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**2015-2016 Bureau of Counterterrorism “Partnership Concept”:
Arabian Peninsula**

Summary:

Violent extremists operating and fundraising in the Arabian Peninsula region¹ continue to pose a danger to U.S. and allied interests. Despite leadership losses, the highly capable al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) exploits the current chaos in Yemen to retain a safehaven and gather new recruits. Additionally, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) draws recruits from the peninsula and conducted attacks in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia in 2015, increasing regional concerns about ISIL’s operational capacity outside of Iraq and Syria. Iranian groups, such as the Quds Force, are engaged in destabilizing activities in the region, as are [REDACTED] including Lebanese Hizballah (LH). Additionally, a variety of global extremist groups, including South Asian groups such as al-Qa`ida and the Haqqani Network, continue to [REDACTED] in the region.

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While governments in the region are increasingly committed to addressing terrorism and some have significant capabilities in that regard, their approaches, willingness to cooperate with the United States, and capabilities vary. For example, several regional partners have critical gaps in their ability to detect and respond to attacks and investigate and prosecute terrorism cases.

Broadly, the Bureau of Counterterrorism (CT) will focus efforts on countering AQAP, ISIL, and Iranian and Iranian-linked groups in region. Recognizing ongoing challenges in Yemen, including the suspension of U.S. embassy operations enacted on February 11, 2015, [REDACTED]

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CT, working with the Departments of Defense, Treasury, and other interagency partners, will pursue diplomatic engagements, programs, and other activities to address critical gaps and advance the following strategic goals:

1. Contain the regional threat posed by AQAP and ISIL and reduce the transit of foreign terrorist fighters by strengthening information-sharing and improving local law enforcement capacity to secure borders and points of entry [REDACTED]
2. Counter violent extremist radicalization and messaging in the Gulf region through diplomatic engagement and exchanges of best practices on detecting and countering violent extremism, including online engagement.

¹ For purposes of this paper, the term “Arabian Peninsula” refers to Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen.

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3. Curb terrorist financing from the Gulf region through (1) assisting in the strengthening of legal regimes and the implementation of existing counter terrorism legislation to more effectively freeze assets, impose travel bans and export controls, and monitor and share information on terrorist financiers; (2) [REDACTED] (3) providing training for and increasing information sharing with Financial Intelligence Units (FIUs); and (4) denying and reducing the benefits of kidnappings for ransom (KFR) payments.
4. As conditions permit, restrict AQAP's and ISIL's freedom of movement and operations in Yemen through support for the reconstitution of basic police and judicial capabilities to arrest and detain terrorism suspects, investigate and prosecute terrorism cases, respond to KFRs, engage vulnerable communities, and rehabilitate violent extremists.
5. Constrain the ability of Iranian and Iranian-linked groups to operate and plot attacks in the Arabian Peninsula through diplomatic engagement, sanctions, information-sharing, and law enforcement cooperation.

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Strategic Context and Gaps:

AQAP continues to pose a significant terrorist threat in Yemen as well as to the broader region and U.S. homeland. In recent years, the United States has provided significant assistance to support Yemen's political transition and build its capacity to counter terrorism. While some gains against AQAP have been achieved, challenging political and security dynamics in Yemen have prevented greater progress. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

While AQAP has faced some setbacks over recent years, it continues to operate freely and contend for territorial influence in parts of Yemen. AQAP has taken advantage of the political crisis and is capitalizing on current political and security developments. While the Houthis are staunchly opposed to AQAP, the Yemeni security infrastructure remains fractured and AQAP may seek to exploit the ongoing insecurity and regional tensions. For example, some southern tribal actors – feeling threatened by Houthi aggression – are joining forces with AQAP in order to protect their communities and territory. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] However, once the political and security environment improves, it will be essential, in conjunction with international and other U.S. government partners, to reconstitute the Yemeni police and justice sectors.

The rise of two ISIL branches—in Saudi Arabia and Yemen—have also affected the Gulf region, and a series of ISIL-linked attacks in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia in 2015 underscore the group's potential to increase sectarian unrest and threaten our interests. Foreign terrorist fighters from the region have traveled to Syria and Iraq to fight with ISIL, posing a significant challenge for their governments as they return home with new skills and networks and potentially hardened violent ideology. Gulf countries are taking steps to address the foreign fighter challenge, in line with UN Security Council Resolution 2178, but gaps remain in terms of border security, airport

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security, and information-sharing. Several countries in the Gulf are also playing lead roles in countering ISIL's messaging and recruitment of foreign terrorist fighters, as well as contributing to ongoing military efforts to defeat ISIL.

