McRaven Implores Sides to ‘Calm Down a Bit’ After Saudi Oil Facility Attack

The former commander of Special Operations Command and the Navy SEAL leader who directed the raid that killed al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden said he is “not overly concerned” about the current crisis with Iran, but he is worried that the attack on Saudi oil facilities “may ramp this up a bit.”

Retired Adm. William McRaven added: “Everyone needs to calm down a bit. We need to think through this,” try diplomacy and, “If that doesn’t work, there’s always the sense of proportionality.”

“We don’t need to be involved. But if we feel something more forceful is needed, we better make sure it’s proportional so we don’t get a spin up and escalate the situation. If the Saudis escalate, it could lead to war. We don’t want that,” McRaven said Sept 18 as he addressed a forum on special operations forces (SOF) at the New America think tank. “We’ve been dealing with the Iranians for decades. We know how to deal with the Iranians.”

He noted that a U.S. cruiser shot down an Iranian airliner and “killed 298 innocent folks” in 1979 during the Iran-Iraq war, but it did not lead to a U.S.-Iranian war. “Strange as it may sound, I think people in the [Persian Gulf] are rational actors. Nobody wants to go to war.

… We have to
figure out how to work it out."

In response to a question during the forum, McRaven said he "absolutely" was concerned about the lack of experienced officials on President
Trump's national security team, because it diminishes the traditional process
by which the layers of experts and advisers develop options for the president.

"When you don't have that process, or the process doesn't work effectively, or you don't have the depth of experience you need at
different levels, then the president doesn't have the best options. The
president is never going to be the subject matter expert," McRaven said.

He also said he "never thought negotiations with the Taliban were a good way to go" and predicted that if an agreement led to the withdrawal
of all U.S. troops, in "six months or a year, all the blood and treasure we
have put into Afghanistan would have been reversed" and all the progress made
in educating girls and giving women more opportunities would be lost.

Earlier in the day, Roya Rahmani, Afghanistan's ambassador, said Afghans had been concerned about the U.S. led negotiations because Afghan
officials were not involved, and she was "relieved" when Trump ended the talks.

Asked about the rash of scandals involving special operations personnel, particularly SEALs, McRaven suggested the 18 years of war

in which SOF has borne a disproportionate burden must have had some effect. But he said Army Gen. Richard Clark, the current SOCOM commander, "did the right thing" by firing three senior SEAL leaders, which sent the right message to the force.

In other session during the day-long forum, House Armed Services Chairman Adam Smith (D-Wash.) and a Republican member of the committee agreed that Congress needs to ensure that SOF gets the resources it needs to conduct its vital missions and worried that the growing focus on "great power competition" with Russia and China would result in cutting SOF funding to pay for big war weapons, such as the Air Force's B-21 strategic bomber.

Other panels of active or former SOF personnel and civilian officials suggested that SOF needed to seek greater ethnic and cultural diversity in the ranks to deal with the evolving global security situation, which would include a continuing threat of global extremists and terrorists.