

STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD

**AMBASSADOR DANIEL BENJAMIN
COORDINATOR FOR COUNTERTERRORISM**

**THE STATE DEPARTMENT'S COUNTERTERRORISM OFFICE:
BUDGET, REORGANIZATION, POLICIES**

**HOUSE FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON TERRORISM, NONPROLIFERATION,
AND TRADE**

APRIL 14, 2011

2:00 pm

Chairman Royce, Ranking Member Sherman, and Distinguished Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before this Committee today. I thought this would be a good opportunity to discuss the State Department's concept of strategic counterterrorism and the plans outlined in the QDDR for the State Department to work with Congress to transform the Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism (S/CT) into a full-fledged Bureau. We certainly feel that the change will strengthen our work within the interagency and with partners around the world. S/CT and the State Department have assumed a growing role in counterterrorism over the past several years and have moved beyond coordination into an essential policymaking and programming role for the U.S. government.

When S/CT was established more than 30 years ago, its primary mission was to help coordinate the U.S. government's counterterrorism-related activities. Since counterterrorism was not the priority for the U.S. government in the early 1980s that it is today, it was envisioned that S/CT could carry out these responsibilities with a fairly small staff. In the wake of 9/11, the resources and attention devoted grew across a wide spectrum, and while coordination remains important, we do much more.

Within the U.S. government, a Bureau of Counterterrorism, of course, would continue to be the State Department lead on U.S. counterterrorism strategy and operations, and would continue its formulation and implementation of relevant policy and programs. The Bureau would work to both thwart imminent terrorist

acts while also reducing recruitment and radicalization and promoting the relevant capabilities of partner states. Furthermore, it would advance the Department's views on the management of counterterrorism and homeland security issues within the broader context of our bilateral, regional, and multilateral relationships. It would thus work to safeguard American security interests while promoting our values, including our support for human rights, democracy, and the rule of law. It would also coordinate the Department and interagency response to complex counterterrorism crises through a variety of mechanisms including leading the Foreign Emergency Support Team. Finally, it would manage a wide range of programs, within the department, that build partner capacity in the areas of law enforcement, countering violent extremism, counterterrorism finance, and terrorist travel.

Over the past ten years, the United States has made great strides in tactical counterterrorism – taking individual terrorists off the street, disrupting cells, and thwarting conspiracies. Yet if we look at the strategic level, we continue to see a strong flow of new recruits into many of the most dangerous terrorist organizations. A Bureau of Counterterrorism would continue to work aggressively with our interagency counterparts to stop imminent and developing threats. But it would also carry forward and expand the work underway to undermine the appeal of extremist ideologies and help many partners develop the tools to deal with the terrorist threats they face.

We are in the midst of a season of transformative change in the Middle East, the full implications of which are still taking shape. The wave of democratic demonstrations that began to sweep the Arab world at the end of 2010 holds promise but also some peril. Because great numbers of citizens carried out their public demands for change without reference to al-Qaida's (AQ's) incendiary world view, these events upended the group's longstanding claims that change would only come to the region through violence. At the same time, the political turmoil distracted security officials and led to the possibility that terrorist groups would exploit the new openness and find it easier to carry out conspiracies – a possibility with significant, worrisome implications for states undergoing democratic transitions. But should the revolts result in democratically-elected, non-autocratic governments, AQ's single-minded focus on terrorism as an instrument of political change could be severely delegitimized. This is a moment of great possibility for American policy.

That is the long-term hope, and we will work hard to realize it. Before we discuss that effort, let me just review some key aspects of the current threat landscape. I will start in South Asia, home to the group behind the September 11 attacks.

Pakistan, particularly the Federally Administered Tribal Areas region and the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, continues to be used as a base for terrorist organizations operating in Pakistan and Afghanistan, and Pakistani security forces have undertaken efforts to counter these threats. While Pakistan has made progress on the counterterrorism front, specifically against Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP), the challenge remains to make these gains durable and sustainable. To this end, Pakistan must sustain its efforts to deny AQ safe haven in the tribal areas of western Pakistan. We continue to press Pakistan for increased action against Lashkar-e Tayyiba and terrorist groups that undermine the security of Pakistan, the region, and beyond.

Though the AQ core has become weaker, it retains the capability to conduct regional and transnational attacks. In addition, the affiliates have grown stronger. Indeed, over the last two years we've seen the AQ threat become more distributed and geographically diversified – in Yemen, East Africa, and the Sahel, for example.