The Gulf is also central to efforts to counter violent extremist influences and foreign terrorist financing more broadly. [REDACTED]

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Finally, LH and other Iranian and Iranian-backed groups continue to operate in the region. Many Gulf countries are concerned about these groups and seek to counter their influence, [REDACTED]

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CT Strategic Goals:

Working closely with other U.S. government partners, CT will develop and pursue new programs, activities, and diplomatic engagements that advance the following strategic goals:

1. **Contain the regional threat posed by AQAP and ISIL and reduce the transit of foreign terrorist fighters by strengthening information-sharing and improving local law enforcement capacity to secure borders and points of entry in** [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] other countries on the Arabian Peninsula. While CT programs and activities in Yemen remain limited, we will focus on bolstering regional efforts to contain the regional threat posed by AQAP, including degrading broader support networks for AQAP. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] CT will also work to enhance aviation security across the region, especially to combat the threat to airlines that AQAP poses. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] CT will also seek to strengthen information-sharing and diplomatic cooperation among countries in the Arabian Peninsula in responding to Yemen-based terrorist threats. CT will continue to pursue designations and sanctions of AQAP senior leaders and AQAP foreign terrorist fighters in an effort to raise public awareness of the threats posed by these individuals and to augment law enforcement efforts to curb AQAP's terrorist activities.

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2. **Counter violent extremist radicalization and messaging in the Gulf region through diplomatic engagement and exchanges of best practices on detecting and countering violent extremism, including online engagement.** The February 2015 White House CVE Summit helped to catalyze global attention to the need for an expanded tool kit to counter violent extremist radicalization and recruitment. Building on the White House CVE Summit action agenda, CT seeks to support strategic communications efforts by governments in the Arabian Peninsula to counter AQAP's and ISIL's messaging and recruitment. CT seeks to utilize multilateral initiatives, through the GCTF and [REDACTED] for example, to raise awareness about CVE best practices and initiatives in the region. In this regard, CT also encourages efforts by countries in the region to elevate the role of credible and authentic religious voices to counter ISIL's messaging and other violent extremist narratives. CT also hopes to expand our engagement and better align our approaches to CVE, both offline and online, including moving closer on our views on respect for human rights such as freedom of expression. Where appropriate, CT will also promote media campaigns and community engagement in the region to counter AQAP's messaging and recruitment. Finally, CT seeks to promote and support efforts to rehabilitate and reintegrate violent extremists, including returning foreign fighters.
3. **Curb terrorist financing from the Gulf region through (1) assisting in the strengthening of legal regimes and the implementation of existing counter terrorism legislation to more effectively freeze assets, impose travel bans and export controls, and monitor and share information on terrorist financiers; (2) providing support for government-NGO-private sector partnerships, (3) providing training for and increasing information sharing with FIUs, and (4) denying and reducing the benefits of KFR payments.** Despite taking some action, governments in the Gulf continue to face challenges in monitoring and stopping financial flows to terrorist organizations. To address these challenges, working closely with Treasury, CT will continue to press and provide assistance to host countries to strengthen legal regimes and more effectively implement existing counterterrorism legislation to freeze assets, impose travel bans, including through the use of domestic designations and UN sanctions. CT will also continue to press governments in the region to share information on the activities of known terrorist financiers, including with the United States and with regional neighbors. In addition to governments, CT will intentionally involve non-governmental and private sector organizations, who are critically important in identifying financial vulnerabilities and preventing terrorists from abusing them. As one nascent line of effort, CT will continue to invest in workshops and activities to promote "good giving" in the charitable sector. CT will also seek to assist governments in strengthening export and border controls to prevent bulk cash smuggling to AQAP in Yemen and strengthening FIUs – in particular, helping paper-based FIUs transition to more efficient computer software. CT funds a Department of Justice Resident Legal Advisor (RLA) in [REDACTED] and is deploying a second RLA in the region to [REDACTED] given the significant terrorist financing threats in the Gulf.
4. **As conditions permit, restrict AQAP's and ISIL's freedom of movement and operations in Yemen through support for the reconstitution of basic police and judicial capabilities to arrest and detain terrorism suspects, investigate and**

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prosecute terrorism cases in fair and accountable proceedings, respond to KFRs, engage with vulnerable communities, and rehabilitate and reintegrate violent extremists. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] As political and security conditions permit, in partnership with INL and other donors, CT will renew programs to strengthen Yemen's counterterrorism legal frameworks and build basic criminal justice sector capabilities to arrest and detain terrorism suspects and to investigate and prosecute terrorism cases in fair and accountable proceedings. CT will also seek to support programming in targeted governorates of Yemen to reduce AQAP's appeal and support base, including, where possible, by fostering relationships with and linkages to central and subnational authorities as necessary and appropriate.

