

STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD

AMBASSADOR-AT-LARGE FOR COUNTERTERRORISM

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EMERGING THREATS AND CAPABILITIES SUBCOMMITTEE

USG EFFORTS TO COUNTER VIOLENT EXTREMISM

MARCH 10, 2010

10:00 AM

Chairman Nelson, Ranking Member LeMieux and members of the Committee: thank you for your invitation to appear before you this morning.

I am pleased to have this opportunity to discuss with you, along with my colleagues from the Department of Defense, the Department of State's efforts to counter violent extremism overseas, and how we collaborate and coordinate closely in this effort.

In the past eight years, the United States has made great strides in what might be called tactical counterterrorism – taking individual terrorists off the street, and disrupting cells and operations. But an effective counterterrorism strategy

must go beyond efforts to thwart those who seek to harm the United States and its citizens, allies, and interests. Military power, intelligence operations, and law enforcement efforts alone will not solve the long-term challenge the United States faces – the threat of violent extremism. Instead, we must look as well to the political, economic, and social factors that terrorist organizations exploit and the ideology that is their key instrument in pushing vulnerable individuals on the path toward violence. As President Obama succinctly put it, “A campaign against extremism will not succeed with bullets or bombs alone.”

For many years while outside of the government, I have argued that the United States has to make countering violent extremism a priority. Now, in my position as Coordinator for Counterterrorism, I am both challenged and humbled by the tremendous responsibility of helping develop and coordinate the U.S. government’s efforts to undermine the al-Qa’ida narrative and prevent the radicalization of vulnerable individuals. Curtailing the influence of militants is critical to enhancing our nation’s security. The primary goal of countering violent extremism is to stop those most at risk of radicalization from becoming terrorists. Its tools are non-coercive and include social programs, counter-ideology initiatives, and working with civil society to delegitimize the al-Qa’ida narrative and, where possible, provide positive alternative narratives.

Successfully combating terrorism necessitates isolating violent extremists from the people they pretend to serve. Often, they do this themselves. Time and again, their barbarism and brutality have provoked backlashes among ordinary people. The indiscriminate targeting of Muslim civilians by violent extremists in Iraq, Pakistan, and elsewhere has alienated populations, led to a decline of support for al-Qa'ida's political program, and outraged influential clerics and former allies, who in many cases have spoken publicly, issuing fatwas against terrorism.

Of course, we cannot count on al-Qa'ida to put itself out of business. While the group's atrocities undoubtedly are part of the reason it has failed to mobilize masses of people, it continues to have success in replenishing its ranks. So as we look at the problem of transnational terrorism, we are putting at the core of our actions a recognition of the phenomenon of radicalization — that is, we are asking ourselves time and again: Are our words and actions strengthening or diminishing the appeal of arguments used by al-Qa'ida to justify violence against the United States and its allies? What more do we need to do to blunt the appeal of this brand of extremism?

Answering these questions is at the heart of any genuinely strategic approach to counterterrorism, because ultimately undermining the appeal of al-

Qa'ida's rationale for violence is essential to help make environments "non-permissive" for terrorists seeking to exploit them. In other words, when the terrorists find their immediate environments to be hostile to them and their work and fewer places offer them any kind of haven, their ability to evade detection will diminish and their numbers will shrink.

We are not there yet. The reality is that the United States confronts a violent ideology that holds real attraction for significant numbers of people. At the heart of the conflict with al-Qa'ida is a struggle over narratives. Al-Qa'ida dispenses an account of the world that falsely portrays the United States as a predatory power eager to occupy Muslim lands, steal Muslim wealth, and suppress the religion of Islam – a notion that President Obama, Secretary Clinton, and their predecessors have consistently refuted. Al-Qa'ida and like-minded extremists exploit this perception and argue that the only solution is violence, a message which appeals to a small cohort of the alienated, particularly young men. The story has an elegant simplicity and, for some in Muslim communities with grievances, real or perceived, an appealing explanatory power.

Because a variety of social and political factors can affect how people respond to al-Qa'ida, we are working from various angles to discredit its arguments and reduce their persuasiveness. Effectively countering the al-Qa'ida

narrative involves capacity-building, outreach to civil society organizations, and educational development, as much as it does direct messaging. It involves working through host governments and non-governmental organizations to engage with clerics and other influential voices with credibility in local communities.

