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TO: PUBLIC DIPLOMACY AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS STAFF FROM UNDER  
SECRETARY RICK STENGEL (R)

SUBJECT: NEW DIRECTION AND CHANGE OF LEADERSHIP AT THE CENTER  
FOR STRATEGIC COUNTERTERRORISM COMMUNICATIONS (CSCC)

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CHANGES TO THE CSCC, INCLUDING THE NEW COUNTER-ISIL INFORMATION  
COORDINATION CELL (ICC)

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1. (U) SUMMARY: Following the rise of the self-proclaimed Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), the Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications (CSCC) has created an Information Coordination Cell (ICC) to specifically counter ISIL. Representatives from seven agencies across the U.S. government craft daily communications guidance based on shared intelligence and information. In February, Rashad Hussain was named the new Coordinator and Special Envoy for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications. This cable provides details on CSCC's new direction and strategy. End summary.

2. The Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications (CSCC) was established at the direction of the President and former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in 2010 and codified

by President Obama's Executive Order 13584 in September 2011 to "coordinate, orient, and inform government-wide strategic communications focused on violent extremists and terrorist organizations." CSCC works under the direction of the President and the Secretary of State.

3. Since ISIL, or DAESH, announced itself in April 2013, CSCC has prioritized discrediting and delegitimizing this group. Toward this end, CSCC stood up a new unit in November 2014, called the Counter-ISIL Information Coordination Cell (ICC), responsible for integrating counterterrorist messaging across key lines of effort within the interagency process and providing regular briefings to senior officials, including the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs (R). The ICC is the largest and fastest-growing part of a newly-expanded CSCC, currently with 25 officers from State, DOD, CIA, NSA, NCTC, FBI, and DHS. Its mission is to direct government-wide communications aimed at discrediting propaganda led particularly by ISIL and degrading its ability to disseminate messages and recruit fighters. Key ICC activities include USG messaging coordination, partner engagement outreach, and message development. The ICC also is leading ongoing meetings within State and with all relevant departments and agencies to ensure a common operating plan and to gather participants' thematic and operational insights.

4. With officials from more than 60 countries participating in the White House-led Global CVE Summit earlier this year to discuss coordinated efforts to combat terrorism, the ICC's most pressing priority is encouraging others to join this important endeavor. This includes working closely with members of the Global Coalition to Degrade and Defeat ISIL and third parties to intensify efforts to counter the recruitment and radicalization to terrorist violence, while strengthening critical international partnerships. To achieve these goals, the ICC is working with regional bureaus to initiate and lead meetings with regional governments and third parties to augment the capabilities of USG communicators against ISIL and other violent extremists.

5. The ICC also has developed and maintains a whole-of-government strategic communication plan that incorporates USG and Coalition communications plans against ISIL, while providing a common operating picture to partners working on these efforts. The ICC leads a weekly USG video teleconference with all relevant departments and agencies to gather their thematic and operational insights. The ICC also oversees the production of a

number of products designed to help guide and/or capture the broad range of efforts being conducted throughout the interagency to counter ISIL and other terrorist propaganda, including Thematic Guidance, Daily Reports, and Weekly Updates, which are distributed regularly to roughly 3,000 stakeholders within the USG and to select Coalition partners.

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#### CSCC OPERATIONAL COMPONENTS

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6. CSCC is now divided into three areas of operation: Message Development, including the Digital Outreach Team (DOT); Partner Engagement & Outreach; and Government Coordination.

**A. Message Development:** This section gathers analytic support from the intelligence community, academia, NGOs, and other sources of relevant expertise to counter violent extremism, including developing and disseminating strategic, operational, and tactical information to focus USG messaging efforts. CSCC leverages intelligence community support and analysis to ensure messaging is guided by a strong understanding of the audience, what resonates, and who are the most effective messengers. It also coordinates with the relevant DOD components to achieve common objectives, including developing and sharing counter-ISIL messages that can be used by a wide range of stakeholders, including throughout the interagency, at U.S. Embassies in the field, and with select Coalition partners. To achieve its goals, the section produces and widely disseminates a number of products, including the following:

- **Thematic Guidance:** This concise, heavily referenced product, produced roughly twice each week, is based on input from the intelligence community, several USG offices, Coalition communicators, and others. It is intended to inform and prepare partners for upcoming events and to help them expose new ISIL vulnerabilities. Topics have included highlighting ISIL's false claims of invincibility, the terror group's inability to govern or provide basic services for the Sunni Muslims it purports to protect, atrocities against women and children, and destruction of cultural heritage and artefacts, among many others. The guidance is disseminated to over 3,000 USG and Coalition communicators and officials.

- **Daily Reports:** Produced for release each afternoon, this report provides links to pertinent news articles, online sites,

videos, banners, and other information to give communicators the latest trends and developments they can use in their own messaging, including offering potential tweets and Facebook ideas to expose and exploit ISIL vulnerabilities. The report offers the latest information on U.S. and Coalition counter-ISIL messaging efforts and significant events, plus anti-ISIL "stories," such as recantations, ISIL atrocities, victim stories, and anti-ISIL statements that exemplify themes and opportunities for counter-messaging efforts.

