

# ANNUAL REPORT 2025

The Soufan Center is an independent nonprofit organization based in New York City. Our mission is to provide cutting-edge research, analysis, and strategies to anticipate and counter the world's most urgent security challenges.

The Soufan Center is a 501c3 non-profit organization

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ANNUAL  
REPORT  
2025

# LETTER FROM THE FOUNDER

Ali Soufan

TSC Founder



In 2025, The Soufan Center continued to inform, inspire, and make a tangible impact on the field of global security. Through rigorous, independent research and trusted analysis, we closely monitored emerging threats and complex conflicts worldwide. By translating knowledge into deeper understanding, we highlighted the trends shaping today's security landscape. Most importantly, we transformed insight into action—helping to shape policy, inform the public, and advance solutions to some of the most urgent challenges facing states and communities around the globe.

As the year draws to a close, the international community continues to confront deep divisions and uncertainty. State actors are navigating an international order that is increasingly fragmented and volatile, while non-state actors play an expanding role in shaping global outcomes—operating as mercenaries in conflict zones, criminal networks controlling illicit markets, and technological disruptors in the online space. Protracted conflicts in Sudan and Ukraine persist, even as fragile ceasefires hold in Gaza, Thailand and Cambodia.

Throughout the year, the TSC team closely tracked these issues, producing daily intelbriefs, publishing in-depth research, and convening collaborative events to support dialogue and knowledge sharing. Our research publications began with an examination of how terrorist actors use sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) as a weapon of war. We explored the evolution of foreign fighter flows in Syria following the fall of the Bashar al-Assad regime. In response to President Donald Trump's pivot toward the Western Hemisphere, we published analysis on the challenges of military engagement against criminal cartels in Latin America. And we closed the year with research examining the complex relationship between media and hostage-taking in a contemporary context.

Across our 248 intelbriefs we provided our readership with a daily snapshot of global developments with significant geopolitical implications. Through these briefings, readers gained insight into the United States' shifting priorities within the international order, as well as the evolving geopolitical alignment among Russia, China, and Iran. We closely tracked the evolution of terrorist movements across the ideological spectrum, alongside trends in radicalization, online recruitment, and transnational networks. Our analysis also examined

domestic political pressures, including the strength of far-right parties in Europe, deepening polarization in the United States, and the strain these dynamics place on already fragile alliances. Across all regions, technological advances, climate-related challenges, and market disruptions continued to shape global stability and security.

We warmly welcomed over a thousand participants to our two flagship events this year. At the 2025 Global Security Forum (GSF), discussions focused on the growing impact of non-state actors on global security, highlighting the complex and protracted nature of contemporary threats, including the convergence of terrorist groups, criminal networks, and proxy actors. The forum also showcased the critical role of local, regional, and "middle power" actors in addressing challenges such as humanitarian assistance, conflict mediation, and countering radicalization, especially as multilateral institutions face gridlock. At the 2025 Global Summit on Terrorism and Political Violence (GSTPV), leaders from government, law enforcement, intelligence, academia, civil society, and victim advocacy came together to address rising terrorism threats, amplify the voices of survivors, and emphasize the need for sustained collaboration to confront evolving global security challenges.

As I reflect on 2025 and celebrate another year of progress, I recognize the dedication, expertise, and passion of the TSC staff and fellows, guided by our Board of Directors. We warmly welcomed Dr. Colin P. Clarke as our new Executive Director, as well as a host of new fellows this year: Adam Hadley, Nicolas Stockhammer, and Lucas Webber. The TSC team's commitment drives every research project, intelbrief, and media engagement, shaping the work that defines our mission. We are also deeply thankful to our readers, donors, and supporters—your trust and partnership continue to inspire and sustain our efforts to address the world's most pressing security challenges through knowledge, collaboration and dialogue.

With thanks and appreciation,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "A. Soufan". The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a professional style.

TSC Founder

# OUR STORY & VISION

**The Soufan Center is an independent nonprofit organization based in New York City. Our mission is to provide cutting-edge research, analysis, and strategies to anticipate and counter the world's most urgent security challenges.**

**At a time of increasing division and volatility worldwide, We stand as a trusted, forward-looking, non-partisan voice committed to advancing security that protects people as well as nations.**

## OUR STORY

### **The Soufan Center: Born of Necessity, Built on Independence**

TSC's trajectory underscores its reputation as a fearless, independent, and impactful voice—delivering foresight when others looked away.

The Center was born because too many critical issues were left unaddressed. In Washington, D.C. and beyond, prevailing interests often ignored hard truths, preferring the comfort of consensus to the urgency of reality. We refused to look away.

In today's polarized world, few voices dare to deliver unvarnished assessments of national security with unflinching independence—particularly when those assessments cut against dominant narratives.

Our founder built a legacy as a trusted, unflinching voice in national security. Carrying that forward, The Soufan Center was established to provide clear, fact-based analysis—even when it challenges governments, entrenched orthodoxy, or Beltway inertia.

**We do not follow the consensus. We set the agenda.**

## OUR MISSION

To deliver rigorous, independent research and actionable strategies that anticipate and confront the world's most urgent security challenges - detecting destabilizing trend lines before they harden into volatile and dangerous fault lines.



New York City seen from Brooklyn by Maciejbledowski



INFORM. INSPIRE. IMPACT.

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## 2025: Year in Review

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**2.5M+**

Page views on our website over the year

**2M+**

Our content generated over 2+ million impressions on social media

**1600+**

At our 2025 Global Security Forum, we hosted 1600+ in-person attendees and our event streams and recordings received 10K+ views.

**248**

Daily IntelBriefs

**650+**

At our 2025 Global Summit on Terrorism & Political Violence, we hosted 650+ in-person attendees and our event streams and recordings received 7000+ views.

**35**

Opinion and Commentary Pieces authored by Our Experts

**7,800+**

7,800+ Media mentions of our research, products, and experts

**4**

Research Publications

**6**

We managed 6 projects over the year.



