



THE SOUFAN CENTER

ANNUAL REPORT

2020



The Soufan Center is an independent non-profit center offering research, analysis, and strategic dialogue on global security challenges and foreign policy issues.

The Soufan Center is a 501c3 non-profit organization

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LETTER FROM THE FOUNDER



“2020 was an unprecedented year for the international security landscape. The COVID-19 pandemic not only dramatically changed our way of living and working, but also exacerbated preexisting fault lines, security threats, and civil society challenges.”

I cannot be prouder of what The Soufan Center (TSC) has accomplished during an especially trying year. Through our work, TSC has managed to contribute to the development of sustainable, ethical domestic and international policy solutions that make the world safer. My goal is for TSC to serve as a resource for practitioners, academics, media, and other stakeholders on a broad range of complex issues facing governments and civil society—from international and domestic terrorism to matters related to law enforcement and cyber security, as well as human, energy, and food security. The TSC team has accomplished so much in the three years since its founding. TSC is consistently seen as a trusted resource, and our research and analyses equip thought leaders, policymakers, and experts with the tools necessary to confront the most pressing security challenges of our time. Our commitment to critically examine such issues and challenges through a multidisciplinary and non-partisan approach is reflected in the excellent and committed team that makes up TSC, and its partners. We have decades of experience across government, security, academic, UN, and NGO sectors and with expertise across a plethora of global security issues, including counterterrorism, armed conflict, geopolitical analysis, and disinformation, and considering the critical importance of human rights and development dimensions.

2020 was an unprecedented year for the international security landscape. The COVID-19 pandemic not only dramatically changed our way of living and working, but also exacerbated preexisting fault lines, security threats, and civil society challenges. Violent extremists across the board utilized the pandemic for their own gain, while some state actors doubled-down on disinformation campaigns to sow discord in societies across the globe. The global health crisis significantly aggravated humanitarian crises from Central America to the Horn of Africa, from Yemen to Afghanistan, and beyond. Geopolitical conflicts raged as regional and authoritarian states sought to exploit the chaos to solidify their influence and control. The trend of popular uprisings observed in 2019 continued, including in the United States, all the while human rights and civil liberties have been under attack from authoritarian leaders, emerging surveillance technology, and nationalistic movements. This occurred against the backdrop of declining American leadership during a global crisis, an increasingly assertive China, and a more aggressive Russia.

It is safe to say that 2020 kept TSC busy. Of note, I was honored to be invited to brief the U.S. Congress twice, for which we provided expert opinion and policy recommendations on how terrorist organizations and violent extremist actors seek to exploit the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the challenges of U.S. counterterrorism cooperation with Saudi Arabia under the de-facto leadership of Mohammed bin Salman.

While the pandemic significantly impaired travel across the globe, I am pleased to report that The Soufan Center officially launched three locally focused projects in the Middle East and beyond. TSC has partnered with the United Nations Democracy Fund to lead a project that seeks to enable witnesses to inform the world about conflict in Iraq, Syria, and Yemen. In addition, the project *Through the Lens of Crisis: COVID-19 and the People on the Frontlines of Conflict* was launched with the support of the Carnegie Corporation of New York. The project partners with local journalists and storytellers to highlight stories and document on-the-ground realities in crisis-affected contexts in the Middle East against the backdrop of the pandemic. With the support of Rockefeller Brothers Fund, TSC also launched *Stories from the Field: Grappling with the Impact of COVID-19* to highlight the unique challenges and impacts of the pandemic in Turkey and India through videos and articles.

In addition to our new projects, another major accomplishment for TSC was our 2020 Global Security Forum (GSF), a four-day conference held virtually for the first time, which examined *A New World (Dis)Order? Managing Security Challenges in an Increasingly Complex Landscape*. GSF 2020 attracted thousands of viewers, and over 60 national and international media outlets covered discussions from the event. It allowed for cutting-edge discussions among senior policymakers, experts, and practitioners, whose efforts continue to shape the global security environment today.

2020 proved that it is critical to continue developing innovative, credible, and sustainable policy policies to address both traditional and non-traditional security threats. Now, more than ever, a whole-of-government approach is necessary, but a whole-of-society approach is vital to find innovative solutions to the most pressing issues of our time. TSC looks forward to continuing to serve as a resource and forum for dialogue on global security issues and emergent threats in 2021 and beyond.

Sincerely Yours,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Ali Soufan', written in a cursive style.

Ali Soufan

LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



It is my great pleasure and privilege to have joined The Soufan Center as Executive Director in December 2020, and to be part of such a dynamic team with an international network of policymakers, practitioners, and experts spanning the globe.

The past year has been a tremendously busy one for TSC. While the practice of attending physical conferences and events this year was abruptly halted in March, it did not deter us from sharing our research and knowledge. In 2020, our team presented over 50 times in domestic and international forums, events, and conferences, including at the United Nations. I am also happy to report that we launched our webinar series, in total hosting five online virtual discussions that examined a variety of topics ranging from far-right extremism to modern disinformation to police brutality. Our webinar series was attended by individuals from government, the private sector, academia, NGOs, and media.

We continued to build on our important work on violent white supremacy extremism and related transnational networks, with reports on the Atomwaffen Division and the Russian Imperial Movement, the first violent extremist far-right group labeled a Specially Designated Terrorist Group by the U.S. State Department.