Terrorist violence from al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) has been directed inside and outside of Yemen, threatening the security and well-being of the Yemeni people, the broader Arabian Peninsula, and the United States. Yemen also faces an array of other challenges, including a fractured political system that many Yemenis no longer trust, as shown by the increasing number of protests calling for change from the entire political establishment.

In recent months al-Qa'ida in Iraq (AQI) has adapted to changing conditions, diminished capacity, and dismantled leadership to continue to carry out large-scale and coordinated attacks against government officials, security forces, and even civilians inside Iraq. AQI is believed to be responsible for the late March attack on the Salah Ad-Din Provincial Council (PC) Headquarters in central Iraq that resulted in the killing of 15 hostages execution style and up to 30 additional fatalities, including the three PC members and a local journalist. Iraqi CT efforts have improved since September and Iraqi security forces are leading successful operations and targeting AQI, which will prove critical as US military forces draw down over the next few months.

The situation in Somalia also remains deeply concerning. Al-Shabaab has conducted frequent attacks on government, military, and civilian targets inside Somalia, and the group's leadership remains actively interested in attacking regional U.S. and Western interests. Last July we saw al-Shabaab demonstrate its ability and intent to carry out attacks outside of Somalia when it claimed responsibility for twin suicide bombings that killed 76 people in Kampala, Uganda, during the World Cup.

Al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) is another threat. No group has made a bigger name for itself in the kidnapping-for-ransom business than AQIM, which relies on ransom payments to sustain and develop itself in the harsh Saharan environment. AQIM also conducts small scale ambushes and attacks on security forces in Algeria, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger. Regional efforts to contain and marginalize AQIM continue, as do our military and law enforcement capacity building efforts.

We could discuss any number of other trouble spots, in Southeast Asia, Western Europe, the Levant, and elsewhere. However, for the purposes of discussing policy developments that will help us with all of these, I would like to turn to the three pillars of our effort to take counterterrorism to a strategic level and to be genuinely comprehensive in our approach. These pillars are reducing recruitment, building partner capacity, and multilateral engagement.

Reducing Recruitment/Countering Violent Extremism

The Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) work of S/CT focuses on three main lines of effort that will reduce terrorist recruitment: delegitimizing the violent extremist narrative in order to diminish its "pull"; developing positive alternatives for youth vulnerable to radicalization to diminish the "push" effect of grievances and unmet expectations; and building partner capacity to carry out these activities. Key intents of CVE programming are to diminish the drivers of radicalization and demonstrably reduce the effectiveness of terrorist propaganda, thus leading to lowered numbers in recruitment.

To counter AQ propaganda, we helped stand up the Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communication (CSCC), under the Bureau of Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, to push back against AQ's online and media activities. The CSCC, working with the interagency, focuses not only on the violent actions and human costs of terrorism, but also on positive narratives that can help dissuade those who may be susceptible to radicalization and recruitment by terrorist

organizations. One emphasis of the CSCC's work has been re-orienting the Digital Outreach Team to place greater emphasis on challenging the purveyors of extremist messages online, in Arabic and Urdu. This has included producing original video content.

Successful CVE involves more than messaging, however, and we are working with the interagency to develop programs that address the upstream factors of radicalization in communities particularly susceptible to terrorist recruitment overseas. Efforts include providing alternatives for at-risk youth, encouraging the use of social media to generate local initiatives, and enhancing the resilience of communities to counter extremism.

Research has shown that radicalization is often driven by factors at the local level. To be effective, CVE work needs to be driven by local needs, informed by local knowledge, and responsive to the immediate concerns of the community. CVE interventions will be highly focused and short-term and will be developed in cooperation with USAID and others in the interagency as well as with international partners. CVE programs will address the drivers of radicalism through stabilization and remediation projects along with efforts to supplant radicalizing institutions and voices. Micro-strategies customized for specific communities – and even neighborhoods – owned and implemented by local civil society or government partners have a better chance of succeeding and enduring.

Another central part of the bureau's CVE effort is strengthening our partners' capacity and engagement in CVE work, propagating best practices, and building an international consensus behind the effort to delegitimize extremists and their ideologies. Ultimately, host governments are best positioned to execute truly sustainable CVE efforts. For several years now we have supported host government local law enforcement efforts overseas to engage youth through police-led sports programs and have worked with Morocco and Indonesia to counter the spread of violent extremist ideologies in prisons.