# RESEARCH

In 2025, TSC continued to deliver original research on the foremost foreign policy and security challenges. Within the past year, our team published four research publications: a TSC Issue Brief on sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in Nigeria, a TSC Insight on the legacy and evolution of foreign fighters in Syria, a TSC Issue Brief on the prospects and perils of a U.S. military-led campaign in Venezuela, and a TSC Issue Brief on media and communications considerations in contemporary hostage-taking.

February  
2025

## A Roadmap to Criminal Justice Accountability for SGBV Linked to Terrorism

This Issue Brief authored by Senior Research Fellow Dr. Adejoké Babington-Ashaye, and generously sponsored by the Government of Malta, draws lessons from Nigeria's prosecution of SGBV in terrorism cases, underscoring the importance of integrating SGBV-specific prosecutorial guidelines and fostering international collaboration to ensure justice for survivors. Since the emergence of the prevalent perpetration of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) by terrorist actors as a weapon of warfare, few individuals or groups have faced accountability for their crimes. This Issue Brief examines why accountability for sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) committed by terrorist actors remains limited globally, despite widespread recognition of such abuses as a tactic of warfare and argues for survivor-centered, context-specific approaches, greater prosecutorial guidance, and sustained international support to strengthen accountability mechanisms and deter future abuses.



May  
2025

## The Legacy and Evolution of Foreign Fighters in Syria

This TSC Insight authored by Daniele Garofalo examines how the role of foreign fighters—an ongoing area of research at The Soufan Center—in Syria has evolved following the fall of the Bashar al-Assad regime, with many fighters transitioning from transnational jihadist networks into newly formed or reconstituted armed forces. The TSC Insight details a number of foreign fighter groups within Syria and explores how these shifts complicate post-conflict stabilization efforts, particularly as external actors—including the United States—seek to limit the long-term presence and influence of foreign combatants. Finally, the TSC Insight highlights the implications for future regional security and governance.



TSC INSIGHTS

### THE LEGACY AND EVOLUTION OF FOREIGN FIGHTERS IN SYRIA

By Daniele Garofalo

MAY 2025

Executive Summary

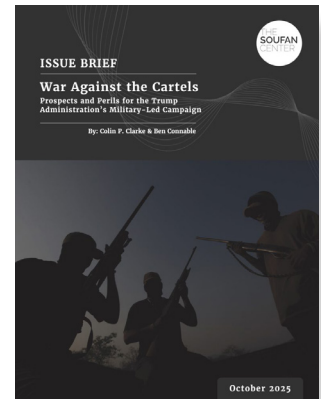
The fall of the Assad regime in December 2024, following the launch of the “Deter Aggression” campaign by Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) and allied opposition factions, marked a turning point in Syria’s conflict and the role of foreign fighters within it. As the war shifted, so too did the presence and influence of tactical units made up of foreign fighters—groups that have once played a critical role in reshaping modern military strategy in the region. Now, as the Trump administration announced following the president’s recent meeting with Syrian interim President Ahmad al-Shara in Saudi Arabia, as the U.S. is set to release sanctions on Syria, President Trump urged al-Shara to “call all foreign terrorists to leave Syria.” This step, however, if implemented, could potentially cause immense challenges for Syria for several reasons, not least of which is that some of these foreign fighters

<sup>1</sup> Marco V. 2025, “Syria’s New Chapter: Writing a New Chapter in U.S. Syria Relations,” Washington Institute for Near East Policy, May 21, 2025, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/syria-writes-new-chapter-in-us-ira-relations>.

October  
2025

## War Against the Cartels: Prospects and Perils for the Trump Administration's Military-Led Campaign

This Issue Brief co-authored by TSC Executive Director Dr. Colin P. Clarke and Dr. Ben Connable analyzes the United States' potential shift toward a military-led campaign against Mexican drug cartels and some gangs operating in Venezuela and across Latin America. The Issue Brief examines strategic options available to Washington, the implications of rebranding these groups as terrorist organizations, and potential second- and third-order consequences of military intervention. While acknowledging the serious threats these groups pose, the piece argues that a law-enforcement-led and partnership-based approach remains the most effective and sustainable path. Reflecting on the shift in America's approach to combating transnational organized crime, the Issue Brief theorizes potential approaches by the Trump administration and warns against potential consequences and concludes that while America's drug problem cannot be fully eradicated as long as domestic demand persists, decisive and principled action remains essential.



Cover Photo Credit Associated Press

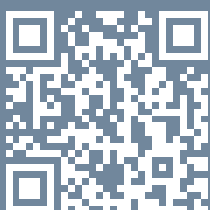
December  
2025

## Media and Communications Considerations in Contemporary Hostage-Taking: An Exploratory Analysis

This TSC Issue Brief co-authored by Sarah Moriarty Levinson and TSC Research Fellow Stephanie Foggett builds on important conversations held at recent TSC events, including the Global Security Forum and the Global Summit on Terrorism and Political Violence. This piece explores the complex relationship between media and hostage-taking today, drawing on literature from academia, policy, and advocacy. This Issue Brief sets out to offer hostage families and their advocates with a better understanding of the main considerations between hostage recovery and media engagement in a contemporary context, noting significant gaps in the literature. Specifically, the piece identifies the need for more research in the future that considers the perspective of the hostage, as well as the needs of hostage families advocating for their release.



Cover Photo Credit Associated Press



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# INTELBRIEF

The Soufan Center publishes hundreds of briefings each year, offering audiences a daily digest of a complex security or geopolitical topic shaping regional and international affairs. In 2025, TSC published 248 daily IntelBriefs, each focusing on a major theme, issue, or trend in global security and international affairs. Designed to be timely, accessible, and analytically rigorous, IntelBriefs translate fast-moving developments into clear, context-rich insights for policymakers, journalists, practitioners, and the broader public. Our IntelBriefs had an online readership of 2.5M+ page views in 2025, reinforcing TSC's role as a trusted source of independent security analysis. This year's IntelBriefs covered a vast range of topics, from developments in the United States, Israel, Palestine, Syria, China, Russia, Iran, Venezuela, sub-Saharan Africa, and Europe—to thematic issues such as global terrorism, domestic extremism, hybrid-warfare, artificial intelligence, the human dimensions of conflict, and global hostage-taking.

