

National Security Group Lunch Transcript

May 3, 2013

Threat Denial in the Obama Administration

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SEBASTIAN GORKA:

I'd like to begin by making a disclaimer: nothing you're about to hear necessarily represents the views of the Department of Defense or any other government agency. Maybe in the future it might. So I was asked by Ben and CSP to discuss what the future looks like with regards to counter-terrorism in the United States and counter-intelligence. Can you go back on the slides, you're flipping them forward, just leave it up there. Thank you, that's fine.

And what events such as the confirmation of John Brennan to be DCI actually mean in our fight against Al Qaeda and associated movements. The fact is that just as with the filibuster we were discussing beforehand, that occurred yesterday, the reality of the situation has almost absolutely nothing to do with what is discussed in the media and what in fact the politicians are talking about. Because it's not a question of drone strikes or not drone strikes. The issue is that we have a complete misunderstanding of the threat environment and we have empowered people who believe things that are not true about our enemy.

The fact is that on the anniversary of September the 11th, not only was an ambassador killed with his security detail, but in no less than eight US compounds, the black flag of Al Qaeda was raised. This is something that last occurred when we were in a world war. The idea that on eight sovereign territories that belong to this nation, an enemy threat group's banner was raised and we did not respond is the reality of the threat. But that does not concur with the narrative that the White House and that people like John Brennan have committed themselves to.

That narrative is the following: we are at war with an organization and solely an organization. That organization is Al Qaeda and with the successful neutralization of its head, Osama Bin Laden, made two years ago, that organization is "on the ropes." It is no longer relevant and as a result, things such as the withdrawal from Afghanistan are fully justified. Anything that does not concur with that narrative will not be allowed into the picture, into the debate. A great piece of evidence with regard to that selective use of information is the story behind the documents that were actually captured in a Abbottabad after we killed Bin Laden. My colleague at FDD Tom Joscelyn has just published on this, and makes a point

that allegedly there were hundreds of thousands of documents that we captured that the SEAL team brought out of there. This is an unclassified piece of information. We brought out numerous hard drives, discs and CDs which, together, are according to one White House official the biggest haul of intelligence ever at a site of this type, where an individual was captured or killed.

Nevertheless, in the last two years, 17 documents have been released out of those hundreds of thousands. Despite the fact that of course this administration is committed to transparency. The reason the rest were not released – according to a British journalist – is because they demonstrate quite clearly that Al Qaeda is not on the ropes and that in fact, it still maintains a very high level of operational – if not control – influence with regards to attacks occurring this very day, 12 years after September the 11th. That fact does not support the government narrative, and therefore the documents will not be declassified or released.

The second part of the problem which relates to whether or not we are safer today as a nation are the continued consequences of what has become termed the purge of counter-terrorism training in US government. My wife Katie Gorka of the Westminster Institute has published on this extensively. Please go to the West Inst –WestminsterInstitute.org to see those. And of course, Tara Dahl [PH] and Michele Bachmann have done incredible work in uncovering what is going on inside federal government with regards to not being able to discuss the threat honestly.

For those who have not followed this story, let me give it to you in a thumbnail sketch. In September of '11, it was decided by the White House that a full review must be executed of every single training document used within the Department of Defense or the Department of Justice for counter-terrorism courses. Not only the documents, 700,000 of them, but also the identities and the bio information of everybody who trains our federal law enforcement or our military, be they government officials or be they subject matter experts being brought in from the outside. This purge was quite remarkable because it was executed in a matter of six weeks. I don't know if anybody can remember a government initiative of this magnitude that was executed with such alacrity.

And the consequences of that purge were that not only were distinct materials and slides banned, censored as if we were in some kind of a Stalinist or communist state, individuals were blacklisted and not allowed to train their fellow officers. For example, an FBI agent who I am familiar with who has 10 years hunting Al Qaeda under his belt, and he was banned from briefing his fellow agents. Why? Because in his briefings, he uses words like Jihad. And because he discusses the religious justification used by Bin Laden and Zawahiri and others. That is no longer permitted, and that system is now put in place. I am subject to it when I go and brief at Quantico or elsewhere and if I do not remove slides, which are deemed to be politically incorrect, I may not give the brief.

Where are we today two years later after that purge? The fact is quite ironically, there are people beneath senior management levels, both inside the Department of Justice and the Department of Defense who are pushing back – quietly, but they are pushing back. And the most amusing instance I ever had was the person who had invited me to do some training for a certain agency, walked up to me during the training and quietly whispered in my ear, and said, you do know this is a white board. What you write on it won't stay here. So people inside the machine are gaming the machine because they realize their bosses are undermining the operational capacity to train our agents and officers.

The reality – next slide please – is the following. I just – I handed it out in black and white, here it is in color. The paucity, the poverty, of the threat assessment coming out of the White House today is based upon the following narrative which comes from Clinton Viktorovich [PH], a former NCTC individual, who is a senior official in the NSC and it is the same narrative that John Brennan for example in his infamous CSIS speech just after the elections in '09, made. If you haven't read it, please go to CSIS, google Brennan and you will see his speech August 6th '09, and you will understand where this narrative comes from.

