

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIEDRELEASE IN PART
B7(E),B7(F)**2015-2016 Bureau of Counterterrorism Partnership Concept:
Iraq, Syria, and the Levant****Summary:**

(SBU) The Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIL), the al-Qa'ida affiliate Nusrah Front, and other extremist groups continue to control territory in Syria and Western Iraq, including key population centers in Raqqa, Northern Aleppo, Anbar Province, Mosul, and the Baiji Refinery. Over the past year, Coalition military efforts against ISIL (Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR)) have worked to defeat ISIL at its core, and in some cases have recaptured territory from ISIL. However, ISIL continues to be a draw for foreign terrorist fighters from around the world as it spreads its message through social media outlets across the globe; ISIL has also inspired the emergence of several affiliates and a number of lone offender attacks around the world.

(SBU) More than a year after the election of a new Prime Minister, Iraq continues to face challenges with growing violence, a humanitarian crisis, sectarian divisions, and an economic downturn aggravated by dropping oil prices. The porous borders in Iraq, Syria, and the Levant region – as well as other regions around the world – allow for the easy flow of fighters, weapons, and explosives to ISIL. Lebanese Hizballah (LH) also continues to play a key role in the conflict in Syria, as their fighters support the Asad regime and continue to fight both the moderate opposition and extremist groups. LH draws support and financing from its global networks.

(SBU) The Bureau of Counterterrorism (CT) undertakes efforts around the world to stem the flow of foreign terrorist fighters to Iraq and Syria and to disrupt global terrorist financing networks associated with ISIL and LH.¹

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(U) Over the next year, working closely with other U.S. government partners and international coalition partners, CT will pursue diplomatic engagements, capacity-building programs, and other activities in the Levant region to advance the following strategic goals:

1. (U) Deter and reduce the movement of foreign terrorist fighters and illicit goods, including weapons and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and their precursors, into and out of Iraq and Syria by strengthening border security and information sharing capabilities.
2. (U) Disrupt ISIL and the Nusrah Front's financial and facilitation networks by building the capacity and cooperation of financial regulatory institutions, law enforcement agencies, and prosecutors in the region, and by the use of designations and sanctions.

¹ For more details on these efforts, see CT's 2015-2016 Partnership Concepts for Europe, North Africa, the Sahel region of Africa, South and Central Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Western Hemisphere.

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3. (U) Counter ISIL and other extremist group's recruitment and radicalization in the Levant region by enhancing community engagement and counter-messaging by civil society and law enforcement.
4. (U) Weaken the financial and support networks of LH and other Iranian proxies, partners and allies in the region by promoting information-sharing, sanctions and designations, and cooperation among law enforcement agencies and prosecutors, [REDACTED]
5. (U) Strengthen the capacity and leadership of key countries in the region, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] to promote regional cooperation and capacity-building against evolving threats.

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B7(F)**Strategic Context and Gaps:**

(SBU) Iraq, Syria, and the broader Levant region have witnessed a significant surge of terrorist activity in the past several years, primarily as a result of ISIL's seizure of large areas of Iraq and Syria, al-Nusrah Front's continued presence in Syria, and the ongoing, destabilizing conflict in Syria. In 2015, the resulting security vacuum and humanitarian crisis in Iraq continued to present new challenges to the Iraqi government and exacerbated existing ethno-sectarian grievances. ISIL has made some advances within Iraq and Syria, maintaining the city of Raqqa as its regional "capital," even while suffering setbacks in other areas, such as in northern Syria. Lebanon and Jordan both experienced increased internal stresses as a result of the continued instability in Syria, ISIL's expansion, and large refugee flows. Syria and Iraq face significant gaps and challenges in securing their borders and managing continued refugee and foreign fighter flows.

(SBU) The Global Counter-ISIL Coalition, a partnership of over 60 nations built by the United States to degrade and ultimately defeat ISIL, marked its one-year anniversary in September 2015. Throughout the year, the Coalition carried out initiatives and activities along its five lines of effort: conducting military operations in Iraq and Syria, supporting the stabilization of liberated areas in Iraq; disrupting the flow of foreign terrorist fighters; cutting off ISIL's access to financing and funding; and exposing ISIL's true nature (ideological de-legitimization and denying ISIL a stable platform (Internet/social media). The Coalition also works closely with the UN to address the humanitarian crisis.