In the Middle East, IntelBriefs closely tracked the continuation and regional repercussions of the war in Gaza, including violence against Palestinian civilians, its impact on Israel's security posture, and broader regional stability. Our team examined how the conflict reshaped militant dynamics, intensified regional polarization, and influenced extremist narratives well beyond the immediate theater. IntelBriefs also assessed the implications of sustained tensions involving Iran and its network of regional partners and proxies, particularly as escalation risks increased across multiple fronts. Syria also remained a focus of our IntelBriefs throughout the year, with coverage examining the legacy of prolonged conflict, the emergence of the new government, and the implications of shifting international engagement.

IntelBriefs on Russia and Ukraine analyzed the persistence of the war in Europe and its broader security implications, including the normalization of hybrid warfare tactics such as cyber operations, sabotage, and information manipulation. Coverage explored how Russia's approach to the conflict influenced the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and European security planning, while also shaping Moscow's engagement with non-Western partners. Related IntelBriefs examined how lessons from the war are informing military doctrine and security thinking globally.

China featured prominently in 2025 IntelBriefs, particularly in relation to strategic competition, technology, and global influence. Analysis addressed Beijing's expanding role in international affairs, including its use of economic leverage,

technological development, and diplomatic engagement to advance strategic objectives. IntelBriefs also examined how China's growing global footprint intersects with security concerns in regions far beyond East Asia. Other Asia-focused coverage included tensions between Cambodia and Thailand, as well as the ongoing civil war in Myanmar, highlighting the security, humanitarian, and regional implications of prolonged instability in Southeast Asia.

Sub-Saharan Africa remained a critical area of focus, with IntelBriefs covering the continued expansion and adaptation of jihadist groups across the Sahel and other regions. These briefings examined how extremist organizations exploit weak governance, military overstretch, and local social, political, and economic grievances, while also assessing the impact of international drawdowns and the growing involvement of external actors. IntelBriefs highlighted the long-term risks posed by persistent instability.

IntelBriefs also examined the ongoing political and security developments in Venezuela and the broader region, focusing on instability, migration pressures, and the growing influence of transnational criminal organizations. IntelBriefs also addressed U.S. policy debates surrounding organized crime and cartel violence, situating them within wider discussions about militarization, law enforcement cooperation, and regional sovereignty.

Thematically, IntelBriefs in 2025 addressed the ongoing challenge of domestic extremism, political polarization, and the weaponization of information. Our team explored how lone actors and small networks continue to pose threats, often radicalized through online ecosystems that amplify conspiracy theories, extremist narratives, and foreign disinformation. Another topic of great focus in 2025 included hybrid-warfare, particularly from Russia towards Europe, with sabotage of critical infrastructure, cyber intrusions, and influence operations targeting democratic institutions. Emerging technologies were another recurring theme, particularly the growing use of artificial intelligence and its security implications. IntelBriefs assessed how AI is being integrated into military planning while also examining how extremist groups and criminal actors exploit digital tools for propaganda, recruitment, and fundraising. IntelBriefs also addressed the human dimensions of conflict, exploring the humanitarian impacts of conflict particularly in Gaza and Sudan, which represented the most severe humanitarian crises in 2025.

# Our top 5 most read IntelBriefs in 2025

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01

**Al-Shabaab's 2025 Offensive and the Unraveling of Somalia's Federal Counterinsurgency**



02

**China Strategically Infiltrates U.S. Critical Infrastructure as Cyberattacks Escalate**



03

**Between Islamic State and Al-Shabaab: An Embattled Mogadishu?**



04

**Israel's Strike on Qatar: A Blow to Regional Mediation and Diplomacy**



05

**Netanyahu Under Pressure from All Sides to Change Course on Gaza**

# PROJECTS

In addition to our publications and IntelBriefs, The Soufan Center oversees a portfolio of specialized projects that directly support our core research mission. These initiatives focus on anticipating emerging threat trend lines, strengthening transparency and accountability, and generating practical, policy-relevant strategies. Below are highlights from our initiatives in 2025.

## The September 10th Project

The Soufan Center's September 10th Project offers vital tools, information, and analysis to address what the 9/11 Commission identified as a "failure of imagination" that led to the tragic events on September 11, 2001. The project includes threat reports, briefs, and events hosted by leading counterterrorism experts, such as the annual Global Summit on Terrorism and Political Violence (GSTPV) in New York City. The United States cannot afford to be caught off guard again by terrorism, and the September 10th Project offers to better understand future threats and responses.

## Accountability for Sexual and Gender-Based Violence by Terrorist Actors

Sponsored by the Permanent Mission of Malta to the United Nations

The Soufan Center, with the support of the Permanent Mission of Malta to the United Nations, undertook a project to guide UN member states and the international community toward tangible progress regarding accountability and justice for sexual and gender-based (SGBV) crimes in the context of terrorism. The aim of the project was to map practical avenues for member states and UN entities to further criminal prosecutions, sanctions, blacklisting, and other related accountability mechanisms for SGBV crimes linked to terrorism. The initiative resulted in a research paper released in February 2024, as well as a TSC webinar titled Community Needs and External Justice Actors: A Roadmap to Accountability. The webinar was moderated by former TSC Research Analyst Michaela Millender and featured the author, TSC Research Fellow Dr. Adejoké Babington-Ashaye. Additional participants included Ms. Tina Alai, Dr. Oluwale Ojewale, and Dr. Jason Warner.

Under the auspices of this project, in June 2023, ahead of the Eighth Review of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, TSC co-hosted a webinar with the UK's Mission to the United

Nations to highlight justice mechanisms and map relevant prosecutions. Earlier efforts include a December 2022 research brief on Nigeria's response to SGBV under United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions and a June 2021 brief on accountability for the Islamic State's genocidal acts against Yazidis in Iraq.

## Below the Threshold: Russia's Hybrid Campaign Against Europe 2022-2025

Sponsored by the Airey Neave Trust

The Soufan Center, with the support of the Airey Neave Trust, undertook a project in 2025 to examine Russian hybrid tactics in Europe from the onset of the Ukraine invasion in February 2022 to December 2025. These tactics, which include disinformation campaigns, political manipulation, cyberattacks, and influence operations, represent a key component of Russia's approach to achieving its geopolitical objectives without direct military confrontation. Through the evaluation of six case studies — the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Estonia, Moldova, and Georgia — the project uncovers the broader patterns of Russian hybrid activity, assesses its implications for European security, and provides actionable insights for policymakers.