Our daily IntelBrief, a snapshot of research and analysis on key events and developments in security and counterterrorism, continues to inform experts and practitioners worldwide with 253 total IntelBriefs last year. In a world in which we are continually receiving masses of information, the IntelBrief provides a clear-eyed assessment of the important stories that impact global security.

As governments and communities continued to make strides against the coronavirus pandemic, including the historic development of a vaccine in record time, we have all had to find ways of adapting to a new environment. I am proud that TSC has continued to proactively engage with partners and networks in government, media, international organizations, and civil society to advance nuanced solutions to security challenges. Our analysis, research, and experts' opinions have been referenced over 1,250 times in national and international media outlets.

2020 set the bar high. The TSC team and I look forward to working with all of you as we strengthen our research, analysis, and dialogue in what already promises to be an exciting and busy 2021.

Sincerely,

Naureen Chowdhury Fink

“The past year has been a tremendously busy one for TSC. While the practice of attending physical conferences and events this year was abruptly halted in March, it did not deter us from sharing our research and knowledge.”

ABOUT THE CENTER

About

The Soufan Center is an independent non-profit center offering research, analysis, and strategic dialogue on global security challenges and foreign policy issues, with a particular focus on counterterrorism, violent extremism, armed conflict, and the rule of law. Our work is underpinned by a recognition that human rights and human security perspectives are critical to developing credible, effective, and sustainable solutions. TSC fills a niche role by producing objective and innovative reports and analyses, and fostering dynamic dialogue and exchanges, to effectively equip governments, international organizations, the private sector, and civil society with key resources to inform policies and practice.

THE SOUFAN CENTER IS AN INDEPENDENT NON-PROFIT CENTER OFFERING RESEARCH, ANALYSIS, AND STRATEGIC DIALOGUE ON GLOBAL SECURITY CHALLENGES AND FOREIGN POLICY ISSUES.

Our Mission

The Soufan Center's mission is to equip key stakeholders – governments, international organizations, the private sector, media, communities, and individuals – with the knowledge and resources needed to understand and address contemporary global security challenges.

Our Work

The Soufan Center engages in research, projects, and events across a broad spectrum of violent threats including terrorism, counterterrorism, violent extremism, disinformation, geopolitical dynamics, and armed conflict, including the impact on civil society, humanitarian action, and the rule of law. Through our daily IntelBrief, we provide focused analysis on specific global security issues. In our comprehensive research reports, we contribute in-depth analysis and evaluate evolving challenges. With our events, we engage diverse audiences to drive changes in policy and practice. Through our projects, we seek to amplify voices and perspectives from the field and build capacities for more nuanced analyses of – and responses to – regional and international challenges. Working closely with a wide range of media, we share our findings and insights on current events, risks, and responses.

Our History

Founded in 2017 by former FBI special agent Ali Soufan, The Soufan Center is an independent, non-partisan, and registered 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. Led by Executive Director Naureen Chowdhury Fink, our team is strengthened by diverse professional and cultural backgrounds, including experience in human rights; international development; federal, state, and local government; international organizations; law enforcement; and the military. Each year, The Soufan Center organizes the Global Security Forum, an annual international conference to address evolving security challenges and bring together senior officials and practitioners for innovative exchanges. Through TSC Arabic, The Soufan Center ensures critical research and analysis is available to Arabic-speaking audiences in the Middle East, North Africa, and across the globe.

THE SOUFAN CENTER'S REACH

3 PUBLISHED RESEARCH REPORTS



3 CONGRESSIONAL TESTIMONIES



U.S. House of Representatives
PERMANENT SELECT COMMITTEE ON
INTELLIGENCE

50+ EVENTS, SPEECHES AND BRIEFINGS

90+ OPINION AND COMMENTARY PIECES

180+ INTERVIEWS WITH NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL MEDIA

253 INTEL BRIEFS

THE SOUFAN CENTER
IntelBrief

1250+

MEDIA MENTIONS IN NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL MEDIA OUTLETS

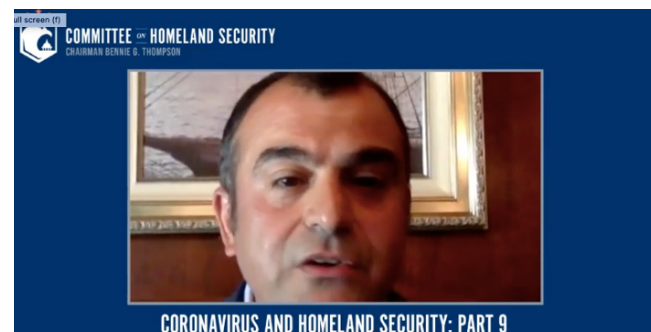
MOST COVERED TOPICS



POLICY ENGAGEMENT: Local Impact



Speakers for the Committee on Homeland Security public virtual forum on 'Coronavirus and Homeland Security Part Nine: Extremism During the Pandemic.'



Ali Soufan at a Committee on Homeland Security public virtual forum on 'Coronavirus and Homeland Security Part Nine: Extremism During the Pandemic.'



Ali Soufan at a House Intelligence Committee virtual open hearing on the 'U.S.-Saudi Security and Intelligence Relationship.'