But its core element is the following. It states that there are three groups of Islamists, so politically motivated Muslims in the world: there are the purists, the political and the violent Islamists. According to Viktorovich's writings, which are available online unclassified, the pure Islamists are those who believe solely in Dawa. They believe in preaching and education. They will create a Caliphate, a global order, but only through the non-kinetic means of education and proselytizing. There's a second group, which is typified by the Muslim Brotherhood who Viktorovich calls the political Islamists who say education and proselytizing are inadequate. You must go out there, create political parties and win elections, as of course they did during the Arab Spring. And the third group are the violent Islamists who say preaching and politics is going to take too long or won't achieve what we wish. We must use force. We must be involved in a global Jihad. Viktorovich's argument is that these three groups are hermetically sealed from one another and have no relation or connection to each other, and that the middle group will be our salvation. That the safety of the United States will be found in negotiating, coming to terms with establishing a détente with the Brotherhood. The reality is of course not so. Please build the slide. Build, build.

The reality is that these are overlapping circles or you can also call them a transmission belt if you look at any significant figure in Al Qaeda, be it Bin Laden himself, be it his boss Abdul al-Azzam, be it al-Zarqawi, be it the current head of Al Qaeda, Ayman al-Zawahiri. All of these individuals went through a process of evolution, starting off as purely religious, then getting involved in the Brotherhood, and then moving into violence. These are not hermetically sealed groups. These are one and the same, the transmission belt of ideology, the only difference is how they approach the challenge of achieving what they wish to achieve. Next slide please.

The fact is that we have forgotten something that we realized eight years ago in the bi-partisan 9/11 commission report. This is just one sentence from the 600 pages, which makes it clear in this war, you cannot kill your way out of the problem. Whether you're trying to do drone strikes on somebody drinking their latte in Starbucks in Baltimore, or not, is irrelevant. Killing your way out of this isn't going to work. Why? Because we have to attack the ideology that drives the threat group. That's why my wife published this book recently called Fighting the Ideological War which looks at – takes the best people from the Reagan administration who fought the ideology of the Soviet Union, and sat them down with those who understand the Jihadi ideology and worked out a plan on how to attack the current ideological threat we have today. That's the threat assessment it should be driving the US CT policy, but clearly is not. Next slide please.

Everything I have to say – and this is when I do trainings, I always finish on this one slide. This is the reality that will not be discussed in this city. As a government, as national security practitioners, America is obsessed by the gray box. Our 25-meter target are the violent Jihadists whether it is Al Qaeda, Al Shabab, AQIP, AQIM, we are obsessed with those that use violence against us. We want to prevent the next 9/11, the next Times Square bomber, the next Abdulmutallab. That's our threat mission. However, we ignore the fact that the purple box, the non-violent Jihadists – the group that Frank and Chris have done so much work on – outnumber the kinetic group by factors of thousands and the Brotherhood are not different from Al Qaeda in the strategic end-state they wish to achieve. The only difference is how they wish to achieve it. So it must be understood as two enemies with one strategic goal: undemocratic theocracies, be they in the Middle East, or be they in Europe, or be they here in America. I've left my testimony to Congress that goes into more detail about why we're losing this war and another article on Al Qaeda over there by the back of the room if you wish more details. Otherwise, last slide please. If you wish to continue offline these are the best details – contact details for me. But I'd be glad to answer any questions. Do you want to do that now or later? Q and A?

WOMAN:

We definitely want to do the questions right now. Thank you. That was tremendous.

SEBASTIAN GORKA:

Okay.

WOMAN:

Let me add, you have a number of publications online as well.

SEBASTIAN GORKA:

Sure. Yes, yeah.

WOMAN:

So, we would be happy to distribute links to those, additionally. We want to open up to the floor, but I wondered if I could just take the prerogative of doing an initial question, Sebastian. There's been a real lack of leadership on both sides of the aisle on this. And that's one of the things that, you know, we've had some tremendous on the House side in particular, Michele Bachmann, Louie Gohmert and others have – have made a huge effort – Trent Franks, to get this out front. But the conventional leadership at the level of Boehner or McCain or others have not taken this on. Can you just address that issue? How do we – how do we turn this into something where we can get more traction in the next four years?

