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CNAS KEYNOTE POLICY ADDRESS
May 3, 2017   9:30 – 10 A.M.
AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY

Good morning. Thank you for the kind introduction, Liz, and for inviting me to join you today. It's truly my honor to be here.

I talk a lot about the threat landscape these days, and I typically describe it as being more challenging and diverse and complicated than ever before.

As we meet here today, the discipline of terrorism prevention is literally evolving and changing beneath our feet every day, and it requires that we must respond with extraordinary agility and flexibility. The counterterrorism work that we were doing 10 years ago or even 3 years ago looks very different from the work we are doing today. And I'm fairly certain that the future holds an even more complicated story to tell, as new threat vectors emerge or take on new forms.

I want to take this opportunity today to discuss three topics. First, I'll start with some thoughts on the terrorism threat landscape that we see from ISIS and al-Qa'ida. Second, I'll say a few works about some areas where we can do a better job tackling the threat of those mobilized to extremist violence here and around the world. And lastly, I'll finish with a few quick words on CT strategy.

So, let's begin with the overall threat.

One doesn't have to look very hard to see how the ISIS threat is manifesting itself in almost every Western nation, well beyond the conflict zone and far removed from the physical caliphate.

That threat continues to take multiple forms, and in broadly general terms, the threat we collectively face falls along a spectrum that ranges from inspired attacks on one end of the spectrum, to enabled attacks somewhere in the middle of the spectrum, and then finishing up with directed attacks on the other end of the spectrum.

At one end, we have inspired attacks. We describe an attack as inspired by a foreign terrorist organization when an individual or cell carries out the operation on a group's behalf or in its name, but without direct support from that group. At the other end, we have directed attacks. A directed attack occurs when a terrorist group provides support

NATIONAL COUNTERTERRORISM CENTER   2017

to all or nearly all facets of an attack—from the training to the target selection to the deployment of operatives. Often we see individuals operate between these two extremes of inspired and directed—in what I would characterize as the "messy middle" of enabled attacks. Enabled attacks are characterized by varying degrees of support to the individual or cell that carries out the attack. For instance, a group might provide an attacker with technical guidance or material support, but the group falls short of controlling the details of the attack.

This changing landscape of attacks has made our efforts to analyze and anticipate the threat we face more difficult, not just for the US, but our allies as well. While progress has been made in shrinking the size of the territory ISIS controls in Iraq and Syria, we know that the group maintains the ability to carry out terrorist attacks far beyond the conflict zone.

The number of arrests and other disruptions we've seen across the globe, while testament to effective intelligence and law enforcement work, also tells us that the global reach of ISIS right now is largely intact, despite the extremely effective work that has been done to degrade ISIS. The group also continues to publish thousands of pieces of official propaganda and to use online mobile apps to organize its supporters and inspire attacks.

All of this underscores our belief that there is not in fact a direct link between ISIS' battlefield position in Iraq and Syria and the group's capacity to conduct external attacks, and it makes clear that battlefield losses alone are insufficient to mitigate the threat from ISIS. Winning on the battlefield in places like Mosul and Raqaa is a necessary but insufficient step in the process of eliminating the ISIS threat to US interests around the world. We need to be patient in terms of expecting return on the investment that we are making with our campaign against ISIS. It is simply going to take longer than we would like to translate victory on the battlefield into a genuine reduction in threat to our citizens.

Now, a separate question that continually arises when we talk about ISIS and the results of coalition pressure inside Iraq and Syria is the future of the thousands of foreign fighters who have traveled there.

At this point in the conflict, we are faced with the challenge of approximately 40,000 foreign terrorist fighters who have traveled from at least 120 countries during the past four years. The good news is that we know that the rate of foreign fighters traveling has steadily declined since its peak in 2014, probably in large part because of the tremendous efforts governments have undertaken to stem this unprecedented flow. In terms of outflows from the conflict zone, we expect the numbers of foreign fighters attempting to depart Syria and Iraq will increase as ISIS continues to lose territory. That seems natural. That said, we think we are unlikely to see a mass exodus, as we expect that many battle-hardened fighters will stay and fight for the caliphate.

But we are concerned about the small minority of fighters who return to their home countries looking to build local networks and plot attacks. Given the size and scope of this problem, even that small minority will continue to test our ability to prevent extremists from traveling to plan or carry out attacks. Volume was initially our chief concern. We were worried about being overwhelmed by this reverse foreign fighter flow. But we have come to realize it is quality that matters, as much or more than quantity, when it comes to foreign fighters returning home. Individuals with specialized skills or a unique ability to mobilize other extremists can pose a significant threat, even if the numbers are less than we envisioned a few years ago.