Based in New York City, The Soufan Center (TSC) continued its legacy of active engagement on matters related to U.S. domestic and international security policy. TSC staff and Fellows participated in events, briefings, hearings, and other activities, sharing knowledge and expertise with local and national government, law enforcement, intelligence, legal, and financial bodies. Some of these include: the United States Department of State, Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Department of Treasury, Joint Improvised-Threat Defeat Organization (JIDO), Office of Intelligence and Analysis (OIA), and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, among many others.

TSC's senior leadership was invited to participate in three congressional hearings in 2020. On January 9, 2020, Michael Masters, President of The Soufan Center Board of Directors and National Director and CEO of the Secure Community Network, provided witness testimony at a House Committee on Homeland Security hearing, in the subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Recovery. The hearing took place in Washington, D.C. on "Understanding the Importance of DHS Preparedness Grants: Perspectives from the Field." In his remarks, Mr. Masters addressed the troubling rise of domestic violent extremism in the U.S., noting that the FBI was pursuing over 850 domestic terrorism investigations at that time.

On May 20, 2020, Ali Soufan, Founder of The Soufan Center, participated in a House Committee on Homeland Security hearing on "Coronavirus and Homeland Security, Part Nine: Extremism During the Pandemic." Then Subcommittee Chairman Max Rose and Congressman Emanuel Cleaver hosted the forum to discuss how extremist groups have exploited the coronavirus pandemic and to identify what could be done to address this growing threat.



Michael Masters at a Homeland Security Committee hearing on 'Understanding the Importance of DHS Preparedness Grants: Perspectives from the Field.'

"The FBI, Department of Homeland Security and National Counterterrorism Center have jointly assessed that domestic hate groups will continue to pose a lethal threat to religious and cultural facilities at home, especially mass casualty attacks at large gatherings and soft targets, and will be difficult to detect before they act."

— Michael Masters

Reflecting his warnings of the violent white supremacy extremist threat in his September 2019 hearing testimony, Mr. Soufan's testimony included commendation of the State Department's designation of the Russian Imperial Movement, and subsequent action by social media companies, to start responding to the threat. However, he warned that "the pandemic has created a disinformation-terrorism nexus with its focal point centering upon the white supremacist threat."

On September 11, 2020, Mr. Soufan participated in a hearing convened by the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence (HPSCI) on "Assessing the U.S.-Saudi Security and Intelligence Relationship." The hearing was organized to sharpen the Committee's oversight and inform future legislation on related topics by shedding light on: the benefits of U.S.-Saudi counterterrorism cooperation and the Kingdom's role in propagating extremist ideologies; how recent Saudi regional policies have impacted U.S. national security objectives; and growing public evidence that the Saudi security services are engaged in a global campaign to silence critics of the Saudi government, including American citizens.

Through these three Congressional hearings and several points of engagement with public, nonprofit, and private sectors, The Soufan Center ensured that our unique perspective on rule-of-law driven security policy and analysis was communicated to critical stakeholders for maximum impact in the United States.

POLICY ENGAGEMENT: Global Reach

The Soufan Center continued to share its research, expertise, and recommendations with a range of international stakeholders across the globe in 2020. From governments, to international organizations like the United Nations (UN), the European Union (EU), and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), to fora like the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF), TSC participated in a series of events at the international level, sharing research, analysis, and thought leadership on a broad range of security threats, from Salafi jihadist terrorism to violent white supremacy extremism to disinformation.

In 2020, the topic of transnational, far-right groups and violent white supremacy extremism remained a leading security focus for TSC. Following U.S. Department of State designation of the Russian Imperial Movement as a “Specially Designated Global Terrorist Group” alongside three of its leaders, TSC hosted a webinar with Irfan Saeed, Director of the Office of Counterterrorism and Countering Violent Extremism at the U.S. State Department. The event covered COVID-19, the latest U.S. sanctions, and evolving U.S. policy in response to domestic violent extremism. In further discussion on this threat, former Director of Policy, Research and Programs, Emerita Torres, participated in a January panel event at Canada’s School of Public Service on “How Washington Works: A Discussion on Populism and Nationalism,” as well as a February event by the Global Center on Cooperative Security, entitled “Blue Sky Retreat 2020: Seventh Review of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.” In private sector engagement, Senior Research Fellow, Jason Blazakis, presented TSC’s research on white supremacy extremism to a major Silicon Valley company.



Speakers for the “Online Symposium: Unlocking the Power of Football” hosted by Football for Peace.



Richard Barrett (right) at the joint High-Level Regional Conference on “Foreign Terrorist Fighters – Addressing Current Challenges.”

TSC continued to provide research and analysis on the threat posed by Salafi-jihadist inspired terrorism. In February in Vienna, Austria, Richard Barrett, Senior Fellow at The Soufan Center and Director of the Global Strategy Network, participated in a Joint High-Level Regional Conference on “Foreign Terrorist Fighters: Addressing Current Challenges.” The event was organized by the United Nations Office on Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT), the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), and the Government of Switzerland, in cooperation with the Albanian OSCE Chairmanship, focusing on good practices, lessons learned, and policy options in addressing the evolving Foreign Terrorist Fighters phenomenon. Senior Research Fellow Colin P. Clarke participated in several events with the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF), including on the topic of Watchlisting Guidance (Terrorist Travel Initiative) and Maritime Security in 2020, and many of the discussions on these issues will continue well into 2021. He also participated in a virtual briefing in March on “Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State: Competition or Cooperation in Western Sahel?” hosted by the International Center for Counter Terrorism (ICCT) at The Hague.