With the aid of credible messengers, the United States is trying to make the use of terrorist violence taboo and, we hope in the long term, replace the radical narrative with something more hopeful and empowering. President Obama's effort to create partnerships with Muslim communities on the basis of mutual interest and mutual respect, as he outlined in speeches in Ankara and Cairo provides a new opportunity to promote a more positive story than the negative one promulgated by al-Qa'ida.

Because I consider this mission vital, one of the first things I did after being sworn in as coordinator was to start developing a CVE team, something that previously had not been a part of the Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism. We now have a six-person unit responsible for creating CVE programs based on robust qualitative and quantitative assessments of the environment.

In an effort to consolidate what we in the Administration know and to do what we could to galvanize the interagency's work on CVE, last fall my office convened a one-day interagency summit to examine USG efforts in countering violent extremism, identify programmatic shortcomings, and make recommendations for creating a sustainable strategy going forward. The Summit brought together senior attendees from the NSC, NCTC, USAID, intelligence agencies, and the Departments of State, Defense, Homeland Security, and Justice. Important lessons were shared. For example, all were in agreement that our programs are often more effective when implemented by host nations, NGOs, and local partners. Partnering with foreign governments is crucial. These officials will have a better understanding of the particular dynamics and influential figures in their communities. Empowering these allies also bolsters their will to sustain programs over the long term.

One recognition that was widely shared at that summit is that we are still in the early phases of CVE work. In recent years, we have learned a good deal about the phenomenon of radicalization. Various agencies in the U.S. government have done an impressive job to further the government's understanding. Significant research and analysis have been conducted by the intelligence community; in fact, we are working with the NCTC at the moment to use their intelligence for

programmatic purposes. We also never hesitate to take advantage of the many studies done by the private sector and academia.

Nevertheless, there is still the need for more work in the social sciences on the cluster of issues related to radicalization. Polling and surveys will help inform us where radicalization is occurring at the neighborhood level, guide our programming decisions and serve as a baseline to measure the effectiveness of our initiatives.

To successfully develop and implement CVE programs, we must understand the dynamics of the communities at risk. Every community, whether long-rooted or part of a new diaspora, possesses a unique political, economic, and social landscape. For this reason, one-size-fits-all programs are likely to have limited appeal. Instead, our efforts must be tailored to fit the characteristics of the intended audience. Thus, it is critically important that our Embassies are on the front lines of our CVE efforts and that they play a key role in designing CVE programs. They can best identify the people in-country who can serve as credible voices and who can successfully implement projects. Partly for this reason, I have spent about half of 2010 and much of last year on travel to the Middle East, Asia, Africa, and Europe. There I met with numerous officials from State and other

departments, including DoD, to discuss and support Post efforts on CVE and explore ways to elaborate these initiatives.

Besides working to keep those at risk of radicalization from becoming violent, we must also beat back the al-Qa'ida narrative in the broader public. Framing our interaction with the rest of the world, especially with Muslim communities, through the lens of counterterrorism can be counter-productive. Engaging mainstream communities around the world is that much harder if our audiences believe we see them as part of the problem, rather than as part of the solution, or are only interested in using them to get at the small number of violent extremists who actually threaten us. Moreover, we believe that engagement framed with mutual respect and the pursuit of partnerships in areas of shared interest actually marginalizes violent extremists by contrasting our positive vision with the terrorists' commitment to murder, violence, and destruction.

We must do a better job of explaining U.S. policies to foreign publics and debunking myths about the United States. Building personal relationships and deepening existing cultural and economic ties are some of the best ways to dispel misperceptions about U.S. interests and motives. Immigrant and youth populations should be treated not as threats to defend against, but as communities of potential partners who can play a lead role in changing our world for the better.

We also need to look to what Deputy National Security Advisor John Brennan has called the “upstream” factors. We need to confront the political, social, and economic conditions that our enemies exploit to win over the new recruits the funders and those whose tacit support enables the militants to carry forward their plans. The President and his team understand well how headline political grievances are exploited by radicals. That is why this administration is giving so much attention to resolving issues like the Arab-Israeli peace process, which create deep antipathies against the United States that can be exploited by violent extremists.

We are working hard to develop a variety of CVE programs. One that is already in its second year is the Ambassadors Fund for Counterterrorism. The Ambassadors Fund allows Posts to identify local partners and send in proposals to secure funding for local efforts. The Ambassadors Fund is an example of a locally-targeted program that marries the tools of soft power and counterterrorism assistance to help combat extremism. Up to \$100,000 per grant is provided to embassies for projects.