5. **Constrain the ability of Iranian and Iranian-linked groups to operate and plot attacks in the Arabian Peninsula through diplomatic engagement, sanctions, information-sharing, and law enforcement cooperation.** [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] . Through diplomatic engagement and technical assistance, CT will seek to strengthen information-sharing, sanctions, and overall law enforcement cooperation to counter activities by Iranian and Iranian-linked groups in the region.

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Annex: Recent and Ongoing CT and Other State Programs**Current CT Programs:**

Over recent years, CT has funded major programs in the following areas:

- Law Enforcement/Border/Airport/Maritime Security:** CT-funded programs in [] have focused heavily on building investigative capacity, particularly with regard to post-blast forensics and use of explosives, and have been implemented by subject matter experts from the Department of Justice and DS/ATA. Program efforts in [] have been focused on building investigative capacity, airport security, maritime interdiction of terrorism, critical incident response, border control management, bulk cash smuggling, and asset forfeiture and anti-money laundering. Key implementers have included DS/ATA, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the Department of Justice (DOJ), and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). CT has funded DS/ATA training for [] law enforcement officials on border security, airport security, maritime security, investigations, and general leadership and management. Enhanced border security engagement also ties to the Terrorist Interdiction Program, through which CT provides select partners in the region with the capability to secure their ports of entry against known or suspected terrorists attempting to enter or depart the country. The State Department and the Terrorist Screening Center (TSC) have also engaged [] on proposals to share watch-listing information and strengthen border screening capacity.
- Countering Violent Extremist Messaging:** In [] CT has supported a local grant focused on law enforcement CVE training and partnerships for community engagement. CT has also funded another small local grant to support civil society leaders in [] in advancing CVE initiatives. We continue to support regional engagement and programming through []
- Strengthening CT Legal Frameworks and AML-CTF Mechanisms and Capacity:** CT funds two DOJ RLAs in [] to engage governments in the region on issues related to combatting terrorism financing, financial crimes and money laundering, building sanctions and designations regimes, strengthening prosecutorial and judicial capacity, and implementing rule of law-based counterterrorism policies and procedures. CT has funded technical assistance and training for FIU capacity building, cross border financial investigations training for law enforcement officials, and advanced financial investigations training. Key training partners have included DHS, FBI, the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), and Treasury. CT has also funded UNODC to assist the Government of Yemen to support the development of rule of law based legal regimes and criminal justice sector actors.
- GCC "Good Giving" in the Charitable Sector:** In coordination with our RLAs in the region and Treasury counterparts, CT will conduct a workshop in [] focused on the nexus between charitable giving, financing of terrorism, and countering violent extremism in partnership with the GCC. []

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- Rehabilitation and Reintegration: CT has worked closely with Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and other countries in the region on best practices and initiatives to strengthen rehabilitation and reintegration of violent extremists. Prior to the recent political and security developments, CT was funding United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI) to begin developing a new rehabilitation and reintegration initiative in Yemen.

Related Department of State Programs:

- Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI): Prior to the recent conflict in Yemen, MEPI programming in that country supported civil society and political party development, entrepreneurship and job placement training, and civic outreach, education, and advocacy related to the political transition. [REDACTED] B7(E)
[REDACTED] B7(F)
- DRL: Historically, DRL has funded a project [REDACTED] to raise awareness of transitional justice programs and to set up community-based justice sector programs across [REDACTED] B7(F)
- INL: INL funded training for [REDACTED] law enforcement and corrections officials, attorneys, judges, prosecutors, and other judicial officials on criminal justice sector reform. They have also funded training for [REDACTED] police on key strategic planning capacity gaps within the Ministry of Interior, including internal planning, human resources, [REDACTED] B7(E)
[REDACTED] B7(F)
- ISN: EXBS had a robust [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
- CSCC: In [REDACTED] CSCC has a translation project for video comparing experiences of violent organizations (gangs versus terrorist groups), as well as a blogging project to promote national unity in [REDACTED] while targeting violent extremists on both ends of the spectrum. [REDACTED] B7(F)
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- USAID: USAID does not engage in CVE programs in [REDACTED] but USAID has funded activities in [REDACTED] to strengthen and increase interaction between youth and community actors (e.g., [REDACTED]) B7(F)
[REDACTED], and to provide youth with resources to positively affect their communities B7(F)

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