Here in the U.S., we recognize that partner nations will do much of the heavy lifting when it comes to tackling the flows of foreign fighters out of the conflict zone, and that U.S. persons make up a very small portion of the total number of people who have traveled to Syria and Iraq. But even if the volume is relatively small, we must remain vigilant in identifying and tracking these individuals to mitigate the threat they pose to our Homeland. That will require putting in place the legal frameworks and institutions necessary to interdict, arrest, prosecute, and incarcerate foreign fighters before they build new networks, or join existing ones, in their destinations.

It is also worth me saying in this forum—as focused as we are on addressing the challenge ISIS presents—al-Qa'ida has never stopped being a primary counterterrorism priority for the CT community in the United States. In fact, not a day has gone by in my entire tenure—at NCTC and in the other senior CT-related positions I've held—where our emphasis on al-Qa'ida has been anything less than a top priority. And as a result, our resources are stretched across the globe to ensure that we don't miss a critical piece of intelligence.

In this resource constrained environment, understanding the threat al-Qa'ida represents continues to require a significant analytic effort and I find that with all of the focus on ISIS, I need to explain more publicly sometimes why we are still concerned about al-Qa'ida.

CT pressure during the last decade has significantly degraded al-Qa'ida's leadership and cadre in Afghanistan and Pakistan. That's the good news part of the story. Because of this pressure, al-Qa'ida has shifted from its traditional Pakistan-based leadership structure that relied on a centralized shura to make decisions to a more geographically dispersed network of affiliate and veteran al-Qa'ida leaders.

At the same time, al-Qaʻida's larger network has also evolved and proven resilient despite a range of setbacks. These setbacks include the rapid loss of multiple senior leaders as well as the rise of ISIS as an ideological rival. Al-Qaʻida's global network includes five official affiliates, which are recognized by its leadership and active across parts of Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. It's worth noting that despite the rise of ISIS, none of these AQ affiliates have actually defected to join ISIS's self-declared caliphate since ISIS broke from al-Qaʻida in 2013. Think about that for a moment. That's the mark of a resilient organization. Even as ISIS has seized control of the global terrorism stage, the various AQ groups have also managed to sustain recruitment, to maintain local relationships, and to derive sufficient resources to enable their operations. So, while ISIS dominates the headlines, we in the Counterterrorism Community see this evolution of al-Qaʻida as evidence of a strikingly resilient and capable organization.

As I wrap up my overview of the threat environment, I want to talk about what I see as the most immediate threat here in the US, and that is homegrown violent extremism. I've outlined the dynamic threat environment we face from ISIS and al-Qaʻida and their global networks, but here in the US, homegrown violent extremists present the most immediate and unpredictable threat. During the past ten years, HVE attacks have led to nearly 100 deaths and hundreds of injuries in the US. On any given day, if God forbid we were to suffer an attack here, my first thought— before we had any hard information—would be that an HVE was likely responsible.

We have seen a dramatic increase in the pool of potential HVEs, and the FBI is in some stage of investigating potential HVEs across all 50 states. In the past, we have seen that ideology often played an important role in radicalization and in maintaining the cohesiveness of a violent extremist group. Today, however, we believe that the current generation of HVEs probably has a more limited knowledge of extremist ideology in comparison to the generation of U.S. extremists active in the early 2000s. Many HVEs now gravitate toward violence and the adventure of fighting to defend ISIS's caliphate rather than absorbing the nuances of jihadist ideology to justify violence. We've also had to acknowledge that there are a number of factors at play when an individual becomes a terrorist, that these factors are often highly individualized, and that there probably aren't simple "antidotes" or "vaccinations" that can be applied at scale across our population. It's much more complicated than that.

Now, given the complexity of the threats we face, I'd like to talk about some of the strategies we're using to counter them. One of the things in the intelligence field that we do well—and are always continuing to improve and build upon—is collecting intelligence and sharing it with those who need it in order to prevent terrorists from succeeding.

We continue to be aggressive and creative in collecting intelligence and using every available tool. We share intelligence across our various national security organizations in a very structured way, and our willingness and capacity to share intelligence with our international partners continues to expand rapidly. We collect more, we share more, and we do it more rapidly and with fewer impediments than any of us would have thought possible 15 years ago, or even five years ago.

We also do more to share that intelligence outside the federal government with the full array of state, municipal, and local law enforcement professionals who serve as our first line of defense against terrorism in the Homeland. Not a day goes by where there isn't some sort of substantive exchange of terrorism-related information between NCTC, FBI or DHS with our non-federal partners. Because of this level of information sharing, I still believe we hold the upper hand over our terrorist enemies, even as the challenge of collecting the intelligence we need gets harder and harder.

We certainly know that al-Qa'ida and ISIS continue to aspire to carry out significant attacks on US soil, but they are challenged to do so. The very fact that both groups call upon lone actors to commit acts of violence on their behalf speaks to the difficulty they perceive in using a traditional terrorist group cell structure to carry out a Homeland attack.

Given these groups' reliance on radicalizing individuals here in the Homeland, I'd like to talk a bit more about what the US government is doing to counter violent extremism, or "CVE." As a federal government, we've taken steps to organize and resource our efforts to counter violent extremism more effectively, under the leadership of the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of Justice.