- **Weekly Updates:** This reporting tool is designed to capture the broad range of efforts being conducted throughout the interagency to counter propaganda by ISIL and other terrorist. It provides information on the latest developments and trends, including Twitter accounts and hashtags being used by ISIL's most influential followers and supporters. It also includes anti-ISIL messages and themes, plus specific efforts and engagements being led by DOD, various State offices, and U.S. Embassies, with links to videos, banners, and even individual tweets, both to help avoid duplication of effort and to urge replication of successful endeavors.

- **Digital Outreach Team (DOT):** The DOT works to counter extremist narratives in the interactive digital environment. The team was created in 2006 as an online rapid-reaction unit focused on general Public Diplomacy goals. When it became part of CSCC in late 2010, DOT's mission shifted to counterterrorism, with a specific focus on al-Qa'ida and like-minded terrorist groups associated and affiliated with al-Qa'ida. Since 2013, it has shifted its primary focus again, now working primarily to counter ISIL. DOT's output is focused largely on engagement, not simply broadcast. Key objectives include "contesting the space, redirecting the conversation, and confounding the adversary," as well as exposing ISIL atrocities and inherent contradictions or hypocrisies in ISIL propaganda.

-- Writer-analysts for DOT are contractors, whose content is reviewed and cleared internally by the DOT director and his deputy. Video engagements are reviewed internally, by select interagency partners, and approved by the Special Envoy. DOT focuses on Facebook, Twitter, forums, and comment sections of media outlets, as well as spaces where radicalization can begin. CSCC does not generally engage on websites controlled by extremists. CSCC openly identifies itself as working for the USG. It pushes back against propaganda by ISIL and other violent extremists that would otherwise go uncontested and works to redirect conversations where extremists try to gain traction

by calling out well documented atrocities and by clarifying and countering narratives that are against the United States.

-- In December 2013, CSCC launched a pilot English Language Initiative (ELI) to combat increasing efforts by violent extremists to recruit in the English-speaking world, including diaspora communities in Australia, Canada, Europe, and other countries. This program was extended in December 2014. ELI works primarily via Facebook and Twitter by presenting information and facts to counter misinformation and hypocritical statements from ISIL and other violent extremists and their supporters. It also develops and produces original videos, posted on YouTube, and banners, widely distributed through ELI's Facebook and Twitter accounts in an effort to enhance messages and counter-propaganda efforts.

**B. Partner Engagement & Outreach:** This section seeks opportunities to work with others to counter violent extremism and to strengthen international collaboration. Outreach efforts involve working with and through the State Department's regional and functional bureaus and with U.S. Embassies to engage Coalition partners, other governments, and organizations. The section also identifies capable NGO partners who operate in the messaging arena to counter DAESH and other violent extremists, either through support of their governments or through USG support. The goal of these engagements is to encourage governments and NGO partners to become active messengers and, when possible and appropriate, to coordinate efforts. In most cases, CSCC offers itself as a resource, by providing others with assistance to launch their own messaging efforts.

- The most notable example is the USG's partnership with the United Arab Emirates in the establishment of a joint anti-ISIL communications program, called The "Sawab Center." The Center will conduct message campaigns across all media and work with community leaders to directly counter terrorist propaganda - and it will work with governments and civil society to develop, share and launch digital content that discredits extremist narratives. Although a bilateral project at the outset, the Center has already begun working with a number of Coalition partner countries, and plans to expand those activities in the future.

- Working with and through the Department's regional and functional bureaus, this section also organizes regional training workshops for Coalition partners, including other governments, regional organizations, and select NGOs. In

addition, it solicits communication project proposals via third-party organizations or U.S. Embassies; shares information and best practices with partners; and funds projects that support CSCC objectives.

**C. Government Coordination:** This section strengthens and maintains reliable information processes that rapidly and effectively inform, coordinate, and orient USG stakeholder networks. Key mechanisms to achieve this effort involve hosting and leading regular messaging synch sessions and other ongoing meetings within the State Department, including with the Spokesperson's office and Public Affairs, and with all relevant departments and agencies. These meetings are held both to ensure a common operating plan and to gather participants' thematic and operational insights. The Government Coordination team also will develop and maintain a whole-of-government strategic communications plan that incorporates all overt U.S. and Coalition communications plans against ISIL. This overarching plan is intended to provide a common operating picture to our partners. It will identify audiences, objectives, themes, media, agents, critical events, and more, and will serve as the cornerstone of USG communications and planning against ISIL's image. The Government Coordination team also holds regular meetings with the interagency to ensure communications on ongoing messaging activities against ISIL.

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#### LEADERSHIP OF S/E RASHAD HUSSAIN

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7. In February, Rashad Hussain was appointed the Special Envoy and Coordinator for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications. President Obama announced at the February White House Summit on Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) that S/E Hussain would work to expand international engagement and partnerships to counter violent extremism and to develop strategic counterterrorism communications around the world.

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