S/CT's own programmatic resources are modest. To date, our CVE programming has been limited to the Ambassador's Fund for Counterterrorism, a mechanism that delivers small grant funding to embassies that present solid proposals to counter violent extremism at the local level. A summary of activities funded since inception in FY-2008, as well as FY-2010 approved-but-not-funded intentions, can be provided.

Capacity Building

One of the central challenges to our security is that weak states serve as breeding grounds for terrorism and instability. When those states recognize that these gaps exist, we can help with specific capacity building programs. We need to build effective law enforcement capacity, fair and impartial justice and the rule of law, good governance in many places that have never known this. Multiple U.S. government agencies are mobilized in this effort: Justice, FBI, Treasury, USAID, and the Department of Homeland Security.

Let me provide a couple of examples. We believe that the current protracted political standoff is having an adverse impact on the security situation in Yemen which is likely to deteriorate even more rapidly until President Saleh is able to resolve the current political impasse by announcing how and when he will follow through on his commitments. But our shared interest with the Yemeni government in fighting terrorism, particularly defeating AQAP, does not rely solely on one individual. Given the interlinked nature of Yemen's challenges, and the implications for U.S. interests, we adopted a comprehensive and sustained approach taking into account political, cultural, socio-economic, and security factors. Our strategy has two main prongs – helping the government confront the immediate security threat from AQAP, and mitigating the serious political, economic, and governance issues that the country faces over the long term. To help meet immediate security concerns, we have provided training and equipment to particular units of the Yemeni security forces with counterterrorist and border control responsibilities. Our counterterrorism efforts have been affected by the political unrest as the Yemeni government is focused on maintaining internal security.

In the Sahel region, where al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb has shown a troubling resilience and an ability to raise substantial resources by kidnapping for ransom, we have an extensive multinational capacity building-program, the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership, which will run until at least 2013. The overall goals are to enhance the indigenous capacities of governments in the pan-Sahel (Mauritania, Mali, Chad, and Niger, as well as Nigeria, Senegal, and Burkina Faso); to confront the challenges posed by terrorist organizations in the trans-Sahara; and to facilitate cooperation between those countries and U.S. partners in the Maghreb (Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia).

The Antiterrorism Assistance Program

One of our most effective capacity building programs is the Antiterrorism Assistance (ATA) Program, the primary provider of U.S. government antiterrorism training and equipment to law enforcement agencies of partner nations. Last year, in Fiscal Year 2010, \$215 million in Nonproliferation, Anti-terrorism, Demining, and Related programs (NADR) funds supported approximately 350 ATA courses, workshops, and technical consultations that trained almost 7000 participants from 64 countries. In FY 2010, the ATA Program also completed 23 capabilities assessments and program review visits. These on-site assessments looked at critical counterterrorism capabilities and served as a basis for Country Assistance Plans and the evaluation of subsequent progress.

In FY 2011 and FY 2012, the number of active partner countries is decreasing to about 55 in an effort to ensure we are strategically focusing our resources on building partner CT capacity in the right places. While one of the goals of the program is certainly to build relationships with partner nation law enforcement, my role is to ensure that the right countries are in the program, and that the ATA program is most active where there is a nexus of CT threats, U.S. interests, and partners' political will to address shared CT concerns with CT training. The ATA program is most effective where countries have a combination of political will and basic law enforcement skills to be most receptive to the advanced training ATA provides. This relatively successful formula has been especially evident in Indonesia, Colombia, Turkey, and parts of North Africa. Through an emphasis on train-the-trainer courses, we are working with partner nations toward the goal of institutionalization and self-sustainment of capacities. We also are moving toward giving advising and mentoring an importance similar to training and equipping. Finally, we ensure that our programs are based on long-term strategic country and regional plans, integrated with other providers of security sector assistance at the State Department and in the interagency.

Multilateral Engagement

Building new and strengthening existing partnerships is a cornerstone of this Administration's counterterrorism policy. The United States cannot address the threat alone and the UN and other multilateral bodies have resources and expertise that we need to do a better job of leveraging.

With our funding support and guidance, we are getting the UN and regional bodies to focus on practical projects that target critical issues and countries. For example, the UN is bringing together national practitioners from key countries to share experiences and identify best practices in the prosecution and rehabilitation of terrorists. It is also about to embark on a two-year project that will provide much needed counterterrorism training to judges, prosecutors, and parliamentarians in Yemen.