And my view is that we have been successful in some very specific cases at helping provide communities with the information and tools they need to identify potential extremists and to engage with them before they reach the point of becoming an actual terrorist. This engagement can hopefully provide an "off-ramp" that takes an individual off the pathway to becoming a terrorist.

We at NCTC accomplish this mainly through a series of Community Awareness Briefings we produce and present in cooperation with the CVE Task Force and the Department of Homeland Security's Office of Community Partnerships. The briefing raises awareness about violent extremists' recruitment techniques and enables communities to recognize the signs of radicalization and to catalyze an intervention to prevent individuals from mobilizing to criminal activity or violence.

In addition, NCTC has organized and facilitated Community Resilience Exercise in cities around the country. This is a table-top exercise that brings together law enforcement and community members to run through a scenario of an individual radicalizing to violence. The exercise promotes trust building between communities and officials and enables them to develop an action plan for dealing with the threat of extremism in their immediate environment.

This is all good work—work that my NCTC colleagues are doing and I am very proud of that work. But the reality is we've got to do more. The scale at which we undertake these efforts is too limited, and it's certainly not sized to tackle the kind of problem we are experiencing here in the Homeland today. And we do know this: CVE has positive impact in the places where we have tried it, even if it's difficult to measure outputs with traditional metrics. How exactly do you prove that you dissuaded somebody from carrying out a terrorist act? But CVE expands the counterterrorism toolkit beyond the hard power tools of disruption, and to my mind, that is clearly a good thing.

In addition to our prevention work with communities, we need to counter our adversaries' successful use of social media platforms to advance their propaganda goals, raise funds, recruit, coordinate travel and attack plans, and facilitate operations. Last year, ISIS published over 6,000 pieces of official propaganda. This vast amount of information, easily available on social media, has been a large factor in individual radicalization. Our future work must focus on denying our adversaries the capability to spread their messages to at-risk populations that they can reach through the use of these platforms.

And finally, we are always looking for ways to enhance our capabilities is in identities management. Specifically, I'm referring to NCTC's Terrorist Identities Datamart Environment, or TIDE—the US government's repository of data about known and suspected terrorists.

It's the most tactically important thing we do in the CT world—figure out who the bad guys are, who they are connected with, and track their movements. We have a largely name-based identity management system, and while names will always be an important part of determining identity, we need to focus increasingly on biometric information. We currently share biometric data across the IC and with international, state and local partners to ensure various screening agencies and systems identify and disrupt known or suspected terrorists. However, NCTC, along with the watchlisting and screening community, continues to explore new avenues in collecting and sharing biometric information. This includes traditional mechanisms like face, fingerprint and iris data as well as non-traditional biometric data, such as DNA, voice and handwriting.

I'll now wrap up with just 1 or 2 quick thoughts on Counterterrorism strategies. After all, that's a good portion of what you're here to talk about today. Forums, such as the ones that you have convened here today, help us all better understand our strengths and capabilities, as well as our weaknesses and our vulnerabilities, as we work together to keep our country safe and secure. Though we are dealing with a more challenging threat environment than ever before, we are also doing more—and doing it all much better—than ever before to keep our citizens safe and secure. I really do believe that.

But on the question of CT strategy and how we define our strategic objectives, I'll just leave you with one thought. As I look back on my efforts to help develop CT strategies—from my time in the Bush White House, the Obama White House, and today as part of President Trump's Administration, the lesson learned that I take away from my involvement is simply this: We should all bring a good amount of humility to the project of developing CT strategies touching on conflict zones like Iraq and Syria, Afghanistan, Yemen, Somalia and the Sahel.

I say that because as powerful and capable as the United States is—and we have military, law enforcement and intelligence capabilities that surpass those of any other country on earth—it's still quite difficult to deliver outcomes in these conflict zones such that the terrorism threat will be eliminated. We have it within our power to play very effective offense and very effective defense, we can do great work in building partner capacity, and as I said earlier, we are sharing intel more rapidly and more effectively than ever to enable partner action.

But truly altering the environment that gives rise to the terrorist threat we face—that's a much more formidable task. More resources are required, more time is required, and more patience is required. All one needs do is look at the persistence of conflict in South Asia, the Levant, East Africa and North Africa to understand the point I am making.

And so the unsolicited advice I would offer to anybody engaged in CT strategy development is this: Keep these underlying fundamentals in mind as you set forth to articulate new and bold strategic objectives, or to set timelines for the achievement of those objectives.

I truly do feel that we hold the upper hand against our terrorist adversaries, but it also remains true that terrorism emanating from conflict zones around the world will be a persistent feature of the national security landscape, for as long as I serve in this position and likely for the tenure of my successor as well. And probably for my successor's successor as well.

Thank you again for having me here today. I will stop there, and I'm happy to take some questions.