“Since terrorist and extremist groups are also information actors, they too now have a wider reach and larger audience potential because of the contemporary media environment.”

— Stephanie Foggett

TSC continued to focus on the security challenges posed by disinformation and a weaponized information space. Stephanie Foggett, Resident Fellow at The Soufan Center, worked on a year-long project with NATO’s Centre of Excellence-Defence Against Terrorism (COE-DAT) on a Handbook on Best Practices in Counter-Terrorism in 2020. In a chapter co-authored with Dr. Afzal Ashraf, of the University of Nottingham, she presented on the utility and importance of media and communications to terrorist actors, with military-specific considerations for NATO. In a series of virtual seminars and online events, she also shared research on media and terrorism, gender and online extremism, disinformation and the rise of violent far-right and white supremacy extremism with NATO military stakeholders. Senior Research Fellow, Susan Sim, also collaborated with NATO’s Centre of Excellence in Defence Against Terrorism in a 2020 Defence Against Suicide Bombing course, and also on the Handbook on Best Practices in Counter-Terrorism in 2020, authoring a chapter on best practices for developing national counterterrorism policy.



Stephanie Foggett in an online workshop for NATO’s Centre of Excellence – Defence Against Terrorism (COE-DAT).



Emerita Torres (second right) at an event “How Washington Works: A Discussion on Populism and Nationalism” organized by Canada’s School of Public Service.

The Soufan Center also continued to collaborate with entities working on prevention at the international level. On November 10, 2020, Ali Soufan, Founder of The Soufan Center, participated in the “Online Symposium: Unlocking the Power of Football.” The high-level digital event took place during the 75th session of the United Nations General Assembly and was organized by Football for Peace, the United States, the State of Qatar, and the United Nations Office of Counter Terrorism (UNOCT). Utilizing the power of sport, the event looked at ways to safeguard individuals from being recruited into violence and highlighted the role that governments, the private sector, civil society organizations, and communities can play to do more together. Mr. Soufan participated in a panel looking at the current challenges when countering and preventing violence today. Mollie Saltskog, Research Fellow at The Soufan Center, represented TSC at the Global Counterterrorism Forum non-governmental organization partner meeting. This broad spectrum of global engagement ensured that TSC was able to relay our analyses and insights to global policymakers and stakeholders and expand such opportunities for ongoing collaboration.

ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS AND CONFERENCES



Ali Soufan at a conference in Denver, Colorado.



Stephanie Foggett (left) and Emerita Torres (right) at an event with the Penn State School of International Affairs.

Even though travel was impeded for most of 2020, it did not prevent the TSC team from engaging with a range of academic institutions and participating in numerous conferences designed to disseminate our research and analysis. TSC engaged with leading universities in the United States, Europe, the Middle East, and Asia. In the United States, such engagement included the following institutions: New York University's Center for Cybersecurity, Penn State University's School of International Affairs, Carnegie Mellon University's Center for Informed Democracy and Social Cybersecurity, the University of Maryland's National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), Fordham University Law School's Center on National Security, the Combating Terrorism Center at the United States Military Academy at West Point, George Washington University's Project on Middle East Democracy (POMED), Boston University's School of Law, Middlebury University, and Mansfield University.

In Europe, TSC researchers participated in events with the Center for Security Studies (CSS) at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich, Oxford University's Strategic Studies Group, and GLOBSEC, a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization focused on issues of global security and based in Bratislava, Slovakia. In the Middle East, TSC partnered with Hamad Bin Khalifa University (HBKU) for an event titled "Educate to Eradicate," focusing on the role of education in tackling violent extremism. In Asia, an event with the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies' Centre of Excellence for National Security examined domestic instability in the United States and focused on the rise of domestic violent extremism, with an eye toward policy options that were related to official TSC research products. TSC institutional dialogues and academic conferences also covered issues and topics including: the proliferation of deepfake technology; Saudi foreign policy under Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman; the challenges of white supremacy extremism in an online environment; the impact of COVID-19 on terrorism and counterterrorism; how to deal with foreign fighters after the loss of ISIS' territory; terrorist designations and terrorist financing; and an exploration of trends in violent extremism worldwide.



Ali Soufan (second right) at the event 'Educate to Eradicate: The Role of Education in Tackling Violent Extremism' organized by Hamad Bin Khalifa University (HBKU).

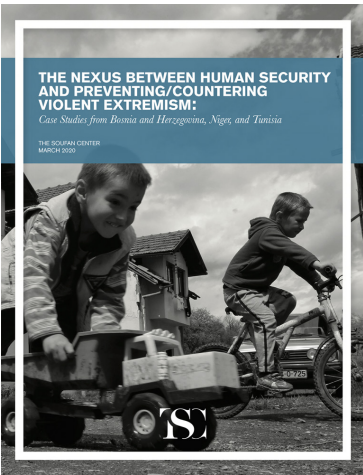
The Soufan Center was a founding member of the Global Research Network, launched by the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED) to create a network of international experts and researchers to complement UN assessments and analyses. The GRN has offered opportunities for dialogue and scholarship among more than 100 leading research institutions internationally, diplomats, and experts, and The Soufan Center has remained an active member of the network. In 2020, and in cooperation with partners at the United Nations, former Director of Policy, Research and Programs, Emerita Torres, participated in a GRN virtual round table on "Emerging Trends in Violent Extremism Conducive to Terrorism: A Focus on Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism." TSC shared its reports and analysis on the threat posed by domestic and transnational violent far-right extremists, including violent white supremacists and other far-right actors. The Soufan Center also hosted a GRN meeting in the margins of the 2020 Global Security Forum. The panel discussion on "COVID-19 and Counter-Terrorism: Key Global Trends and Challenges" was moderated by David Scharia, Chief of Branch at CTED, and the event brought together GRN experts from Africa, Asia, Europe, and North America to discuss regional and global security dynamics within the context of the global coronavirus pandemic. These discussions also served to inform the deliberations and activities of diplomats, officials, and experts at the UN and in various global capitals.