## Violent Far-Right Extremism Outlook

The Soufan Center's work on violent far-right extremism offers research and analysis on narratives and propaganda, including antisemitism and Islamophobia, current trends within various aspects of the transnational movement, tools the counter their activities, and global security implications. This outlook brings together a wide range of resources in one easily accessible place, including research publications, highlights from past events such as the Global Summit on Terrorism and Political Violence, infographics, and related IntelBriefs.

## Violent Non-State Actor (VNSA) Snapshots

The Soufan Center's Violent Non-State Actor (VNSA) Snapshots provide concise summaries of select non-state actors and their organizations worldwide. Each snapshot highlights critical information, including the group's background, leadership, objectives, tactics, and threat level, offering a succinct understanding of each entity. These briefs are intended for policymakers, researchers, journalists, and others seeking a reliable, quick-reference resource. Additionally, researchers are able to navigate our VNSA hub to find related research, IntelBriefs, infographics, and more.

## Global Elections Outlook

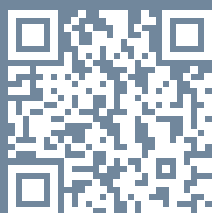
The Soufan Center's Global Elections Outlook provides timely analysis on a range of elections taking place throughout the world. In 2025 TSC released outlooks on the Bolivian, German, and Ecuadorian elections. TSC's Global Elections Outlook provides policy makers, practitioners, and researchers with information about these elections and the potential security and foreign policy implications for different outcomes. At our Global Elections hub, researchers are also able to view relevant research, IntelBriefs, and infographics.



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Airey  
Neave  
Trust



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# GLOBAL SECURITY FORUM

The 2025 Global Security Forum (GSF) took place from April 28–30, 2025, in Doha, Qatar. The seventh annual gathering brought together more than one thousand participants under the theme ‘The Impact of Non-State Actors on Global Security.’ This pivotal theme explored the evolving roles and influences of non-state actors—ranging from private military contractors and transnational terrorist groups to organized criminal networks and violent extremist organizations—on the global security landscape. The 2025 forum welcomed partnerships with Arizona State University, Defense One, New America, the United Nations Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED), and The Soufan Group.

Key speakers this year included Qatar Prime Minister H.E. Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani, the ICRC’s Director General Mr. Pierre Krähenbühl, Syrian Minister for Emergency Situations H.E. Raed Al-Saleh, Singapore Minister of Home Affairs H.E. Dr. Tito Karnavian, Qatar Minister of State H.E. Dr. Mohammed bin Abdulaziz Al-Khulaifi, and Sudan Minister of Finance H.E. Dr. Gibril Ibrahim. Participants also heard national perspectives from representatives from Armenia, Finland, Greece, Indonesia, Iraq, Qatar, Malaysia, Moldova, Nigeria, South Africa, Sudan, Syria, the United Kingdom, and the United States—as well as from speakers from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), INTERPOL, and the United Nations.

Joining from all over the world both in-person and online, participants enjoyed high-level remarks, fireside chats, and panel discussions—as well as a series of side events, including a film screening, state roundtable, table-top exercise, and workshops. The key points raised across the myriad discussions presented a global security environment that is increasingly complex, interconnected, and protracted, requiring states and practitioners to adapt to evolving threats driven by the convergence of terrorist groups, criminal networks, proxy actors, and emerging technologies. Terrorist and criminal actors continue to exploit governance gaps, societal tensions, and ongoing conflicts for recruitment and financing. Entrenched conflicts and overlapping humanitarian crises—from Sudan and Gaza to Ukraine and Myanmar—are marked by widespread violations of international humanitarian law, deepening civilian suffering, and eroding accountability.



H.E. Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani delivers the opening remarks at the 2025 Global Security Forum

These dynamics underscore the need for renewed commitment to humanitarian principles, protection of civilians, and long-term approaches that move beyond short-term crisis response toward sustained engagement and multilateral cooperation. Amid persistent gridlock in formal institutions, local, regional, and “middle power” actors are increasingly at the forefront of humanitarian assistance, mediation, and counter-radicalization efforts. At the same time, rapid technological change is enabling grey-zone activities that blur attribution and undermine public trust, highlighting the need for stronger cooperation among states, international bodies, and the technology sector, as well as the development of new skills, partnerships, and applied learning models to address enduring security challenges.

We offered the following key findings following this year’s gathering: 1) States and practitioners must adapt to evolving security challenges, with a confluence of actors – including terrorists, criminal groups, and proxy elements – creating a complex threat environment. 2) Amidst protracted conflicts, concurrent humanitarian crises, and increasing violations of international humanitarian law, states need to reaffirm their commitment to the rules of war and human rights. 3) States and practitioners must re-think notions of temporality away from crisis response to long-term engagement. 4) Local and regional actors, as well as “middle powers,” are increasingly at the forefront of addressing today’s geopolitical challenges. 5) Advanced technologies complicate an already complex security landscape as states struggle to regulate the sector. 6) States and practitioners must develop new skills and models for long-term response, incorporating creativity and applied learning.

The 2025 Global Security Forum also hosted over a dozen side events alongside the mainstage programming offered at this year’s gathering. Side events included a film screening, roundtables, interactive exercises, panel discussions, as well as reception and dinner events for this year’s participants. Our extensive programming this year also brought together journalists from around the world. We featured moderators from leading international media outlets, including MSNBC’s Richard Engel, The National Interest’s Steve Clemons, Defense One’s Patrick Tucker, the BBC’s Nawal Al-Maghafi, and France 24’s Wassim Nasr. GSF also continued its valued media partnership with Defense One. Forum discussions received international coverage from outlets such as AFP, Al Jazeera, Defense One, and Middle East Eye, while Qatari national media provided extensive reporting in both Arabic and English.