(SBU) During 2015, air strikes by the Counter-ISIL Coalition helped slow certain ISIL advances in Iraq and Syria. Airstrikes enabled local forces in Syria to retake ISIL-held towns such as Tal Abyad, and degraded ISIL's infrastructure and leadership. The U.S. government began its advise-and-assist program in Iraq this year and its train and equip program in Syria, training Iraqis and Syrians to act as ground forces and stabilizers within their countries. Despite Coalition successes during 2015, many challenges remain, and ISIL retains significant capacity and territorial control in Iraq and Syria.

(SBU) ISIL continues to attract thousands of individuals from around the world to travel to Iraq and Syria and fight on its behalf. The United States is working with partners around the world to address the radicalization and recruitment as well as transit of foreign terrorist fighters, in line with UN Security Council Resolution 2178.

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(SBU) ISIL continues to derive income from a range of sources, such as oil smuggling, kidnapping for ransom, looting, extortion, illegal "taxation," antiquities theft and smuggling, and foreign donations. The United States is using sanctions to ensure that banks, companies, and citizens across the world do not engage in financial transactions with ISIL. UN sanctions, including the UN Security Council 1267/1989 al-Qa'ida Sanctions regime, also obligate member states to freeze assets, ban travel, and embargo arms from al-Qa'ida-associated individuals and entities. However, continuing challenges include applying international pressure to counter ISIL's economic sustainment, refining our understanding of how ISIL has adapted to the changing financial landscape, and further targeting ISIL's financial activities.

(SBU) The United States is also working to combat kidnapping for ransom (KFR) by ISIL and other extremist groups in the Levant region. The new Hostage Recovery Fusion Cell and Special Presidential Envoy for Hostage Affairs will place a priority on preventing hostage-taking and facilitating the safe recovery of hostages.

(SBU) Despite the 2015 Iran Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), the United States remains concerned about Iranian support for terrorism throughout the region, specifically through its Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-Qods Force (IRGC-QF) and its ally, LH. Over the last few years, LH, a Shia militant organization implicated in numerous terrorist attacks including against U.S. citizens, has been engaged in military activities in Syria in support of the Assad regime. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] The State Department is working with a number of international partners [REDACTED] [REDACTED] to identify and curtail criminal schemes which enable LH's terrorist plotting and military operations. LH remains the most capable, deep-seated, and prominent terrorist group in Lebanon, enjoying popular support among segments of the Lebanese population. LH's involvement in Syria has brought the spillover effects of the conflict into Lebanon, with increased violence between ISIL and other Sunni extremist groups and LH in the north and the Beqaa Valley.

(SBU) In the Palestinian territories, Iran continues to provide weapons, training, and funding to Hamas and other Palestinian terrorist groups, including the Palestine Islamic Jihad (PIJ) and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLP-GC). These Palestinian militant groups have been involved in the deaths of a number of Israelis from attacks originating in Gaza and the West Bank.

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CT Strategic Goals:

(U) Working alongside other U.S. government and international coalition partners, CT will seek to develop and pursue diplomatic engagements, capacity-building programs, and other activities that advance the following strategic goals:

1. **Deter and reduce the movement of foreign terrorist fighters and illicit goods, including weapons and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and their precursors, into and out of Iraq and Syria by strengthening border security and information sharing capabilities.** ISIL continues to gain momentum by attracting and using foreign terrorist fighters. ISIL and Nusrah Front exploit weak borders in the region to move people and material (e.g.,

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explosives, weapons, oil, antiquities, and bulk cash) into and out of Iraq and Syria. Through training courses, exercises, regional workshops, advisory support, and the provision of equipment, CT seeks to assist governments [redacted] to increase their capacity to secure their own borders and disrupt the flow of foreign terrorist fighters, weapons, and other illicit goods (e.g., bulk cash, antiquities) within a rule of law framework. CT seeks to work with partners to increase the exchange of terrorist screening information and utilize technology to identify and track movement of terrorists across borders. CT promotes stronger legal and policy frameworks to enable cooperation, watch-listing, and information-sharing by law enforcement agencies, especially involving air and land travel within the Levant.