RESEARCH AND INTEL BRIEFS

RESEARCH

The Soufan Center published three in-depth research reports in 2020 – the first focused on preventing and countering violent extremism in fragile states, and the next two reports looked at violent far-right extremist organizations that pose a serious threat to international security, namely the Russian Imperial Movement (RIM) and the Atomwaffen Division (AWD). In 2020, TSC’s research was influential in helping frame the nature of the threat posed by violent white supremacists and other racially and ethnically motivated violent extremists. The reports were cited widely in the media, as well as utilized by governments in North America and Europe to inform policymaking, terrorist designations, and sanctions against individuals and groups forming part of this transnational network.

In March, TSC published “The Nexus between Human Security and Preventing/Countering Violent Extremism.” The report included results and findings from fieldwork in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Niger, and Tunisia — three countries that have been targeted by the international community for counterterrorism and preventing/countering violent extremism (P/CVE) efforts. The report highlighted key findings and challenges in recent approaches to countering violent extremism in these countries. The lack of publicly available data on P/CVE funding makes it difficult to track trends, and the research team found that there are poor-to-non-existent mechanisms for monitoring, assessment, and evaluation of both state and civil society initiatives in P/CVE. The report also found that many P/CVE funding initiatives to civil society groups went toward projects that focus on capacity-building or dialogue rather than tangible development programs.



The report also highlighted that in some instances, donor preferences may have shifted civil society organizations away from their traditional focus and towards P/CVE programming, though this also reflects a broader concern about donor-driven agendas in many places. The report concluded that, to succeed in the long term, P/CVE approaches must reflect a range of structural factors — such as political, economic and social drivers, including over-policing, the socio-economic exclusion of particular communities and groups based on ethnicity, race, gender or religion, and lack of economic opportunity. These push factors create an enabling environment for terrorists and violent extremists to exploit grievances, recruit, and mobilize support. The report also underscored that international P/CVE efforts should view interventions as a longer-term relationship rather than an operation to be deployed one time to solve a problem.

In April 2020, TSC published a report entitled, “Inside the Russian Imperial Movement: Practical Implications of U.S. Sanctions.” This report came on the heels of the U.S. Department of State’s designation of the Russian Imperial Movement (RIM) as a terrorist organization, and our research examined the significance of this unprecedented act. The report underscored that violence stemming from increasingly transnational white supremacist and ultra-nationalist groups poses an equivalent, or perhaps even greater, threat to the U.S. homeland today to that of Salafi-jihadist groups like the Islamic State and al-Qaeda.



The April 6, 2020 US State Department designation of RIM as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist (SDGT), and designation of three of the group’s leaders, was the first time the U.S. government undertook such measures against a violent white supremacy extremist group. The TSC report concluded that the actions taken by the State Department presented both a major symbolic milestone and a practical step in U.S. and international efforts to counter violent white supremacy extremism and its broader transnational network. The report shed light on the ambitions and activities of the Russian Imperial Movement, an ultranationalist and paramilitary group based in Saint Petersburg, Russia. The Russian Imperial Movement and the Imperial Legion, the group’s military wing, have been responsible for training white supremacist terrorists and cooperating with U.S.-based white supremacist groups and individuals. The report underscored the need for the United States and its allies to continue collecting and analyzing intelligence on the transnational nature of violent white supremacy extremist groups like the Russian Imperial Movement. TSC’s report helped map out connections and overlap between the groups that comprise this movement.

Finally, in August 2020, The Soufan Center published a third report, “The Atomwaffen Division: The Evolution of the White Supremacy Threat.” This report argued that the U.S. government should devote serious consideration to sanctioning the Atomwaffen Division (AWD), as it meets the criteria to be labeled a terrorist group. While AWD has roots in the United States, the group has an expanding international footprint, with established links and affiliates in the United Kingdom, Germany, Russia, Ukraine, and the Baltic States, making its reach and potential to influence and plan violence global in nature. Ukraine continues to be a critical node in the transnational violent white supremacy extremism network. The announcement of a potential AWD affiliate or inspired group in Ukraine presents a dangerous avenue for AWD members and other white supremacist organizations and individuals from around the world who wish to travel, train, and gain combat experience. By sanctioning AWD, the hope is to mitigate the real and growing white supremacist threat and prevent the continued international growth of this network. Similar to the so-called Islamic State, AWD has built a globally identifiable brand, which is capable of seducing violent white supremacist extremist and aspiring neo-Nazis from around the globe and spurring lone wolves to action by providing inspiration. AWD’s ultimate goal is to accelerate societal collapse, promote chaos, and create a racially pure white society.

