and execute sustainable counterterrorism operations and activities and ensure the safety and security of our personnel, partners, and allies in that fight when the future of our counterterrorism missions can turn on a dime?

Thank you. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses.

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