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Expanding Counterterrorism Partnerships:
U.S. Efforts to Tackle the Evolving Terrorist Threat

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Thank you very much for inviting me to speak today. This is clearly an opportune moment to have a discussion about the nature of the terrorism threat, which continues to change and evolve over time, as well as the Administration's overall approach in responding to that threat, which is also taking on new proportions as the outlines of the emerging threat become clearer. The President discussed this in his State of the Union address and earlier public statements, but I hope to further flesh out the nature of the effort and its implications. I note it was also treated in an editorial in the Washington Post on Friday, and there are some interesting discussion points there I hope to cover in my remarks and later in our back and forth.

The global threat environment is considerably different than it was in past, and equally remarkable – if somewhat disturbing – is the pace and dynamism of the changes we have seen. On the positive side of the ledger, the prominence of the threat once posed by al-Qa'ida with its centralized, hierarchical terrorist command structure has now diminished, largely as a result of leadership losses suffered by the AQ core.

However, on the other side of the balance sheet, the past several years have seen the emergence of a more aggressive set of AQ affiliates and like-minded groups. The emergence of these more radical and violent groups is, in most cases, associated with a loss of effective government control, as in Yemen, Syria, Libya, Iraq, and Somalia. Groups that have become active in these areas are mainly localized, but some pose a threat to Western interests in Europe and in the United States, and we take these security concerns very seriously. Lately, the most visible manifestation of terrorism in the Western context has come in the context of so-

called "lone offender attacks," which – as we saw in the case of the terrorist assassinations at the Paris publication *Charlie Hebdo* – may or may not be associated with organized terrorist groups; they may simply be inspired by such groups or their ideological convictions.

The very complexity of addressing this evolving set of terrorist threats, and the need to undertake efforts that span the entire range from security to rule of law to efficacy of governance and pushing back on terrorist messaging in order to effectively combat the growth of these emerging violent extremist groups, requires an expanded approach to our counterterrorism engagement. There is ample discussion and debate – and understandably so – over the use of active U.S. kinetic measures to address terrorism, but the President has emphasized repeatedly that more than ever before, we need to diversify our approach by bringing strong, capable, and diverse partners to the forefront and enlisting their help in the mutually important endeavor of global counterterrorism.

A successful approach to counterterrorism must therefore revolve around partnerships. The vital role that our partners play has become even clearer in recent months with the emergence of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) as a hugely destructive force in Iraq and Syria. We have worked to build an effective anti-ISIL coalition, a coalition that is clearly crucial because the fight against ISIL is not one the U.S. can or should pursue alone. More than sixty partners are contributing to this effort, which is multi-faceted in its goals – not only to stop ISIL's advances on the ground, but to combat the flow of foreign fighters, disrupt ISIL's financial resources, and counteract ISIL's messaging and undermine its appeal, among other objectives. Just last week, Secretary Kerry and UK Foreign Secretary Hammond co-hosted a small group of key partners in London to review our comprehensive efforts and discuss what more we can do together to pursue a comprehensive, Coalition-oriented strategy in the days ahead. This kind of wide-ranging activity can only be undertaken in concert with others in the region and across the globe.

The notion of finding and enabling partners, of course, is not new or limited to the anti-ISIL effort, and indeed many of our most significant counterterrorism successes in the past have come as a result of working together with partners on elements ranging from intelligence to aviation security. But we need partnerships now more than we ever have before.

Effective partnering means identifying those actors overseas – some governmental, some non-governmental, and some multilateral – that can make a difference in this

decisive battle against the most salient terrorist threats confronting the U.S. and U.S. interests. Partners come with a variety of capabilities and varying amounts of political will, so cultivating them often is not just a matter of diplomatic engagement – which the State Department in particular has the lead role in pursuing – but working with them to develop the technical and practical skills needed to combat violent extremism within their borders and beyond.

My bureau at the State Department, newly formed as a bureau and given particular prominence as a result of organizational changes over the past few years, is engaged on all these fronts, using the full range of policy tools from diplomacy to programmatic efforts in order to marshal the right international partners for the most appropriate set of objectives. That work is done collaboratively with many other elements of the U.S. government, ranging from the National Security Council to the Departments of Defense, Homeland Security, Justice and Treasury, as well as the intelligence community. Ensuring the strategic coherence of all our collective efforts is a key part of what we do and remains a central focus as we craft CT strategy into the future.