The Soufan Center consistently aims to develop timely, consequential, and action-oriented research and analysis that can both articulate emergent threats and offer actionable recommendations for global policymakers. TSC’s 2020 reports propelled this objective forward and set the stage for further research on violent far-right, anti-government, and white supremacy extremism and counterterrorism in the coming year.

RESEARCH AND INTELBRIEFS

THE **SOUFAN** CENTER
IntelBrief

INTELBRIEFS

In 2020, The Soufan Center's premier daily product, the IntelBrief, continued to focus on topics that remain core strengths of TSC, including: the threat posed by groups like al-Qaeda and ISIS; domestic violent extremism and violent white supremacy; disinformation; and geopolitics in the Middle East, including ongoing tensions between the United States and Iran. TSC IntelBriefs were picked up or covered by news and media outlets worldwide.

The year 2020 started off with the United States killing Qassem Soleimani, the head of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Quds Force (IRGC-QF), and IntelBriefs detailed the subsequent implications for regional instability, the Iranian response, and impact on the broader U.S.-Iran relationship. Just weeks later, TSC published an IntelBrief on January 27th, titled, "The Global Health Challenges Posed by the Spread of Deadly Viruses," going on record as one of the first research organizations to identify the threat posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, which would spread worldwide in the first few months of 2020.

TSC continued its coverage of COVID-19 throughout the year, analyzing the impact on the global economy, U.S. counterterrorism partnerships, and international security more broadly. A major focus of TSC IntelBriefs was the intersection of disinformation and COVID-19, as well as how violent non-state actors, including violent white supremacy extremists, weaponized COVID-19 to spread propaganda and recruit new members. TSC IntelBriefs also analyzed the fallout from the murder of George Floyd and resulting U.S. countrywide protests and demonstrations.

IntelBriefs additionally looked at the roles of women in white supremacist online ecosystems, highlighting the role of gender in racially and ethnically motivated violent extremist organizations. Related IntelBriefs assessed a range of domestic extremists, including the Boogaloo Bois, the Proud Boys, and the Oath Keepers, as well as the conspiracy theory movement QAnon.

Throughout the course of 2020, TSC IntelBriefs closely tracked the evolution of militant jihadist violence in East Africa, providing key analytic insight into the growing threat posed by the Islamic State Central Africa Province (ISCAP), tracing its spread throughout Mozambique and parts of Tanzania. Sub-Saharan Africa remains an area of growth for both al-Qaeda and Islamic State franchise groups, and our IntelBriefs provide our readers with accurate and detailed assessments of the challenge that these terrorist affiliates pose to regional security.

TOP 5 INTELBRIEFS 2020



1

WOMEN IN WHITE SUPREMACIST ONLINE ECOSYSTEMS

Sep 24, 2020



2

THE BOOGALOO MOVEMENT – FROM ECCENTRIC DISTRACTION TO DOMESTIC TERROR

Jun 15, 2020



3

WHITE SUPREMACISTS AND THE WEAPONIZATION OF THE CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)

Mar 25, 2020



4

THE WAGNER GROUP: A RUSSIAN SYMPHONY OF PROFIT AND POLITICS

Apr 21, 2020



5

THE UNITED STATES REMAINS A TINDERBOX AS TENSIONS CONTINUE TO MOUNT

Aug 11, 2020



The 2020 Global Security Forum (GSF) focused on the theme, “A New World (Dis)order? Managing Security Challenges in an Increasingly Complex Landscape,” tackling complex security threats in the volatile context of a global pandemic and ever-shifting multipolar international system. The 2020 GSF covered a breadth of issues, including: a strategic assessment of national, regional, and international security challenges; the challenges and impact of disinformation; and public perceptions of such threats and narratives. The event underscored the need for the international community to work together to address contemporary security challenges, with governments marshalling the innovation of the private sector and civil society and harnessing the fortitude and compassion of their citizens.

The 2020 Global Security Forum commenced with a fireside chat with Ambassador Robert C. O’Brien, former United States National Security Advisor. Reflecting on America’s leadership and the 2020 U.S. Presidential election, Ambassador O’Brien assured “a very professional transition from the National Security Council” with the incoming Biden administration. A discussion with H.E. Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the State of Qatar, touched upon the long-standing partnership between Qatar and the United States, among other regional and international priorities.

The four-day event touched upon security matters around the globe. On global terrorism, Nathan Sales, then Ambassador-at-Large and Coordinator for Counterterrorism at the State Department, described Africa as “the key front in the next stage of the fight against terrorism.” Singapore’s Ambassador Bilahari Kausikan, former Permanent Secretary of the Singapore Ministry of Foreign Affairs, focused on security dynamics in Asia, noting, “The most dangerous issues in Asia are hard power issues: South China Sea, North Korea, Taiwan Straits, Senkakus, and Himalayas. You can’t deal with these by soft power.” Speaking on the drawdown of U.S. troops in Afghanistan, General John R. Allen (Ret.) declared, “There was no tactical, operational, or strategic merit to doing this in such a short period of time,” while former CIA Director John Brennan called for “a fresh look at whether the United States government is organized in a manner that is poised to deal with the challenges of the future as opposed to the past.”



FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: Steve Clemons, Ambassador Robert C. O’Brien.



FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: Ali Velshi, His Excellency Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani.



FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: Karen J. Greenberg, ASG Michele Coninsx, Gilles de Kerchove.



FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: Kevin Baron, John Brennan.

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the conference convened virtually. Among the prestigious government and expert participants were: Michèle Coninsx, Assistant Secretary-General and Executive Director at the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED); Gilles de Kerchove, the European Union’s Counter-Terrorism Coordinator; Max Rose, former U.S. Congressman; Karen J. Greenberg, Director at Fordham Law’s Center on National Security; David Scharia, Chief of Branch at UN CTED; Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, United Nations Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and Counter-Terrorism; Rami G. Khouri, Director of Global Engagement at the American University of Beirut; Nicholas J. Rasmussen, Executive Director of the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism (GIFCT); Joshua Geltzer, former NSC Senior Director for Counterterrorism; and Alex Gibney, Award-Winning Director, among many others. The event drew upon a distinguished set of journalists to serve as moderators, including: The Hill’s Steve Clemons, MSNBC’s Ali Velshi, Bloomberg’s Bobby Ghosh, CNN Analysts Kimberly Dozier and Peter Bergen, Defense One’s Kevin Baron, The Atlantic’s Adrienne LaFrance, and The New Yorker’s Lawrence Wright.

The 2020 GSF partners were the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED), New America Foundation, Defense One, and the Qatar International Academy for Security Studies (QIASS).

2020 PARTNERS



PROJECTS

STORIES FROM THE FIELD ON COVID-19, SECURITY, AND DISINFORMATION



In 2020, The Soufan Center launched the project, *Through the Lens of Crisis: COVID-19 and the People on the Frontlines of Conflict*, in order to highlight local stories and document on-the-ground realities in the Middle East against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic. Made possible through the support of the Carnegie Corporation of New York, *Through the Lens of Crisis* offered a focus on crisis contexts through a collaboration with journalist and security expert James Blake and the image verification platform Truepic.

Through the Lens of Crisis documented the humanitarian, societal, and security effects of COVID-19 across the Middle East. The stories shed light on several issues, including the lack of international assistance in conflict-affected areas, the expansion of emergency powers and restrictions by governments in response to COVID-19, the use of disinformation campaigns by state and non-state actors, the dangers of human trafficking, forced labor, and modern-day slavery in vulnerable communities, and the risk of renewed protests and instability across the region as unemployment and poverty rose. In collaboration with James Blake and Truepic, TSC published four stories – covering Syria, Yemen, Lebanon, and Iraq – that detailed, through articles and accompanying videos, the additional challenges COVID-19 posed to these conflict and crisis-afflicted contexts.

Later in the year, TSC launched a second project, *Stories from the Field: Grappling with the Impact of COVID-19*, spotlighting challenges in a range of locations, with journalists and researchers sharing their views and stories from the field. With support from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, *Stories from the Field* shared unique stories on the COVID-19 impacts on emergency response capacity and disinformation in Turkey and India. These stories offer a glimpse into the inequalities and challenges laid bare by the pandemic, and the inspiring stories of individuals who persevered through it all.

THROUGH THE LENS OF CRISIS: COVID-19 AND THE PEOPLE ON THE FRONTLINES OF CONFLICT



ENABLING WITNESSES



In May of 2020, The Soufan Center received a grant from the United Nations Democracy Fund (UNDEF) for a project called *Enabling Witnesses to Inform the World about Conflict in Iraq, Syria, and Yemen*. The murder of Jamal Khashoggi highlighted just how dangerous both being a dissenter and a journalist – or someone who tells the story of conflict as a doctor, aid worker, or simply a witness – continues to be globally.

Our work at The Soufan Center reaffirms every day that accurate reporting on conflict is essential. The stories of war, conflict, and insecurity must also be told with sensitivity and respect to present a full narrative; too often, they are not, with potentially serious consequences for victims of violence and displacement. Told correctly, such stories have the power to influence policy and prompt shifts in thinking. In the past, victims' stories weren't told until well after a conflict had ceased. That has changed drastically with the advancement of technology. The full scope of events, and the actions committed by governments, non-state actors, or others in the course of the conflict, can now be documented and relayed in real-time.

With the help of expert consultants, we designed a project that trains and provides a network to the storytellers of the conflicts in Iraq, Syria, and Yemen. A cohort of 40 participants, including journalists, health workers, and aid workers, were chosen from these three contexts, some now living as refugees outside of those countries. COVID-19 has forced many organizations, including TSC, to reimagine and reassess activity plans. While COVID-19 has complicated our efforts to hold a first training in 2020, we have made adjustments to host the first training online and the second in-person training in 2021.

SALON SERIES



Over the last two years, The Soufan Center, with generous support from The Carnegie Corporation of New York, started the Salon Series – convening small groups of policy makers, funders, media, and academics for candid and cutting-edge discussions of the most pressing human security-related topics of the day. Speakers included some of the foremost experts in their fields and were cultivated from around the globe. All conversations were boutique, invitation-only, and off-the-record, which allowed for honest and provocative conversations without any fear of retribution. All speakers were given one edict: if you can read it in the morning paper, there is no point in saying it here.

The Salon Series ran for two years, from 2018 to 2020, and included conversations about how issues like terrorist financing, the cycle of endless small wars, intra-religious schisms, and persistent despair under repressive regimes were affecting global prosperity. We examined regions including Southeast Asia, the Persian Gulf states, the Levant, South and Central Asia, and Europe to ensure we were providing a set of dialogues that reflected perspectives and challenges from around the globe.

