

Transcript: CNN's The Situation Room with Wolf Blitzer

18:30:26

BLITZER: We're following the breaking news, an airline mechanic, former Air Force airman, charged with trying to join ISIS after he was arrested in Turkey, allegedly trying to make his way into Syria to join up with ISIS terrorists.

Let's get some more on what's going on. Joining us, our CNN political commentator Peter Beinart; our national security commentator, Mike Rogers, the former chairman of the House Intelligence Committee; our former NATO supreme allied commander, Admiral James Stavridis; and CNN counterterrorism analyst, Philip Mudd. Guys, thanks to all of you for joining us.

Philip Mudd, what's going on here? How much of a problem is this? The guy actually makes his way to Turkey and is only arrested, apparently, after he tries to cross the border into Syria.

PHILIP MUDD, CNN COUNTERTERRORISM ANALYST: Well, there's a couple issues you've got to think about here. The first one is obviously, he's what we call a clean skin in business. That is he's got a document. They can get him back to the United States.

The more significant issue, Wolf, here is the digital footprint he's leaving. By that, I mean he had to buy a ticket to go to Turkey, and as we know now, he's online looking at websites that would show him entry into a place like Syria. If you're somebody like me, a counterterrorism professional, you might consider looking at that digital footprint, sort of the digital version of the physical footprint you would have looked at in the 20th Century.

But that's all free speech stuff. You are allowed to travel to Turkey. You're allowed to look at bin Laden websites. You're allowed to look at travel routes into Syria. If you want us, in my old business, to find people like that, you've got to change the law, because right now you can't look at that stuff without cause.

BLITZER: Mike Rogers, you were chairman of the House Intelligence Committee for a long time. Apparently, this guy was under surveillance; he'd been known for a long time, going back at least to 2001, to 9/11, if you will, when he started telling some friends and colleagues he supported bin Laden. Were you briefed on this? Would that have come to your level?

MIKE ROGERS, CNN NATIONAL SECURITY COMMENTATOR: It depends. If there was an action that this individual was going to take, an affirmative action. So you have to think about this. The FBI does hundreds and sometimes thousands of cases per year on individuals who appear to be self-radicalizing and engaged in at least speech that would indicate that they're going to take the next step to have an aspiration to commit an act of terror.

So not every one of those cases would have been briefed to us. Only when they would have taken an affirmative step.

BLITZER: Admiral, are you surprised that a veteran, military veteran -- I know it's bad that any

American might even be considering this, but a vet, were you surprised that a vet would do this?

ADMIRAL JAMES STAVRIDIS, FORMER NATO SUPREME ALLIED COMMANDER: I'm not Shocked. We're seeing a certain amount of this going on in the U.S. military. We saw this recently in those attacks out at Ft. Bliss in El Paso. I'm much more worried about his passport and his ability to get back than I am about his military knowledge going forward.

BLITZER: All right. Let me bring in Peter Beinart and turn to the Israeli elections. Peter, I know you've been watching this very, very closely. It's too close to call. Netanyahu is claiming victory, but it's by no means a done deal. It could take days, if not weeks before a new government is formed, either Netanyahu or Isaac Herzog, the main challenger. We don't know what's going to happen yet, but give me your analysis.

PETER BEINART, CNN POLITICAL COMMENTATOR: This is much better for Netanyahu than most people have thought. You know, running up to this election, people thought that Herzog would have an advantage. He does seem to have an advantage. I think probably Netanyahu has a better chance of forming a government than Herzog does, and the consequences of that, I think, as your former guest, Adam (ph) suggested, are really going to be really quite severe.

Netanyahu ran, I think, was an openly racist campaign at the very end, basically warning his voters that Arabs were voting in droves. His own citizens, basically demonizing his own Arab citizens. And he said that he would not support a Palestinian state, reversing the pledge he had made back in 2009.

So I think if he is the next prime minister, which I think is prepped (ph) likely at this point, I think the relationship between the Obama administration are going to get even worse.

