

USSOCOM Deputy Commander

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"Countering Violent Extremism"

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Mr. Chairman and distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity to speak with you about United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM)'s role in Countering Violent Extremism (CVE). This role is at the core of the Command's mission and purpose, one I'm pleased to present to this Committee.

Over two decades ago, USSOCOM was founded to 'prepar[e] special operations forces to carry out assigned missions' in support of Geographic Combatant Commanders (GCCs). Since then, these forces and their missions changed considerably in response to dynamic global conditions and threats.

Following 9-11, the Command shifted its role both as a force provider and synchronizer of planning against terrorist networks. Initial efforts - under what eventually became Concept Plan (CONPLAN) 7500 - were largely kinetic activities directed against the Al Qaeda network and its affiliates.

Through successful direct action, US Special Operations Forces (USSOF) degraded the leadership and capacity of these violent

extremist organizations. Our forces captured and killed adversaries, frustrating efforts to accomplish their goals to include the acquisition of weapons of mass destruction. While these direct, sometimes unilateral, actions are essential to national security, by themselves they are not decisive.

To achieve enduring success requires a broader focus, one which addresses the underlying causes of extremism. Specifically, the focus must include indirect and ideologically-based activities countering violent extremism (CVE), while building organic capacities toward this end among our allies and partners.

This 'new normal' was captured in the publication of the National Implementation Plan for the War and Terror (NIP). The NIP is comprised of four pillars, one of which - CVE - underpins the other three: protection and defense of the homeland, preventing terrorist acquisition of weapons of mass destruction, and attacking terrorists and their capacity to operate.

The current version of Department of Defense (DoD) CONPLAN 7500 mirrors this mindset. It reflects the primacy of indirect approaches, both to deter active and tacit support for Violent Extremist Organizations (VEO) and to erode extremist support for VEO ideology.

In turn - and echoing our founding mission - we currently see USSOCOM's role in CVE as two-fold: as both a force provider and synchronizer of planning.

As a force provider, we leverage USSOF's persistent presence in over 75 countries to conduct high quality, low profile, long-term engagements in Security Force Assistance (SFA). These actions foster trust, and enable partners to directly combat extremist organizations through advising, training and - when authorized and funded - equipping of forces.

Functionally, this is executed by providing special operations forces to GCCs, and - in some cases - authorized via a funding mechanism commonly referred to as 'Section 1208.' This mechanism affords the training and equipping of indigenous forces, both regular and irregular, in support of ongoing U.S. counterterrorism operations.

Success is best understood as a two part equation: (1) direct action against violent extremists, and (2) the simultaneous preparation of others to face their own security challenges. When executed well, the latter reduces or even eliminates the need for the former.

As previously mentioned - and in our role as a synchronizer - USSOCOM's efforts toward CVE are detailed in CONPLAN 7500. This plan - crafted at USSOCOM and approved by the Secretary of Defense - is joined with regional, supporting plans and programs of the Geographic and Functional Combatant Commands to accomplish the CVE mission. As a collective, these plans and programs allow us to work with interagency and international partners to synchronize CVE research, planning, operations and activities on behalf of the DoD.

Bannered under CONPLAN 7500 is a fundamental belief that extremism cannot be physically 'killed.' The Command believes in cultivating credible influence to build the foundation for change, one which promotes ideologies that reject extremist affiliation and action. In tandem, we undercut the resources and recruitment efforts of VEOs to limit both their sustainment and freedom of action.

The Expanded Trans-Regional Psychological Operations Program (ETRP) is the mortar in this ideological foundation, one providing a uniform set of objectives available to all GCCs to conduct CVE-centric, Psychological Operations (PSYOP) activities in support of CONPLAN 7500. Within ETRP is a system of checks and balances, an approval process to ensure Department of Defense-conducted PSYOP activities are executed with full awareness and approval of the appropriate Department of State (DoS) representative. This includes U.S. Ambassadors within countries where these capabilities are employed.

USSOCOM's program of record, ETRP-MIST (Military Information Support Team), provides the resourcing and deployment mechanism for the forces executing these operations. ETRP-MIST is currently supporting 25 USSOCOM MISTs, units deployed at the specific request of US ambassadors around the globe. Working closely with and authorized by Embassy Public Affairs and Diplomacy staffs, MIST teams - usually small in number - conduct local information programs via local media in service to ETRP and DoS Mission Strategic Plan CVE goals.

USSOCOM's Joint Military Information Support Command (JMISC) provides operational planning, analytical, research and production support for all of the Geographic Combatant Commanders. JMISC produces six military-to-military journals, one for each GCC, with particular topical emphasis on CVE and regional security. In tandem, the JMISC's four regional influence web sites counter Internet-based misinformation supporting extremism, while synchronizing DoD's web-based messages on CVE topics.

As a point of distinction, USSOCOM remains steadfast in distinguishing between DoS diplomacy efforts and DoD-led influence campaigns. While both directly address CVE, our efforts are specifically designed to deter, prevent and disrupt violent extremists. Still, we recognize and appreciate the logic of coordinating and synchronizing these endeavors toward a common objective of reducing the appeal of violent extremism. The Command supports the President's guidance to 'rebalance' current information and engagement programs to both deconflict authorities and maximize outcomes.

Programmatic efforts to counter ideological foundations of extremism are matched by actions to address the factors that sometimes make communities vulnerable to violent extremism. The President has called for a New Beginning with Muslims around the world, and the positive vision of mutual respect, partnership, mutual interests, and mutual opportunities is a powerful contrast to al-Qaeda's

destructiveness. While the military is not the lead in this effort, USSOF Civil Affairs teams conduct a diverse set of activities promoting development and goodwill through building of infrastructure, job skill training, and the provision of medical, dental, and veterinary care in areas where existing governance structures are unable or unwilling provide these services. Again, as with SFA, the focus of Special Operations Civil Affairs is on long term capacity building within local and national structures.

Finally, the Command simultaneously strikes at the financial center of VEOs, serving as the DoD lead in Counter Threat Finance. In close partnership with other Combatant Commanders, the Services, and - as directed - appropriate U.S. government agencies and international partners, we spearhead DoD efforts to identify, track and dry up this flow of capital in the interest of national security.

With the increasing prevalence of narcotics trafficking as a VEO funding stream, the USSOCOM Counter Narcoterrorism (CNT) Program provides USSOF to GCCs, ambassadors, and other US government agencies to address the nexus of this crime and the terrorism it funds. Recent CNT efforts include SOF-led training and security assistance to partners in Colombia and Panama.

As a collective, these examples illustrate the unique contributions of the forces provided by USSOCOM. Our career multidimensional operators and headquarters personnel are individuals equally capable of direct action with precision and lethality. They are culturally grounded in their area of responsibility, while

diplomatically astute enough to navigate the subtle ideological and social distinctions required for indirect approaches.

Synchronizing planning on behalf of the DoD for global operations against terrorist networks is a difficult task, where prudent outcomes - direct and indirect - come only from prudent strategy. The balance of this approach is the heart of this command, and a responsibility we are proud to execute. In speaking on behalf of our entire Command, we thank you for this opportunity to represent this to you. I look forward to answering any of your questions.