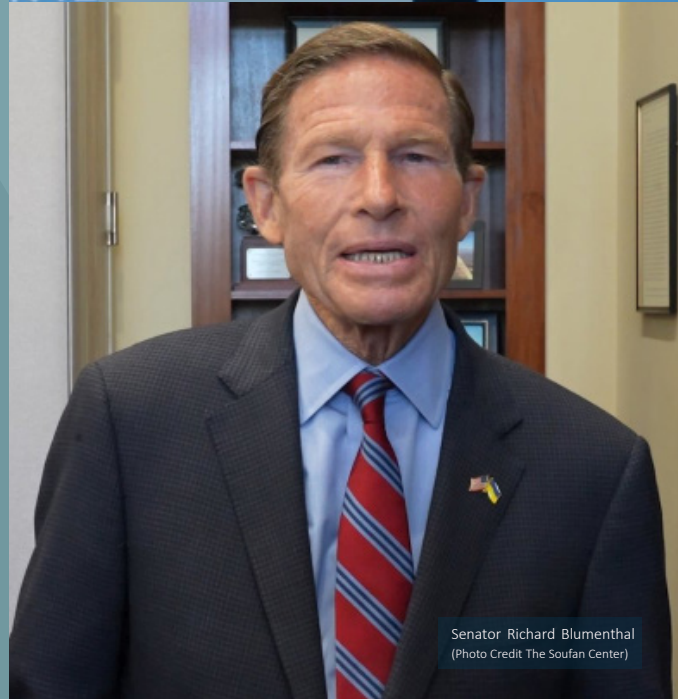
# GLOBAL SUMMIT ON TERRORISM & POLITICAL VIOLENCE

The 2025 Global Summit on Terrorism and Political Violence (GSTPV), convened by The Soufan Center as part of its September 10th Project, brought together over 650 attendees from senior government officials, security professionals, leading scholars, journalists, and survivors of terrorism for two days of focused discussion on the evolving threat of terrorism and political violence. Held in New York City on September 9-10, the Summit served as a platform for examining how terrorist actors, extremist ideologies, and political violence continue to adapt amid geopolitical instability, technological change, and social polarization. The Summit addressed a range of topics such as the evolving nature of the terrorist threat landscape, the weaponization of technology and artificial intelligence, the October 7 attacks and its ripple effects in the region, victims of terrorism, domestic terrorism, and more.

The Summit opened with high-level reflections on the current threat environment and the enduring lessons of counterterrorism practice from New York City Fire Commissioner Mr. Robert S. Tucker on the essential role the New York Police Department (NYPD) played in 9/11 and how it transformed emergency response in New York City. A number of other practitioners in the field reflected on the lessons learned and necessary actions to pursue to continue countering terrorist threats. Mr. Greg Ehrie, a senior voice from the Port Authority underscored lessons learned in counterterrorism and infrastructure protection; NYPD Deputy Commissioner Ms. Rebecca Weiner outlined how intelligence operations remain the city's first line of defense; and FBI officials Mr. Robert Kissane and Mr. Tom McCarney detailed an investigation into a suicide bombing attack in Kenya that eventually led them to the Philippines where they uncovered an al-Qaeda aviation plot similar to 9/11.



Mr. Greg Ehrie  
(Photo Credit The Soufan Center)



Senator Richard Blumenthal  
(Photo Credit The Soufan Center)



Mr. Carl and Mrs. Marsha Mueller  
(Photo Credit The Soufan Center)



From left to right: Mr. Peter Bergen Mr. Brian Michael Jenkins Dr. Bruce Hoffman, Dame Louise Richardson



Mr. Edan Alexander & Family



Deputy Commissioner Rebecca Weiner (Photo Credit The Soufan Center)

Ambassador Nathan Sales, Former Ambassador-at-Large and Coordinator for Counterterrorism at the U.S. Department of State and Mr. Christopher C. Miller, Former Acting Secretary of Defense discussed leadership perspectives on the terrorism landscape and counterterrorism strategies and policies to counter the threat. Additionally, General (Ret.) Austin S. Miller discussed the changing character of warfare and the convergence of terrorism, insurgency, and state-sponsored violence. Drawing on decades of operational experience, he highlighted the strategic consequences of prolonged conflict and the importance of adapting counterterrorism strategies to a multipolar and contested global environment. Colonel (Ret.) Christopher Costa further explored these themes, examining the intersection of intelligence, irregular warfare, and political violence, and emphasizing the need for strategic clarity in an era defined by hybrid threats.

Also featured was Mr. Edan Alexander, who was freed in 2025 after 19 months as a hostage in Hamas captivity. He thanked the U.S. officials who worked so hard to bring him home. Other speakers amplified the human impact of terrorism throughout the two days such as Mr. John O’Neill, Jr., remembering his father, the FBI counterterrorism chief killed on 9/11, Mr. Ahmad Massoud, recalling his father’s assassination by al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, a precursor to 9/11, Mr. Travis Frain, survivor of the Westminster Bridge attack in London, Mr. Joseph Spindler, whose son survived 9/11 but was later killed in al-Shabaab’s DusitD2 attack in Kenya, Mr. Carl and Mrs. Marsha Mueller, whose daughter Kayla was murdered by ISIS, and Mr. Joseph Connor, whose father was killed by the Armed Forces of National Liberation (FALN) in the 1975 bombing of Fraunces Tavern in New York. Additionally, Senator Richard Blumenthal, Mr. Brett Eagleson, President of 9/11 Justice, and Mr. Gavin Simpson, Plaintiffs’ Counsel in 9/11 litigation (S.D.N.Y.) at Kreindler & Kreindler, spoke on the recent developments in the lawsuit claiming Saudi Arabia’s involvement in the planning and execution of 9/11.

# POLICY ENGAGEMENT: UNITED STATES



TSC Board Member Colonel (Ret.) Christopher P. Costa (left), TSC Executive Director Colin P. Clarke (right) (Image from International Spy Museum YouTube)



TSC Executive Director Colin P. Clarke (Photo courtesy of Colin P. Clarke)

Domestic policy engagement is a central element of The Soufan Center's effort to ensure that independent, high-quality research informs the stakeholders responsible for shaping U.S. security policy and strategy. Over the course of 2025, TSC fellows and analysts shared expertise with U.S. policy makers and with fellow think-tanks and research institutes, participating in a wide range of in-person roundtables, public lectures, and expert webinars designed to strengthen understanding of terrorism trends and confront emerging geopolitical challenges impacting the United States.

