

Statement for the Record

Ms. Milancy Harris, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense

for Special Operations and Combatting Terrorism

before the

Committee on Oversight and Reform

U.S. House of Representatives

December 7, 2021

Good morning Chairman Lynch, Ranking Member Grothman, and esteemed members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity speak with you today about the Department of Defense's approach to counterterrorism. I am grateful to appear with my Department of State colleague and look forward to today's discussion.

While we have significantly degraded the terrorist threat with the last twenty years of sustained pressure, we still face a potent challenge. The terrorist threat to the U.S. homeland from externally directed attacks is at the lowest since 9/11, but we still face a number of terrorist groups committed to targeting U.S. interests and personnel abroad. These groups seek to take advantage of instability and ungoverned spaces and have a new and evolving set of tools readily available. Today's terrorist groups are proficient with new technologies, agile in the information environment, creative in circumventing traditional financial systems,

and remain ideologically influential enough to motivate new generations of people to join them or conduct independent attacks on their behalf.

But, let me be clear: the United States has met this challenge at every evolution. Our capability to counter terrorist threats has grown exponentially since 9/11. While it is critical to preserve the option for unilateral U.S. counterterrorism operations where necessary, we often see that the most effective counterterrorism approach is a mix of kinetic and non-kinetic capabilities and working with our partners and allies. For the Department, beyond our kinetic options, this includes collaborating with allies and partners on partnered operations, using our education and capacity building programs to help develop increased counterterrorism capacity in critical regions, and ensuring our security cooperation efforts integrate with other, complementary U.S. Government programs.

As we process the lessons learned from our time in Afghanistan and set the conditions for a new counterterrorism mission, we will seek to leverage intelligence, diplomacy, and military capabilities to ensure Afghanistan never again becomes a safe haven for terrorist organizations. Any approach will not be static, we will continue to iterate and adjust based on the terrorist threat and what will keep America safe. We will rely on the whole of government approach as we seek to deepen relationships in the region, understand the evolving state of Afghanistan's government, and maintain our commitment to the Afghan people. Our withdrawal from Afghanistan does not diminish the Department's vigilance in

our global counterterrorism mission, and our full attention remains on the mission of protecting our homeland, citizens, and interests from the continued threat terrorism poses not only from Afghanistan, but around the world. We will never waver in that mission.

Thank you Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and distinguished members of the committee. I look forward to answering your questions today.