S/CT has been working to develop a new multilateral counterterrorism initiative, which we believe would not only be an important step forward but would address a significant gap in the international counterterrorism architecture: the lack of a central, reliable inter-governmental platform that allows policymakers and practitioners from different regions to engage on a sustained basis on various counterterrorism issues. I would be happy to brief you further, in private, on this important initiative which has strong support from both the White House and Secretary Clinton.

All of this work goes on in the context of vigorous diplomatic engagement. We have formal bilateral counterterrorism consultations with numerous countries. Among them are Australia, Canada, China, Israel, Egypt, Japan, Pakistan, Algeria, Russia, and India; these consultations have strengthened our counterterrorism partnerships so we can complement one another's efforts in pursuit of a comprehensive approach to our common challenges. And, for example, within the U.S.-Pakistan Strategic Dialogue, I co-chair a working group on law enforcement and counterterrorism efforts that is working on issues ranging from prosecutorial training to border security. In addition, we regularly consult with a broader range of countries to help build their political will and capacity to take effective action against terrorists.

While AQ and its affiliates are our highest priority in our diplomatic engagement on terrorism-related issues, Hamas and Hizballah remain a major focus as well. Both are capable and dangerous terrorist organizations that continue to play destabilizing roles in the Middle East. Both are aggressively building their stockpile of weapons and these organizations are increasing their lethal capabilities, which pose a serious threat to broader regional stability. In our bilateral engagement, we regularly press countries to take action on any Hamas and Hizballah presence and activities taking place in their country. Given that Hamas and Hizballah operate well beyond Gaza and Lebanon, respectively, we have many opportunities to raise these issues. In some cases, we have publicly called out countries for the support they are providing, as we did last year with Syria when

we discovered that they were facilitating the transfer of SCUD missiles to Hizballah. More often we do so quietly through bilateral channels, as we have over the past year with our European allies, whom we have been pressing to crack down on Hamas fundraising, since Europe remains an important source of funds for the group. We've asked the Europeans to take action, particularly against Hamas fundraising fronts, at both the EU and member state level. We plan to remain focused on this issue, and will continue to encourage the Europeans to take action.

Before I conclude, I'd like to briefly touch on two other important aspects of S/CT's work:

Designations and Terrorist Financing

A Bureau on Counterterrorism would strengthen both the Department's formulation of USG policy on terrorist financing and its efforts to build foreign governments' counterterrorism finance capacity. Among the instruments the U.S. government wields for increasing the pressure on terrorist groups and individuals are the designations of Foreign Terrorist Organizations and the designation of entities and individuals as Specially Designated global terrorists under E.O. 13224. We have the lead role within the Department in both initiating these actions and working with the UN Security Council to add relevant domestic designations to the 1267 Committee's Consolidated List. The Bureau would continue to certify countries as not fully cooperating with U.S. antiterrorism efforts and also facilitate the listing of State Sponsors of Terrorism.

Coordinating with the Department of Homeland Security

As the effort to secure the homeland from external terrorist threats has become a central part of U.S. foreign policy, the need for coordination between relevant agencies has become a critical challenge to maintaining a unitary foreign policy. The new Counterterrorism Bureau would serve as the counterterrorism/homeland security nexus within the State Department and would lead homeland security policy coordination on cross-cutting issues for State. For example, the Bureau would continue to lead the State Department's close partnership with DHS to develop new screening practices for international air cargo and mail, which involves extensive consultations with the Universal Postal Union, the International Civil Aviation Organization, and our allies overseas. In addition, the Bureau would continue to play a key role within the U.S. government on air passenger security screening procedures. This supports USG efforts to ensure that the public can travel in safety while also promoting the free flow of international commerce and mail. The new Bureau would continue the State Department's lead in

negotiating agreements with foreign governments on the exchange of terrorist screening information to enhance the ability to interdict terrorists.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the threat is formidable but we are making some progress. I firmly believe that countering violent extremism, multilateral engagement, and building local capacity – through our various programs and with our Department and interagency partners – provide us with the tools to make lasting progress in our fight against terrorism. We are requesting your support to make sure that these tools are fully funded at the level requested, especially for building capacity and countering violent extremism. Al-Qa’ida has proven itself a nimble adversary, and in the race to protect the United States and to stay “one step ahead” we should ensure that the tools of civilian power continue to serve National Security interests. This is an enduring challenge. Staying sharp, improving our offense, strengthening our defense and maintaining our intellectual edge – these are all essential. I believe that we are on the right track.