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2. Disrupt ISIL and the Nusrah Front's financial and facilitation networks by building the capacity and cooperation of financial regulatory institutions, law enforcement agencies, and prosecutors in the region, and by the use of designations and sanctions.

Strengthening laws to criminalize the financing of terrorism is central to robust CT legal frameworks. CT seeks to build regional partners' capacity to conduct investigations and prosecutions in a rule of law framework, focusing particularly on prosecutions of individuals involved in financing terrorism and other material support for terrorism, including online. Capacity-building will focus on improving financial intelligence capabilities, cross-border interdiction, and asset forfeiture. Additional technical assistance will concentrate on improving key partners' capability to prevent terrorist organizations from syphoning funds from formal and informal financial systems and on deriving profit from kidnapping for ransom (KFR). CT-funded Resident Legal Advisors (RLAs), Intermittent Legal Advisors (ILAs), and other subject matter experts will develop programming to help key partners better deter, detect, and freeze the funds of terrorists or financiers by enhancing training for central banks, financial intelligence units (FIUs), financial crime investigators, regulatory officials, and sanctions and designations authorities. Furthermore, working with multilateral partners, CT will provide technical assistance training to law enforcement officials focused on protecting human rights while countering terrorism and upholding the rule of law.

3. Counter ISIL and other extremist group's recruitment and radicalization in the Levant region by enhancing community engagement and counter-messaging by civil society and law enforcement. The White House CVE Summit has raised awareness of the need for an expanded tool set to counter violent extremism and the narratives that ISIL and the Nusrah Front are using to draw fighters to the conflicts in Iraq and Syria. ISIL commands, as well as compels, sympathy and support in Iraq, Syria, and the Levant region. [redacted]

[redacted] Denying ISIL a stable platform is also part of exposing ISIL's true nature, which requires measures to counter ISIL's sophistication and adaptability in using the Internet and social media for propaganda and for recruitment.²

Finally, to prevent susceptible youth from becoming radicalized, [redacted]

² CT has led the development of the first U.S. policy on countering the use of the Internet for terrorist purposes and is working with the interagency to develop policy on U.S. Government outreach to private sector service providers in cases of objectionable content online.

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4. **Weaken the financial and support networks of LH and other Iranian proxies, partners and allies in the region by promoting information-sharing, sanctions and designations, and cooperation among law enforcement agencies and prosecutors,** [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Through diplomatic and technical engagement, CT seeks to promote information-sharing, sanctions, and designations, and law enforcement cooperation to address LH's activities in the Levant. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] CT also seeks to strengthen information-sharing, technical exchanges, and law enforcement cooperation with countries in the region to disrupt terrorist plots and counter Iran's destabilizing activities.

5. **Strengthen the capacity and leadership of key countries in the region, to promote regional cooperation and capacity-building against evolving threats.** [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] In an effort to capitalize on existing training infrastructure and subject matter expertise, CT will explore opportunities with [REDACTED] focused on how [REDACTED] can help lead regional training efforts, [REDACTED]

(SBU) These regional CT Bureau strategic objectives contribute to achieving the State-USAID Joint Regional Strategy for Near East Affairs objective C.2: "U.S. bilateral and multilateral partnerships in the region disrupt terrorist networks and reduce terrorist attacks"; objective C.3: "The United States and its partners build stronger security partnerships and regional security frameworks to prevent, mitigate, and respond to conflicts, crises, and mass atrocities, increase the level and quality of cooperation on regional security issues, and enhance regional stability.";

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and, objective C.4 “Countries in the region develop effective, responsible, and accountable security and justice sector institutions that provide a safe and secure domestic environment protecting all citizens.”

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Annex: Recent and Ongoing CT and Related State/USAID Programs**Current CT Bureau Programs:**

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

- **Border Security:** Through the ATA program, CT is providing border security courses aimed at enhancing security at ports of entry and along rural borders. Additionally, ATA surged training for law enforcement to respond to [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] Through the Counterterrorism Engagement Fund, CT is funding a global initiative implemented by the UN Counter Terrorism Centre (UNCCT) to assist countries, including [REDACTED] use advance passenger information effectively to stem the flow of foreign terrorist fighters and assist with determining their related technical assistance needs.