While COVID-19 affected our ability to host the last three scheduled Salon Series events in 2020, which were planned to occur in North Africa, Europe, and Southeast Asia, The Soufan Center hopes to continue a similar project to include considerations of emerging threats and security challenges as countries continue to grapple with the fallout of the global pandemic, new and evolving terrorist threats, and increased great-power competition.

IN THE NEWS

The Soufan Center shares its knowledge and expertise with national and international news outlets from across the world. In 2020, TSC's research, commentary, products, and experts were featured in premier news and media outlets, including *the New York Times*, *the Washington Post*, *the Wall Street Journal*, *the New Yorker*, *CNN*, *MSNBC*, *Bloomberg*, *BBC*, *Fox News*, *Voice of America*, *Defense One*, *NPR*, *The Guardian*, and *Al Jazeera*, among many outlets. Prominent topics with media were international terrorism, domestic violent extremism and the rise of violent white supremacy extremism in America, great power politics, COVID-19 and extremism online, disinformation and conspiracy theories, and America's leadership role in the world. TSC's research, products, and experts were mentioned over 1250 times in media mentions, in over 81 countries around the world.



Colin P. Clarke on Bloomberg TV.



Jason Blazakis on CBS News.



OPINION PIECES AND COMMENTARY

TSC's experts authored over 90 opinion and commentary pieces in major national and international newspapers, magazines, and policy publications. Our experts contributed pieces to the *New York Times*, *the Washington Post*, *Defense One*, *Foreign Affairs*, *Foreign Policy*, *the Los Angeles Times*, *The Guardian*, and *Newsweek*, among many others.



Ali Soufan with Christiane Amanpour, CNN



China's Rights Abuses in Xinjiang Could Provoke a Global Terrorist Backlash

Washington Should Help Beijing Fight Extremism Without Resorting to Repression

Mollie Saltzkoog and Colin P. Clarke

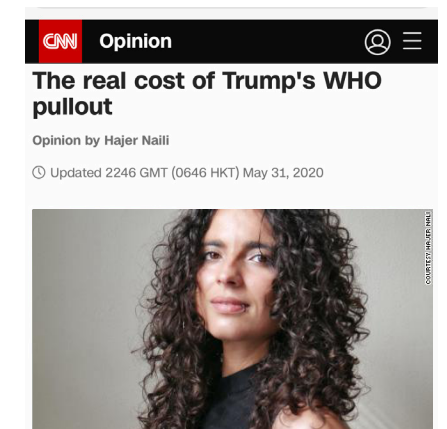


Washington Post Opinions @PostOpinions - Jun 7, 2020

I'm a cop. I won't fight a "war" on crime the way I fought the war on terror, writes @Sakmepm in @PostEverything

Perspective | I'm a cop. I won't fight a "war" on crime the way I fought the war on terror, writes @Sakmepm in @PostEverything. It's not how to police people I consider my neighbors. It's not how to police...

Washington Post



Trump halts funding to World Health Organization 02:03

IN THE NEWS

FILM AND TELEVISION

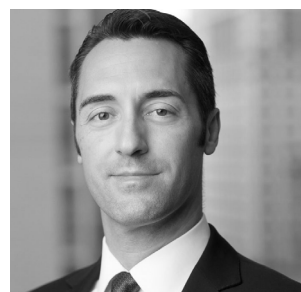
TSC experts were featured in three documentary films in 2020. Ali Soufan appeared in *Showtime's* *Kingdom of Silence*, directed by Emmy-winning filmmaker Rick Rowley and executive-produced by Alex Gibney in collaboration with Lawrence Wright. The film provided an in-depth look at *Washington Post* journalist Jamal Khashoggi's life, work, and murder – and the increasingly complex relationship between the United States and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Ali Soufan also appeared in *Bin Laden's Hard Drive*, a documentary by *National Geographic* and *New York Times* best-selling author and *CNN* National Security Analyst Peter Bergen. The film looked at the al-Qaeda founder's life through an in-depth examination of newly declassified hard drives taken from the compound where he was killed. Mollie Saltskog, Research Fellow at The Soufan Center, appeared in an episode of *VICE's* *Fringe Nation*, chronicling the spread of the growing American neo-Nazi movement in America.



THE SOUFAN CENTER BOARD OF DIRECTORS



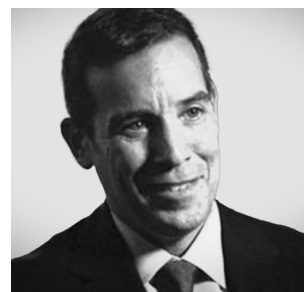
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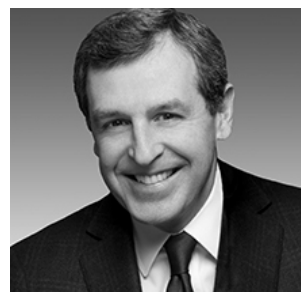
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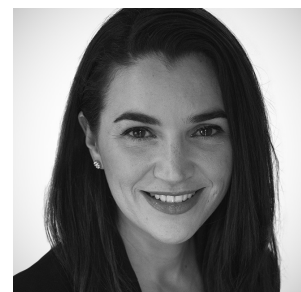
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