SEBASTIAN GORKA:

Yeah, you did read the list of people who understand it, and are doing as much as they can to make a difference and it is really Franks – Trent Franks, Louie Gohmert and Michele. I think the best way to proceed is the following: We have an enormous psychological block to dealing with this because of a willful misinterpretation of the disestablishment clause and the concept of separation of Church and State. In the last 20 and 30 – 20 to 30 years, it has been promulgated that religion cannot in any way touch upon the national security function of the government, despite the fact that the disestablishment clause has nothing to do with that. All it means is there can be no state religion in America, nor can any group be persecuted for who they are. That's it, period. It does not mean the following, as one FBI agent told me, who shall remain nameless – he who was surveilling an Al Qaeda suspect in the United States, he had visual and audio surveillance on him, and he saw the vector of the individual's movement would take him imminently into a mosque. Within minutes the agent had to make a decision. Does he maintain surveillance on that individual or does he tell his boss because his boss believes that separation of Church and State means when that person crossed the threshold into the mosque, the mics and the cameras have to be switched off. That is not what the founding fathers meant. Because I – if it's David Koresh going in to a church, or a Jewish extremist walking into a temple, I don't care who they are. It is the duty of the sworn officer of the state to maintain intelligence surveillance on them. But this is really, you know, prevalent inside US government that that's what the separation of Church and State means.

So how do we deal with this? I have one answer that I think is an easy one. Everything we talk about here has to be taken out of the realm of religion and has to be understood as pertaining to the US Constitution. You just ask one question. Does that individual or that 501c3, or whatever it is, commit itself to the values of the United States Constitution, or is it committed to undermining them? If it's committed to undermining them, whether it's you know, the Branch Davidians, or the Brotherhood, you take them down. You prosecute them and you deal with them or you apply lethal force as necessary. In this, the most important document we have is of course the list of unindicted co-conspirators of the Holy

Land Foundation trial in 2005, which is all up there, available unclassified, the biggest threat financing case in US history, \$12 million funneled to Hamas, and in it, the Muslim Brotherhood document translated into English, submitted to court, lists the Brotherhood's front organizations and their allies in the United States. Organizations such as CAIR, ISNA and ICNA that today still provide strategic advice to the US government and training. How is it that unindicted co-conspirators in the biggest threat financing case in the United States are still providing advice? Ask the question not whether they're Muslims or not, are they committed to the US Constitution? The Muslim Brotherhood is committed to destroying it and as a result we should deal with them as we would anybody committed to undermining the US Constitution. That's my avenue of attack Chris.

WOMAN:

Yes, Ace?

ACE:

Well, the problem is really, you put your finger right on it. But it really goes a lot deeper because who do we have leading it from the Pentagon side of the equation, none other than the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. And how do we get to penetrate the mentality and what they're doing there because it's really subsuming everything we're trying to do? And of course, the single answer, there's not one in Congress who had the guts to ask Brennan if he was a convert. You know. I just find it unconscionable. So how do we get to the military side, which is all wrapped up in political correctness?

SEBASTIAN GORKA:

Look, I always ask one question of setting the stage. How many offices above the rank of colonel – so general flag officers, have resigned in principle in the last 12 years?

ACE:

Zero?

SEBASTIAN GORKA:

Almost zero.

ACE:

Almost.

SEBASTIAN GORKA:

Almost zero. If you look at previous periods, especially Vietnam and even after Vietnam, that is not the case. We have created a general staff that has become highly politicized and is very sensitive to the question of saying no. So when, you know, when the commander-in-chief says you know, will you please make Afghanistan into Switzerland, instead of saying there might be issues with that sir, sorry that might be a little bit beyond the scope of the US military, we say yes sir, three bags full, sir. And we execute an impossible mission. So I have no good answer with how to deal with people of one, two, three star rank. What I find is very interesting, in the last 12 years there has developed a constituency within law enforcement and the military which is anybody below the rank of lieutenant colonel probably gets it and is prepared to learn about the threat and wants to know more about it. There seems to be a cut-off point where you get to a certain rank and especially by SES where it's just – it's politics. It's pleasing the boss and politics. We have to work as much as possible with events like this to give what they need to the people who are doing their mission, the majors, yeah? The junior special agents. Those individuals sooner or later may become generals, may become deputy directors of the FBI, and if we have helped them, then we may put them into a position where the threat assessment will be correct in the future.

WOMAN:

One more? Okay? Yes, in the back?

QUESTION:

Yes, can you discuss some more about the documents that were acquired at Abbottabad in terms of what exactly is being done with those now. Is there any time table for releasing declassified versions and secondly, has the – have the relevant committees in the Congress they have oversight over intelligence, have they had access to these information?

SEBASTIAN GORKA:

I can't answer the latter question. Maybe somebody here can. I would point you to Tom Joscelyn's recent article two or three days ago at FDD. He gives as much information as I've ever seen in the open source public domain. And interestingly, there seems to be some line to a British journalist who wrote about some of the things in the documents that haven't been released. So there's somebody in the UK, who's seen the document – some of the documents beyond the 17, who has stated quite clearly that there is adequate proof in those documents – according to the journalist – to demonstrate that Al Qaeda still executes control or has control – in fact, he mentions the Mumbai attacks, that Al Qaeda central had some role or control in the Mumbai attacks, which is something we have never heard before in the unclassified domain. So, please check Tom's article. Thank you Chris. Thank you Ben.