There is potentially a broad array of partners with whom we can establish or intensify existing relationships on counterterrorism. We can think about partnerships in perhaps five categories, the first composed of those highly capable countries to whom we turn time and again for coordinated action in response to serious threats. The UK, France, and Australia are examples -- though not the only ones -- of these very capable and responsive partners. The leadership of the French in the Sahel region of North Africa and their willingness to send military forces to the area helped roll back the threat of violent extremism in Mali and lessened the threat for the surrounding countries. However, the migration of some of those terrorist elements to Libya means that an ongoing CT effort will be necessary, and will increasingly need to include local partners in the region, as well as the French.

A second group of partners involves regional countries and institutions with localized influence – partners that can project power within their own region to help address the consequences of state failure and the chaos that ensues. In East Africa, this is illustrated by the response of AMISOM, which includes troops from Uganda, Burundi, Ethiopia, Kenya, Djibouti, and Sierra Leone, to the collapse of authority in Somalia. AMISOM has formed the backbone of the effort to push al-Shaabab out of Somalia's major cities and gradually but steadily erode its ability to threaten the government in Mogadishu. Elsewhere, Morocco and Algeria – though unfortunately not generally acting in concert – play extremely influential roles in the Maghreb and Sahel. Jordan is another critical counterterrorism partner with

advanced counterterrorism capabilities and the ability to mobilize and help train third parties in the region. This category of capable, influential local partners can also include multilateral institutions, for example the AU or the GCC, where the potential exists for a greater degree of sustained engagement on counterterrorism efforts.

A third category of counterterrorism partners are those that have demonstrated the political will to work with us but need additional assistance and support to combat the threats they face. Tunisia, Mauritania, Niger, Chad, Bangladesh, and Oman fall into this group, as do a number of other countries in sensitive geographic regions.

A fourth group poses far more challenges, both with regard to the nature of their internal contradictions and their often ambivalent attitude towards cooperation with the United States. Here we are talking about countries that are difficult partners, sometimes for reasons related to serious human rights violations that have exacerbated the terrorist threat or where we may have conflicting definitions of terrorism, and sometimes because these countries may simply harbor doubts about accepting our assistance. Nevertheless, their cooperation remains central to combating the major terrorism challenges we face. With these countries, we need to look for focused areas of cooperation where our interests intersect, bearing in mind the larger policy issues that impact on our counterterrorism collaboration. In those instances where human rights concerns remain an issue, we need to be clear and persistent about the importance of addressing those concerns fully.

Finally, I would note countries like Russia and China, where cooperation has been inconsistent in the past, but where there is, I believe, potential for further development of our CT dialogue.

In addition to the efforts I have described with a variety of governmental partners, we are also expanding our interaction with a range of non-governmental players, which are increasingly critical to combat violent extremism and, in a more profound sense, try to prevent its emergence in the first place. Local NGOs associated with women, youth groups, educators, religious leaders and other community elements can all be valuable partners for us and for their respective governments, and we are encouraging governments to see the value in those relationships and empower such NGOs as critical bridges to affected communities. The Secretary of State highlighted the importance of the prevention aspect of CVE in his remarks at Davos a few days ago, and the White House will

host a meeting next month on Countering Violent Extremism to encourage domestic and international efforts specific to these issues.

Work with governments and NGOs must be amplified through multilateral approaches, as well. In this context, I would point to the work the State Department has done over the past several years to help establish and promote the Global Counterterrorism Forum, a thirty-member organization formed in 2011, whose roster includes all the categories of partners I described earlier, from influential global and regional players to front-line states. And institutions inspired by the GCTF, including the International Institute for Justice and the Rule of Law in Malta, the Hedayah Center for countering violent extremism located in the UAE, and the newly established Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (or GCERF) in Geneva, have helped bring the private sector and civil society more effectively into our CT discussions. The GCERF, which opened its doors a few months ago and which we are supporting vigorously, is a public-private partnership that will make grants to NGOs and community-based elements in key pilot countries where countering violent extremism remains a vital imperative.