Beyond this existing funding mechanism, S/CT has requested \$15 million in Fiscal Year 2011 for a new CVE programming. We intend to use those funds to

focus on hot-spots of radicalization and recruitment, working with embassies to develop locally-tailored programs that counter the negative influence and influencers driving at-risk populations toward violence. We will also work together with the Office of the Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, with the Office of the State Department Special Representative to Muslim Communities, and with USAID to make sure that efforts to engage civil society and counter radicalizing narratives through existing programs are focused in the right areas.

It is efforts like this that we are trying to expand and elaborate. We are working more closely with foreign partners and examining how to get governments in Muslim-majority countries to take on this challenge – especially in ways that do not involve just security services.

We have an excellent relationship with the Department of Defense. We are extremely grateful to Secretary Gates' for his leadership and emphasis on the need to foster a stronger partnership between the Departments of Defense and State. Our cooperation with DoD is paying off as we explore ways to collaborate and innovate new CVE programming. Together we are learning how to complement each other's strengths and efforts in the field, and determine which CVE efforts are best done by the military and which are best handled on the civilian side. A

number of offices in DoD and the Combatant Commands that fund CVE projects and research have expressed a desire to collaborate with us on new programs and we've had fruitful discussions with SOCOM about how our offices can work in concert on program delivery.

We are also working hard to build momentum with our foreign CVE partners. My office hosted a Multilateral "Countering Violent Extremism (CVE)" Workshop with Australia, Canada, Germany, Italy, The Netherlands, Spain, and the United Kingdom in early November as a first step in developing a more cooperative approach, multilaterally to CVE. Participants discussed approaches, target audiences, specific interventions designed to counter terrorists' recruiting efforts, and information sharing. Programs that gave participants insight into the challenges of police work with diaspora communities in the UK and Australia generated a lot of interest as possible templates. Delegations agreed that initiatives must be adapted to specific communities and even neighborhoods to realize the best chance of succeeding and enduring. Participants also agreed there was a gap in knowledge of other countries' policies and approaches to countering violent extremism. We view filling that gap as part of our mission, and one step in this direction will be a follow on workshop that is planned for mid-May.

To help the State Department draw upon the knowledge of one of our key allies, we currently have on detail a senior member from the UK's Foreign and Commonwealth Office's Counterterrorism Research Group. Through this partnership, we hope to gain greater understanding of the UK's experience with countering violent extremism as well as how the U.S. government can create effective, locally-targeted programs and enhance its efforts to counter extremist narratives.

USG engagement can and should take different forms depending on the circumstances of the potential partner. Some organizations with a lack of resources and outside funding will welcome U.S. seed money to hire staff and initiate programs. Others may desire capacity and leadership development training to better position them to challenge extremist narratives. In other cases, the USG can simply act as the facilitator by connecting these organizations with third parties with whom they can partner with.

Some potential partners will not want any formal affiliation with the USG, because they fear it would undermine their legitimacy among constituents. In these cases, the USG can work closely with local, regional, or national governments and third parties, as well as credible regional and international

organizations, to ensure that the organizations receive the assistance they need to deliver targeted, on-the-ground CVE programs.

Non-traditional actors such as NGOs, foundations, public-private partnerships, and private businesses are some of the most capable and credible partners in local communities. The U.S. government and partner nations are also seeking to develop greater understanding of the linkages between Diaspora communities and ancestral homelands. Through familial and business networks, events that affect one community have an impact in the other.

In closing, let me make two points. First, as we pursue our CVE work and counterterrorism more broadly, it is vital that we hew to our values in this struggle. As President Obama has said from the outset, there should be no tradeoff between our security and our values. Indeed, in light of what we know about radicalization, it is clear that navigating by our values is an essential part of a successful counterterrorism effort. Thus, we have moved to rectify the excesses of the past few years by working to close the prison at Guantanamo Bay, forbidding torture, and developing a more systematic method of dealing with detainees. All of these, over the long term, will help undermine terrorist claims about the nature of the United States.

Second and lastly, there is reason for optimism about our ability to make progress on CVE. While such an effort will not be easy or inexpensive, we are developing the capacity to meet this challenge, backed by the talent within the Foreign Service and Civil Service communities and among the scholars in our nation and elsewhere. Within the foreign policy community and the senior political leadership, there is a broad, shared understanding of the vital need to get this right. Undoubtedly, there will be some experimentation, and there will be some failures. But with real patience and willingness to learn from our mistakes, I am confident that we can succeed at this strategic level of counterterrorism as effectively as we have in the tactical realm, where we have made genuinely impressive strides.