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"The terrorism challenges that we face continue to evolve at a rapid pace, and we cannot predict what the landscape will look like one decade or, frankly, even a year from now. However, we believe we can best protect America's interests and people over the long run by engaging in robust diplomacy, expanding our partnerships, building bilateral and regional capabilities, and promoting holistic and rule of law-based approaches to counter terrorism and violent extremism."

*Ambassador Tina Kaidanow, Coordinator for Counterterrorism,
Remarks at the Brookings Institution, September 16, 2015*



Secretary Kerry and Ambassador Kaidanow, with their Turkish counterparts, co-chair the Global Counterterrorism Forum Ministerial Meeting in September 2015, launching a new initiative to address the full life cycle of radicalization to violence.

INTRODUCTION

As demonstrated by the terrorist attacks in late 2015 in Paris, Bamako, and San Bernardino, the United States continues to face a shifting, increasingly decentralized and diffuse threat paradigm. While we have been largely successful at rooting out al-Qa'ida's command structure, we must now contend with the expansion of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), the proliferation of violent extremist recruitment on the Internet, a new flow of foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs), and the increasing threats posed by small groups of self-radicalized individuals outside of traditional conflict areas.

The Bureau of Counterterrorism (CT) worked during Fiscal Year (FY) 2015 to strengthen the U.S. government's diplomatic engagement, information-sharing, and capacity-building programs with foreign partners to protect the U.S. homeland and counter the evolving terrorist threats. We have worked to mobilize partners to detect and mitigate the threats posed by FTFs and to counter ISIL's global facilitation

networks. As President Obama has stated, addressing the shifting threat paradigm requires fostering strong, capable, and diverse partners around the world who have both the political will and the ability to counter violent extremism, prevent and respond to terrorism, and bring terrorists to justice.

This Annual Report describes at a high level the impact of CT's activities to advance its policy priorities during FY 2015 (October 2014-September 2015), specifically the following priorities:

1. Reducing and mitigating the threat of FTFs;
2. Preventing and countering terrorist safe havens and violent extremist recruitment in key states and regions;
3. Preventing and countering terrorist financing and facilitation networks; and
4. Constraining global networks of Iran's proxies, partners, and allies.

In FY 2015, CT also began transforming its own operations to become more effective at addressing the

shifting threat paradigm. We have augmented our staff and implemented structural changes to better define, integrate, and pursue the Department's top counterterrorism partnership priorities and maximize CT's foreign assistance resources, which exceed \$219 million for FY 2015 and will increase to an estimated \$396 million in FY 2016. We have also deepened our cooperation with key domestic security agencies, namely the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and Department of Justice (DOJ), as well as the Department of Defense (DoD), to anticipate and prevent threats against the U.S. homeland.

THE TERRORISM AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM LANDSCAPE IN FY 2015

The expansion of ISIL and its ideology, together with the remaining al-Qa'ida threat, created an increasingly complex strategic environment for counterterrorism and countering violent extremism in FY 2015. ISIL affiliated with terrorist groups in North and West Africa and announced new branches in the Arabian Peninsula, West Africa, Russia's Northern Caucasus region, and South Asia. Thousands of FTFs have traveled to Syria, Iraq, and Libya, most to train and fight with ISIL. Radicalized individuals—inspired to varying degrees by ISIL—carried out lone-offender attacks in North Africa, North America, Europe, and Australia.

A spate of terrorist attacks in early FY 2016—all claimed by ISIL or its affiliates, or carried out in the name of ISIL—illustrated the dangerous trends in

the operating environment over the course of the preceding year, including the expansion of ISIL to new geographic regions, the return of FTFs from Syria and Iraq to their home countries or regions to organize terrorist attacks, and the online radicalization of individuals who plot attacks in their home countries without traveling abroad for training. These attacks, which collectively killed more than 400 civilians, included the bombing of a Russian passenger jet over Egypt on October 31, 2015; the twin suicide bombings in Beirut on November 12, 2015; the attacks in Paris on November 13, 2015; and the attack in California on December 2, 2015.

Meanwhile, ISIL and other violent extremist groups exploited ongoing regional conflicts in Iraq, Libya, Mali, Nigeria, Somalia, Syria, Yemen and elsewhere to establish and maintain safe havens for planning and executing terrorist acts. Regional efforts to degrade these terrorist safe havens made progress, most notably with Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin and al-Shabaab in Somalia, but continued to face significant limitations. In other parts of the world, individuals sympathetic to or affiliated with ISIL and al-Qa'ida exploited weak legal regimes and/or the lack of effective border controls and international information sharing in order to operate, fundraise, plot attacks, and facilitate the travel of FTFs. Additionally, Iranian partners, proxies, and allies, including the designated Foreign Terrorist Organization known as Lebanese Hizballah, continued to engage in a range of destabilizing activities around the world.



Ambassador Kaidanow meets with the President and Prime Minister of Somalia in Mogadishu in June 2015.

PROGRESS ON CT'S CROSS-CUTTING POLICY PRIORITIES

Reducing and mitigating the threat of FTFs. Curbing the recruitment and transit of FTFs is essential to countering ISIL's global networks and sapping the strength of ISIL forces in Iraq and Syria. During FY 2015, CT led interagency and international efforts to promote implementation of the international legal counterterrorism framework—including UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2178 on FTFs, adopted in September 2014. These efforts began to produce meaningful results, including the following:

- Twenty-two countries passed new laws or updated existing laws to address FTFs.
- Twelve countries successfully prosecuted FTF cases.
- Major FTF source and transit countries increased dialogue on information sharing, law enforcement, and countering violent extremism (CVE) strategies.
- INTERPOL's Foreign Fighter Fusion Cell expanded its capacity.
- The United States expanded information sharing with several countries, including Malaysia, Turkey, and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries—many of which were traditionally reticent to create formal arrangements—to disrupt and stem the flow of FTFs to ISIL and other terrorist groups in Syria and Iraq.
- Several countries, including Albania, Bosnia, and Kosovo, developed new national CVE strategies targeting FTF radicalization and recruitment.