A core theme of this year's domestic engagement was the persistence and transformation of international terrorism and the need for steady, proportionate counterterrorism policies at home. TSC speakers worked with national think tanks, research institutes, and regional communities to explain how groups such as ISIS and al-Qaeda continue to evolve financially and operationally. Executive Director Dr. Colin P. Clarke addressed these issues directly in an event hosted by the World Affairs Council of Greater Reading. His presentation examined ISIS financing networks, illicit revenue streams, and the future of extremist movements worldwide. Dr. Clarke highlighted that terrorist organizations must be understood as adaptive systems that exploit criminal networks, new technologies, and geopolitical grievances.



Senior Fellow Nathan Sales (Image from The Soufan Center)

This focus on the future of terrorism was reinforced through a series of other events. Dr. Clarke joined an interactive “Spy Chat” discussion at the International Spy Museum in Washington, D.C., moderated by TSC Board Member, Christopher P. Costa. The event explored trends in international terrorism, contemporary geopolitics, and the use of mercenary and paramilitary groups. Dr. Clarke returned to similar questions in the webinar “Combating Terrorism: Review of 2024 and Future Outlook,” hosted by the International Center for Terrorism Studies at the Potomac Institute for Policy Studies. That session connected global state and non-state terrorism with the expanding challenge of domestic extremism in the United States.

Dr. Clarke also participated as a speaker in a Council on Foreign Relations roundtable titled “Jihadism and Geopolitics: Horn of Africa and Beyond.” Hosted in Washington, D.C. as part of CFR’s Roundtable Series on Africa in a Changing Global Order, the session brought together scholars and practitioners to examine how regional conflicts, governance deficits, and great-power competition create operating space for violent nonstate actors such as al-Qaeda affiliate al-Shabaab. Dr. Clarke’s contribution focused on the strategic implications of these dynamics for the United States, emphasizing that effective counterterrorism policy in the Horn of Africa must be integrated with broader diplomatic and development priorities.

Focusing on non-state groups, as well as other nations’ strategy towards countering (or bolstering) Russia’s growing reliance on paramilitary instruments of power constituted another important aspect of TSC’s domestic engagement in 2025. Dr. Clarke joined the International Spy Museum in Washington for a discussion titled “The Wagner Group: Russia’s Shadow Army.” The event explored the rise and fall of former Wagner leader Yevgeny Prigozhin, the group’s impact on conflicts from Africa to Eastern Europe, and what its trajectory signals about the future of outsourced warfare. Dr. Clarke highlighted how Wagner has operated as a shadow instrument of Russian statecraft—reshaping battlefields, exploiting weak governance environments, and complicating traditional accountability frameworks.

Dr. Kenneth Katzman’s participation in the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations webinar further represented TSC outreach focused on the Middle East. The event, “An Assessment of President Trump’s Visit to the Gulf and the Future of U.S.-Arab Relations,” examined President Trump’s travel to Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates and what it signals for U.S.-Gulf partnerships. Dr. Katzman discussed the strategic objectives behind the visit, energy diplomacy, defense cooperation, and possible regional realignments.

Another theme that appeared in TSC’s domestic engagement in 2025 involved the intersection of armed conflict, human rights, and the imperative of accountability. TSC continued to engage domestic stakeholders on how justice mechanisms can be strengthened in cases of conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence. Drawing on our project on accountability mechanisms for SGBV linked to terrorism, TSC participated in forums aimed specifically at strengthening prosecutions and sanctions tools. This effort culminated in a high-profile virtual presence at the 2025 Global Parliamentary Conference on Counter-Terrorism and the Prevention of Violent Extremism in Istanbul.

Debates over transnational organized crime and border security also featured prominently in TSC’s domestic engagement in 2025. Dr. Clarke joined a Defense Priorities webinar titled “A new war next door? The case against U.S. military strikes in Mexico.” The discussion examined proposals by some U.S. policymakers to employ U.S. military force against cartel violence, including airstrikes on cartel infrastructure and cross-border special operations. Dr. Clarke cautioned that framing organized crime as a conventional military target risks escalation and unintended consequences, arguing instead for approaches grounded in law enforcement cooperation, governance reform, and targeted counter-criminal tools. TSC released a subsequent publication ‘War Against the Cartels: Prospects and Perils for the Trump Administration’s Military-Led Campaign,’ co-authored by Dr. Clarke and Dr. Ben Connable.



Senior Fellow Lyla Kohistany (Photo by The Soufan Center)

# POLICY ENGAGEMENT: GLOBAL



TSC Senior Research Fellow Susan Sim (front row, second from the right) (Photo courtesy of NATO Centre of Excellence Defence Against Terrorism COE-DAT)



TSC Executive Director Colin P. Clarke (Photo courtesy of The Soufan Center)

This year, our experts continued to deliver briefings and remarks to a wide range of governments and international counterparts around the world. Executive Director Dr. Colin P. Clarke and Senior Research Fellow Dr. Adejoké Babington-Ashaye delivered presentations at the Global Parliamentary Conference on Counter-Terrorism hosted by the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT) in Istanbul, Türkiye. Dr. Clarke delivered a keynote address on “The Challenges of Prosecuting, Rehabilitating, and Reintegrating Foreign Terrorist Fighters,” while Dr. Babington-Ashaye delivered a keynote address examining the principal legal and policy dilemmas of counterterrorism in the context of armed conflict. Together, these presentations ensured that TSC’s independent analysis on justice mechanisms reached parliamentarians, UN officials, and practitioners working directly on accountability for terrorism-linked SGBV crimes. Research Fellow Clara Broekaert delivered the keynote address at the Terrorist Travel Working Group meeting of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, focusing on the misuse of artificial intelligence by terrorist actors.