BLITZER: You were chairman of the intelligence committee for a long time. The intelligence -- the intelligence relationship between the U.S. and Israel has been very strong. Military intelligence (ph) pretty strong. But if Netanyahu stays on as prime minister, giving where he stands, opposing the president on these nuclear negotiations with Iran, opposing what he used to support, a two-state resolution, Israel alongside Palestine, is it going to affect the U.S./Israeli relations?

ROGERS: This relationship has had a deterioration factor for years. Despite that, the relationship between our military and intelligence officials has never been better.

I've been in rooms with Mr. Netanyahu, Prime Minister Netanyahu, in discussions on Iran, on ISIS, on relationships between he and the president of the United States.

He feels passionately about it, but he also understands this is a critical relationship for the benefit of Israel and the benefit of the United States. And I think an election can be a healing process. I think we'll get through the election. I do believe he'll end up forming a coalition to remain as prime minister, and then those dialogues will re-kick off. I think the tensions will...

BLITZER: It's going to be close. We'll see what happens. Your reaction?

<18:35:14> HERTLING: Well, as the commander of EuCom, I had responsibility...

BLITZER: European command.

HERTLING: ... from European command, responsibility for those relationships between Israel and the United States, I agree with Chairman Rogers. They have never been stronger at the military-to- military level.

But I think walking away from the two-state solution, a fundamental plank of U.S. policy, begins to put real stress on the political side of this thing. And I think we'll have a significant bleed-over.

BLITZER: You worked for the CIA for a long time. Is that Israeli -- that relationship between the CIA and Mossad as strong as Chairman Rogers is suggesting?

HERTLING: Boy, it's a rare moment that I have to agree with the chairman. I prefer to fight for him. But look, here's the situation from the intelligence side. You're responsible as an intelligence professional to give the president and others the best information you can. The Israelis are very, very good on the Iranian nuclear problem.

Regardless of the political diplomatic dimension here, the security services are going to talk, because they have to give the best picture to the leadership. And both sides have a piece of that puzzle.

BLITZER: You were the NATO supreme allied commander. You know what Russia is all about. You're now the dean of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University. What's up with Putin?

STAVRIDIS: I think we're seeing act three of a three-act play. Act one was the annexation of Crimea, which violates every norm of international law. Act two is this insurgency that he's fostering in southeast Ukraine. Act three, unfortunately, may well be a push towards Mariupol and consolidation of the land bridge between the two.

I would not put that out of the realm of possibility. It's a very dangerous next step.

BLITZER: Do you agree, Mr. Chairman?

STAVRIDIS: I do. And I would also add Transnistria in that equation. They've already voted that they would like to become part of Russia, according to the parliament. That is a strategic piece of land for Putin. I think he'd be interested there.

And think about where he's at. He thinks he's winning this fight. He occupies 20 percent of the land in the country of Georgia. He's annexed Crimea. His numbers at home are off the chart despite the financial problems. I think he thinks he's doing well.

He's just modernized his military, huge operations, training operations in the arctic, which is

really a message to the Baltic states. I think if you think about his lens, he looks at it as, "I didn't want Georgia in NATO, and I didn't want Ukraine in NATO. I've got both of those things. The world is going my way."

So he's looking at it very differently than we would look at it.

BLITZER: Let me just get Peter Beinart's thoughts. Go ahead, Peter.

PETER BEINART, CNN CORRESPONDENT: Yes, he may well be looking at it that way. But I think Russia is still basically a declining power. It's a power that doesn't have any economic foundation other than basically exporting oil and gas. Its population is declining quite dramatically.

And although he may be able to keep these border states out of NATO, it's worth remembering that NATO is far, far deeper towards Russia than anyone ever else would have imagined when Ronald Reagan was president. When the border between the United States and -- between the West and Russia within Berlin, now it's Ukraine. So I don't think when you look -- Putin may have his own views,

but I think when you step back, I don't think this is a story of Putin winning.

BLITZER: All right. Peter Beinart, thanks very much.

Mike Rogers, Admiral Stavridis, guys, thank to you, as well.