- **Critical Infrastructure Security and Resilience (CISR):** Since August 2011, CT, in partnership with NEA and the Department of Energy (DOE), [REDACTED]

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- **Enhancing Civil Society Capacity to Counter Violent Extremism (CVE):** In [REDACTED] CT and CSO recently completed a program focused on counter-messaging [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] In FY15, CT plans to fund and oversee projects in [REDACTED] focused on enhancing communities' and civil society organizations' ability to counter ISIL and Nusrah Front's recruitment efforts by engaging [REDACTED] to effectively respond to extremist ideology and messaging. CT is also exploring options for future CT

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programming regarding [] which includes consideration of CVE and the possibility of building off recently completed CVE efforts.

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- Strengthening CT Legal Frameworks and Criminal Justice Capacity: Through [] criminal justice actors from the Levant participate in a range of trainings dedicated to improving knowledge and skills needed to investigate, prosecute and adjudicate terrorism cases in an effective and efficient manner.

- Countering Terrorist Finance: CT has invested in providing [] with a series of DHS-implemented Cross-Border Financial Investigations Techniques (CBFIT) courses, which build capacity to counter bulk cash smuggling and other illicit cross-border activity. Additionally, CT has funded DHS to deploy Cross Border Financial Investigations Advisors to the field to act as points of contact and investigative lead for all financial seizures and intelligence related to terrorism finance in [] CT and OPDAT are working with Treasury to implement AML/CTF training for [] The CT-funded Department of Justice Resident Legal Advisor (RLA) in [] is engaging in regional CTF initiatives to include Jordanian and Lebanese interlocutors such as an international cooperation workshop on the best practices on AML/CTF information sharing.

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- [] Institutional CT Capacity: Through the ATA program, CT is increasingly focused on instructor development, mentorship and building [] ability to manage, develop and sustain antiterrorism training programs. This will enable [] to export its operational and institutional law enforcement capacity to combat terrorism to other partners in the Middle East and North Africa. Key to this effort of expanding [] ability in serving as a training hub is our ability to leverage the [], which allows us to train other regional partners.

Related Department of State and USAID Programs:

- INL: INL maintains a robust presence in [] INL is working to implement an [] community policing program with the [] through training of trainer courses, and provide targeted equipment donations to Government institutions. INL's IAA with the FBI, which will be coordinated with CT and the RSO, will focus on corruption and financial crimes, counterterrorism and major incident response, and leadership development. [] professionalize its corrections institutions, reduce prison overcrowding, and further support [] physical capacity through equipping efforts. [] INL is currently developing a police program to address crisis response coordination in [] INL recently deployed a senior law enforcement advisor to provide subject-matter-expertise support to the [] and identify potential gaps and programming opportunities in the in civilian security sector for []

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- ISN: In [REDACTED] Export Control and Related Border Security (EXBS) provides technical assistance to draft regulations and bring strategic trade control in compliance with international standards, implementation of an air cargo targeting system a [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]

CSCC: Since June 2014, CSCC has produced [REDACTED] and has

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[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] As part of the counter ISIL effort, CSCC took on the role of Information Coordination Cell (ICC) for the interagency as well. In October 2014, CSCC/ICC held a conference in conference focused on strengthening cooperation in public communications to combat ISIL and violent extremism in [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] The conference called for greater public affairs engagement as the Coalition moves forward, which will involve intensifying engagement to address significant events; actively opposing the recruitment of foreign fighters; and encouraging important religious and social leaders, opinion makers, and the millions of young people who oppose violent extremism to raise their voices through traditional and social media.

- CSO: The Strong Cities Initiative will aim to connect cities (and other relevant sub-national entities, city-level practitioners (including law enforcement)), and the communities they represent, to facilitate sharing of best practices, mutual learning, and development of new approaches to building community resilience to prevent and counter the radicalization of FTF and other violent extremists. Funds will also support workshops and training activities for FTF-affected cities included as part of this network. Several Lebanese cities may be included in the project.

- USAID: USAID has complex missions in [REDACTED]

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- DoD: In [REDACTED], DoD continues to develop [REDACTED] border security infrastructure, largely through the [REDACTED]

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