Our experts also engaged extensively with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) community. Dr. Clarke briefed the 2025 NATO Parliamentary Assembly, addressing more than 300 voting delegates from member parliaments on global terrorism trends and the evolving threat landscape. Senior Research Fellow Susan Sim delivered lectures for the Defense Against Suicide Attacks course at the NATO–Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) Regional Centre in Kuwait City. The course was organized by NATO’s Centre of Excellence Defence Against Terrorism (COE-DAT) and focused on strengthening practical counterterrorism capabilities.

Our team also provided briefings and remarks at a wide range of government meetings and official events. Dr. Clarke delivered a presentation at a meeting of the Aqaba Process, co-hosted by the Kingdom of Jordan and the United Kingdom’s Ministry of Defence in London, focusing on disrupting terrorist activity through the use of generative artificial intelligence. Dr. Clarke also briefed an event in Banff, Canada, hosted by the Alberta Association of Chiefs of Police in partnership with the Organization for the Prevention of Violence, where he addressed strategies for strengthening public safety responses to hate crimes and violent extremism. In addition, Senior Research Fellow Wassim Nasr testified before the French Senate’s Foreign Affairs, Defense, and Armed Forces Committee, offering expert insight on Syria’s trajectory following the fall of Bashar al-Assad.

Over the year, TSC continued to expand its body of work on hostage policy. TSC submitted input to a report by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on torture for the Human Rights Council on ‘Torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment: hostage-taking as torture.’ In the submission, it was especially noted that “Families should be treated as trusted partners working alongside their governments, not as entities to be managed at a distance by their own governments.” Our team also submitted a questionnaire for civil society organizations for the ‘Report of the independent international panel on arbitrary detention in state-to-state relations’ submitted to Global Affairs Canada in 2025. At the close of the year, TSC published a new report on ‘Media and Communications Considerations in Contemporary Hostage-Taking: An Exploratory Analysis,’ authored by TSC Research Fellow Stephanie Foggett and Sarah (Levinson) Moriarty and which built on conversations held at both the Global Security Forum and the Global Summit on Terrorism and Political Violence.

Our team continued to engage with think-tanks and research institutes across a wide range of security issues. Dr. Clarke and Research Fellow Clara Broekaert participated as speakers at the Budapest Conference on Terrorism, co-hosted by the Mathias Corvinus Collegium (MCC) Migration Research Institute and the University of St Andrews’ Handa Centre for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence, where they examined the analytical gap between political violence and organized crime studies. Dr. Clarke additionally spoke at an event organized by the UK’s Henry Jackson Society on the threat posed by Iranian sleeper cells and took part in a seminar on global security challenges hosted by India’s Orion Policy Institute. Senior Research Fellow Dr. Julie Chernow Hwang delivered a presentation to the Australia-based AVERT Network on post-Jemaah Islamiyah trajectories following the group’s disbanding, while Visiting Fellow Jessica Davis briefed the Global Network on Extremism and Technology (GNET) on emerging trends in terrorist financing and the use of technology.



TSC Senior Research Fellow Adejoké Babington-Ashaye  
(Photo by The Soufafi Center)



TSC Senior Research Fellow Wassim Nasr  
(Image from the Website of the French Senate)



TSC Research Analyst Clara Broekaert

# ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT

In 2025, through publications, lectures, roundtables, and university-hosted forums, TSC experts contributed to conversations that bridge rigorous research with professional practice. These engagements reflect our commitment to sharing independent analysis with the next generation of scholars and with academic communities examining the real-world application of strategy and global security.

TSC experts shared research findings directly with graduate-school audiences. Executive Director Dr. Colin P. Clarke participated in a book talk hosted by the Matthew B. Ridgway Center at the University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public and International Affairs. The event highlighted findings from his co-authored book *The Mediterranean Connection: Criminal Networks and Illicit Economies in North Africa*. Speaking in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Dr. Clarke discussed the structure of illicit economies, smuggling routes, and criminal networks that operate across the Mediterranean region. The interactive session allowed graduate students and faculty to engage directly on how organized crime intersects with terrorism and regional instability.

Dr. Clarke and Board Member Christopher P. Costa joined George Mason University and Homeland Security Today for the First Annual Counterterrorism Summit in Arlington, Virginia. The Summit brought together scholars, technologists, and security practitioners to examine evolving tactics used by terrorist organizations. Dr. Clarke participated in a panel dedicated to assessing trends in the activities of al-Qaeda and ISIS, while Mr. Costa addressed how extremist groups exploit financial systems and the cyber domain. These discussions

reinforced the importance of integrating academic research with the practical needs of homeland-security professionals and highlighted how terrorist threats continue to evolve.

Dr. Clarke also engaged with academic communities on the global future of ISIS. He delivered a lecture at the University of Calgary on the group which provided Canadian students and faculty with an in-depth assessment of ISIS affiliates across the Sahel, Syria, and Afghanistan, emphasizing concerns surrounding ISIS-K's persistent focus on external operations. Similarly, Senior Research Fellow Dr. Julie Chernov Hwang participated in the Indo-Pacific Roundtable 2025 hosted by the University of Cambridge Centre for Geopolitics. Held in

Cambridge, United Kingdom, the three-day forum convened academics, think-tank experts, and policy practitioners for focused discussions on a blend of economic and security issues affecting Southeast Asia and the wider Indo-Pacific region. Dr. Chernov Hwang spoke on the panel "Relationships between Domestic Politics and International Relations," exploring strategies for integrating internal political dynamics with regional terrorism and security concerns.

TSC's academic engagement in 2025 also emphasized mentorship and professional development. Former TSC Research Analyst Michaela Millender participated in NYU's Center for Global Affairs program "Career Launchpad: From Global Studies to Global Impact." Speaking in New York, she engaged directly with students to discuss pathways to careers in global affairs and security. By the same token, the very same program recognized TSC experts for their contributions to professional excellence. New York University honored Executive Director Dr. Colin P. Clarke as a 2025 inductee into the NYU School of Professional Studies Hall of Fame. Dr. Clarke, an alumnus of NYU's MS in Global Affairs program, was acknowledged for his outstanding achievements as Executive Director of The Soufan Center and for the unique perspectives he brings to the national-security field, as well as his, and The Soufan Center's mentorship of young professionals and students in the security field.