Preventing and countering terrorist safe havens and violent extremist recruitment in key states and regions. CT worked in FY 2015 to strengthen civilian counterterrorism capacity and promote regional cooperation to isolate ISIL- and al-Qa'ida-affiliated terrorist groups and shrink their safe havens, especially in Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia. This included denying violent extremists recruits by strengthening law enforcement and border security, discrediting violent extremists' messaging and ideology, and addressing the conditions that make some communities and individuals vulnerable to terrorist recruitment. While capacity-building efforts take time, we began to see results in FY 2015, including the following:

- U.S.-trained law enforcement units in Africa demonstrated increased capacity to counter attacks by the ISIL affiliate Boko Haram and al-Qa'ida affiliate al-Shabaab.
- U.S. agencies deepened counterterrorism cooperation and exercises with Gulf partner countries to address the al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) threat emanating from Yemen.
- U.S.-trained law enforcement and justice sector officials in Southeast Asia demonstrated increased capacity to investigate and prosecute terrorist attacks by groups formally aligned with or sympathetic to ISIL and al-Qa'ida.
- With U.S. support, countries in Southeast Asia and elsewhere adopted procedures for handling terrorist inmates and countering prison radicalization as a way to deny ISIL and other terrorist organizations recruits.



Secretary Kerry, shown with then-Attorney General Holder (left) and Secretary of Homeland Security Johnson, hosts CT-organized Ministerial meeting on February 18, 2015, on improving the use and sharing of information to counter FTF threats.



Omani forces participate in ATA Maritime Interdiction exercise.

- In cooperation with the United States, countries around the world developed and began to implement new approaches to counter violent extremist messaging and promote alternative narratives.

Preventing and countering terrorist financing and facilitation networks. In FY 2015, CT strengthened partner capacity to deprive violent extremist groups of funding and prevent terrorist travel, especially related to ISIL and FTFs. CT worked closely with DHS to address vulnerabilities of key partners in the areas of border controls, traveler screening, and watch-listing, which have important implications for U.S. homeland security. CT also worked closely with DOJ and Treasury to target known terrorist facilitators. We made progress in these areas in FY 2015, including the following:

- The United States signed four agreements with foreign countries that provide for the exchange of biographic and biometric terrorism screening information to prevent and disrupt terrorist travel, including to the United States.
- European partner nations took initial steps to increase the sharing of information on airline passengers transiting their countries.
- Partner countries adopted enhanced measures to screen land border travelers and air passengers, including the expanded use of Personal Identification Secure Comparison and Evaluation Systems (PISCES).
- The United States increased assistance to and engagement with Gulf countries on strength-

ening counterterrorist finance laws and sharing related information.

- The United States designated 46 groups or individuals as terrorists under U.S. law, including 13 individuals and five ISIL-affiliated groups.
- The United States nominated or supported other states' nomination of 11 individuals and four groups designated as terrorists by the UN.

Constraining global networks of Iran's proxies, partners, and allies. In tandem with efforts to stop Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon, the United States continues to work to stop Iran's sponsorship of terrorism. CT has led efforts to mobilize international awareness and cooperation to counter Iranian networks and their illicit, destabilizing activities. These efforts gained new momentum in FY 2015, including the following milestones:

- With the European Police Service, the United States launched and expanded an International Law Enforcement Task Force on Hizballah.
- In new programs, CT brought together investigators and prosecutors across the Western Balkans, Latin America, Southeast Asia, and West Africa regions to raise awareness and promote law enforcement cooperation to counter Hizballah.
- With U.S. support, law enforcement officials in Latin America and Southeast Asia expanded information-sharing on Hizballah activities.

- The United States expanded terrorism designations of Hizballah operatives.
- The United States and the GCC agreed to expand cooperation to address Iran's illicit activities in the Gulf.

WAY AHEAD FOR FISCAL YEAR 2016

In FY 2016, in response to the shifting threat paradigm, CT will intensify engagement with key international partners to strengthen U.S. homeland security, anticipate and disrupt threats, counter radicalization, and address the continued flow of FTFs. We will work with our partners around the world to address vulnerabilities that have a direct impact on our shared security. We will also enhance our efforts to build the capacity of key partners, especially those who are threatened by ISIL and its affiliates and who can help degrade ISIL's safe havens.

At the same time, CT will continue to invest in fostering sustainable, civilian-led partnerships to prevent

future terrorist threats from emerging. Over the coming year, CT will deepen our focus on policies, programs, and tools to more effectively address the full life cycle of radicalization, from prevention through rehabilitation and reintegration. To this end, we will lead the Department of State's efforts to integrate and institutionalize its CVE agenda. We will work with local U.S. law enforcement and overseas partners to expand tools for detecting and intervening to stop radicalized individuals before they commit violence.

Building on the organizational changes made in FY 2015, CT will continue to foster a culture of learning and innovation to enhance the way we plan, operate, and evaluate. This will include developing and implementing a strategic monitoring and assessment framework for our policy priorities that will enable us to provide a more analytical and evidence-based annual report on FY 2016.

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