The critical role of multilateral institutions was also underscored in our recent efforts to curb the flow of foreign fighters to Iraq and Syria. UN Security Council Resolution 2178, which was adopted this past September in large part as a result of U.S. effort, mandates that all member states act to address this problem by taking specific actions on legislation, information-sharing, law enforcement, border security, and countering violent extremism. We are looking at how we can best leverage the UN, as well as all the other institutions I just mentioned, to advance our top counterterrorism priorities in the future.

Strengthening Partnerships: The Ultimate Purpose

The foreign terrorist fighters issue reminds us that building partnerships is just the means to an end, not an end in itself. Countering the terrorist threat means identifying strengths and weaknesses within vulnerable countries and regions, devising and implementing programs to address critical gaps, and helping our partners deter terrorist operations that may originate from inside or outside their borders. It requires a fundamental effort to build the rule of law, with law enforcement and justice institutions capable of investigating, prosecuting, incarcerating, and where appropriate, rehabilitating and reintegrating terrorists in an accountable and transparent manner, with full respect for human rights and values. And it necessitates a consistent brand of messaging to youth and other affected populations that may be mobilized by extremists.

This is a daunting challenge, but we are positioning ourselves to address it head on. We are seeking appropriate resources from Congress to support the civilian as well as the military side of these counterterror efforts. The civilian aspect is as crucial, if not more so, than the military and security component of building capability among our partners, and can encompass everything from border security and criminal justice elements to programs that aim to stem terrorist recruitment and radicalization. We need to intensify our dialogue on what works and how effectively we can measure the impact of our programs when we approach Congress for these vital resources.

Denying terrorists access to money, resources, and support is another vital component of our counterterrorism partnership strategy. We assist our partners to disrupt terrorist financial flows by creating effective legal frameworks and regulatory regimes, establishing active and capable Financial Intelligence Units, strengthening the investigative skills of law enforcement entities, bolstering prosecutorial and judicial development, and undertaking specific training to build anti-money laundering and counterterrorist financing capacity. We support the placement of Resident Legal Advisors (RLAs) from the U.S. Department of Justice and mentors from the Department of Homeland Security in key partner nations to advise host nation authorities, focusing most heavily on those countries whose financial systems remain vulnerable to exploitation by terrorist groups and their financiers.

We also multi-lateralize our sanctions against foreign terrorist organizations and individuals to the extent possible so they can have the greatest effect globally. We impose restrictions via our own domestic authorities on terrorists' ability to raise funds and travel, and then we amplify the effect of those sanctions by acting through the UN sanctions committees, which helps to garner broad support from the entire UN membership. The UN designation against ISIL, for example, has proven to be an important tool in targeting the flow of finances to the organization by imposing a global asset freeze, travel ban, and arms embargo. Another good example of this kind of effort is one we have pursued in concert with a variety of partners against Lebanese Hizballah. Hizballah has a near global reach, as illustrated by its terrorist plotting in Europe and Southeast Asia, its frontal support for the Asad regime, and its members' and supporters' involvement in large-scale international criminal schemes. To combat Hizballah, we have built important CT relationships with partners in Europe, South America, West Africa, and Southeast Asia. The EU designation of Hizballah's military wing, the sanctions levied against the group by a number of countries, and the prosecutions of Hizballah

members in locales around the world have all dealt significant blows to the organization, and we continue to work collaboratively to expose and counter Hizballah's activities worldwide.

Conclusion

The construct I have outlined -- working with a wide variety of partners to deny terrorists' safe haven, assisting these partners to build counterterrorism capacity, and thereby shrinking the space in which the extremists operate – is in our view critical, but it is equally obvious that this is not a quick fix. The threats we confront are serious and far-reaching, and it will take considerable time and effort to develop the partnerships and institutional components we need to address them. Nevertheless, we believe this is the most effective and sustainable approach to a complex and enduring challenge. As the President has made clear, the U.S. cannot shoulder the global counterterrorism burden on its own. Moving towards a model where we have a broad range of capable governmental, non-governmental, and institutional partners will aid us in comprehensively degrading the threats and, perhaps even more critically, getting ahead of the curve on curbing the growth of violent extremism.

We have many more tools to mobilize, all of which I can discuss in greater detail, but I think I will stop here and take your questions. I appreciate the chance to discuss this with you today and I look forward to hearing your comments.