Another important element of this year's academic engagement involved contributions to major reference volumes that examine intelligence and strategy in contemporary contexts. Research Fellow Clara Broekaert co-authored a chapter titled "The Intelligence Cycle in the Digital Age" for the Research Handbook on Intelligence and International Law, part of the Research Handbooks in International Law series published by Edward Elgar. The handbook brings together expert scholars and practitioners to assess how international law applies to the work of the intelligence community. Ms. Broekaert's chapter contributes to this broader effort to understand how traditional analytic processes function amid digital transformation. The handbook explores core principles such as sovereignty, state responsibility, non-intervention, and the non-use of force, while also addressing specialized legal regimes including outer space law, international human rights law, international humanitarian law, and privileges and immunities.

Similarly, Dr. Clarke contributed a chapter to Volume II of *The Cambridge History of Strategy*, published by Cambridge University Press. This multi-author volume focuses on the practice of strategy from 1800 to the present day, examining how leaders of states, empires, and non-state groups—including guerrilla forces, rebels, and terrorist organizations—attempt to implement strategy in the modern period. The publication emphasizes the actual “doing” of strategy against proactive opponents and responding actors. As the volume argues, strategy is often less a stylized or fully premeditated enterprise than a product of circumstance, opportunity, and ad hoc decision-making.

TSC Senior Research Fellow Susan Sim published a new book: *The Albatross File: Inside Separation*. Ms. Sim edited the new book which recounts the series of events that led to Singapore’s independence from Malaysia. Published by The Straits Times Press, the book examines how Singapore gained its independence in 1965.



TSC Executive Director Colin P. Clarke (Photo courtesy of Colin P. Clarke)



TSC Executive Director Colin P. Clarke (left) (Photo courtesy of Colin P. Clarke)



TSC Senior Research Fellow Julie Chernov Hwang (Photo courtesy of The Soufan Center)

# IN THE NEWS

Throughout 2025, The Soufan Center maintained an active presence across national and international media. Our experts contributed informed analysis, commentary, and insights on issues spanning geopolitics, global terrorism, international security, human rights, and emerging technologies. Our experts were featured by a range of news and media organizations including the New York Times, the Washington Post, NPR, the Los Angeles Times, BBC News, the Guardian, AP, Bloomberg, AFP, Al Jazeera English, and Reuters.

In 2025, TSC experts conducted hundreds of media interviews, reaching a global audience of millions. Our experts also engaged international audiences through our dedicated social media platforms, where TSC content generated millions of impressions over the year.

TSC's research initiatives, events, and subject-matter experts were referenced in more than 7,800 media items across print, digital, and broadcast outlets. Media organizations worldwide featured TSC analysis, including outlets based in the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Qatar, India, the United Arab Emirates, Canada, Germany, Australia, Saudi Arabia, and Italy.

TSC's experts offered live television and video interviews to a range of national and international media outlets and are featured regularly by outlets including MS NOW, CNN, Al Jazeera English, France24, and BBC News, among others. Our experts offered insights on breaking news developments, as well as providing commentary on investigations and other news stories. TSC's experts spoke on topics including Russia's ongoing war in Ukraine, disinformation and national security, global Islamic State terror attacks, conflicts in the Middle East, tensions with Venezuela, and a range of other topics.

TSC experts authored 35 opinion and commentary pieces in prominent media outlets and policy institutes such as the New York Times, Foreign Policy, West Point's CTC Sentinel, Foreign Affairs, the Foreign Policy Research Institute, World Politics Review, and War on the Rocks among others. Topics covered this year included the resurgence of the Islamic State, terrorism trends, and AI use in terrorist plots. Additionally, in partnership with Defense One, TSC experts authored several pieces on the major themes and topics covered at this year's Global Security Forum.

The TSC team offered more in-depth insights through interviews with radio stations and podcasts. Our experts joined entities—including NPR, the Tech Against Terrorism Podcast, Al-Jazeera English, The World, and Preston Stewart among others—to discuss the latest developments and emerging trendlines on security, foreign policy, and global elections.



TSC Executive Director Colin P. Clarke (right) (Image from Quest Means Business YouTube)



TSC Senior Fellow Kenneth Katzman (right) (Image from Al Jazeera English YouTube)



Research Analyst Clara Broekaert (Image from Al Jazeera English)

# CLOSING LETTER

**Dr. Colin P. Clarke**

TSC Executive Director



It has been an immense pleasure to take on the leadership of The Soufan Center these past months, a responsibility I take seriously each day. As TSC marks eight years since its founding, it is a privilege to reflect on these accomplishments and to lead our team into the years ahead as Executive Director. Throughout 2025, our research, briefings, events, and media engagements sought to identify and connect the forces shaping global affairs—from the wars in Ukraine, Gaza, and Sudan, to the evolving geopolitical risks and tensions involving Russia, Iran, and China. Closer to home, the year also witnessed a seismic shift in the United States’ strategic focus on the Western Hemisphere, driven by renewed security and foreign policy priorities across the Americas. Amid these changes, our team closely monitored developments to deliver timely, incisive analysis and actionable insight.

Each day, the TSC team engages audiences around the world through daily intelligence briefings and media interviews, as well as through our engagement with thousands of participants at our events. Over the year, our team also delivered over 30 briefings and presentations to governments and international organizations across the world, including the United Nations, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS. These opportunities enable our team to share our research and analysis with key thinkers and decision-makers, ensuring that TSC’s work reaches a broad audience and drives meaningful impact. Our diverse network of fellows brings a wide range of expertise and experience that enriches our work and engagement. In an era of disinformation, partisanship, and extreme polarization, TSC endeavors to provide unbiased analysis based on data and empirical evidence.

As this annual report highlights, this past year was another strong and impactful one for our team. Looking ahead, I will continue to build on TSC’s strong foundation—strengthening our trusted work, partnerships, and reach. As the next Executive Director, I am excited to build on the momentum with new ideas, energy, and collaboration. As I thank the TSC team for another year of pride and accomplishment, I look forward to leading the important work that lies ahead.

With thanks and appreciation,

A handwritten signature in white ink, appearing to read 'Colin P. Clarke', written in a cursive style.

**TSC Executive Director**

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