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Opening Statement of Chairman Stephen F. Lynch Hearing on “Examining the Worldwide Threat of al Qaeda, ISIS, and Other Foreign Terrorist Organizations” December 7, 2021

Good morning, everyone, and thank you for attending today’s hearing. Today the Subcommittee on National Security will re-examine and re-assess the varied and evolving terrorist threats facing our nation and our democratic allies around the globe—with the goal of better preparing for, and effectively responding to those threats.

While the current challenge posed by the global COVID-19 pandemic has claimed the attention and resources of our government, we cannot afford to ignore the active and emerging threats that continue to develop—and in some cases, have shifted—to ungoverned regions of the globe, and have evolved in ways that may become more difficult to defeat.

As terrorist threats to the United States continue to evolve, so too must our counterterrorism approach. Around the world, terrorist organizations have sought to exploit local conflicts and insurgencies to advance their own violent and twisted ideological objectives. Denying safe haven to these organizations and delegitimizing their ideology requires a whole-of-government approach that lessens our reliance on massive long-term military presence, and instead looks to “over-the-horizon” partnerships and quick-strike capabilities.

Recent history has demonstrated the value of robust intelligence sharing, diplomatic engagement, and civilian and humanitarian assistance to address root causes of conflict. Experience has also shown that broad democratic goals are best accomplished in coordination with our allies and by, with, and through local partners in the lead whenever possible.

We owe a solemn debt of gratitude to the hundreds of thousands of men and women who have fought to defend our country against terrorism over the past 30 years. Notwithstanding that service and patriotism, which has depleted the ranks of al Qaeda and ISIS leadership, the longer-term success of our efforts remains a challenge. In some ways, the terrorist threats we face today are more complex and diffuse than ever before. Once again, we are in search of a strategy and a policy that will succeed against these new threats going forward.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today about their assessment of the terrorist threats facing the United States. I also look forward to hearing more about how the Biden Administration is working to protect Americans from these threats by building and strengthening our counterterrorism partnerships and leveraging all available tools of national power—including military force, when necessary. Finally, while I believe the decision to end the massive 20-year military presence in Afghanistan was the correct one, the withdrawal does create additional counterterrorism challenges, and I look forward to hearing more about how the Biden Administration will continue to contain these threats.

In an effort to gain a more thorough insight of these issues, by agreement, we have also arranged for a classified question and answer session following this hearing to provide answers to Members’ questions, which may require disclosure of sensitive and classified information and materials.

And with that, I will now yield to the Ranking Member, Mr. Grothman, for his opening remarks.

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