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**STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD**  
**“Beyond ISIS: Countering Terrorism, Radicalization, and Promoting**  
**Stability in North Africa”**

**Subcommittee on the Near East, South Asia, Central Asia, and**  
**Counterterrorism**  
**Senate Committee on Foreign Relations**

**Wednesday, December 6, 2017**

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Chairman Risch, Ranking Member Kaine, and Distinguished Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the invitation to discuss U.S. counterterrorism efforts in North Africa, which form a critical part of our global campaign against ISIS, al-Qa’ida, and their affiliates. Our primary goal in the region is to prevent terrorist organizations from threatening the United States and our interests by denying them the ability to operate in the continent’s vast, under-governed spaces. Terrorist groups with safe haven are able to export their violence around the world, striking our homeland and those of our closest allies. We saw al-Qa’ida do this from Afghanistan in the 1990s through 9/11; more recently, we saw ISIS do the same from Iraq and Syria.

To mitigate the threat posed by terrorist groups in North Africa, we are helping fragile states build capacity as well as leveraging highly capable states’ counterterrorism expertise. We want to develop our African partners’ counterterrorism capabilities to a point where they need not rely on assistance from the United States to defend themselves.

ISIS is on the ropes in Iraq and Syria. But as the group loses control over territory in its core, it is essential that we prevent it from reconstituting itself elsewhere. In particular, ISIS maintains networks in North Africa that seek to conduct or inspire

attacks on the continent, in Europe, and against U.S. interests. Furthermore, North African foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) have figured prominently in the ranks of ISIS militants in Iraq and Syria, and we must remain vigilant against the threat posed by FTFs returning home. Algeria's long conflict with the Armed Islamic Group in the 1990s underscored how important it is for countries to effectively manage the risks posed by returning terrorist fighters. I note that Algeria today is a highly capable counterterrorism partner that is attuned to these risks and sharing its hard-won insights with like-minded partners, including the United States. We also remain concerned about al-Qa'ida's affiliates in the region, especially al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), and their growing reach into other parts of Africa.

Today, I will highlight several specific areas where the Bureau of Counterterrorism has been working with North African partners to address these and other challenges: training law enforcement officers and judges how to handle terrorism cases; strengthening information sharing and terrorist screening; cutting off the flow of money to terrorist groups; and countering the radical ideologies used by ISIS and its affiliates to recruit new members.

### **Law Enforcement, Criminal Justice, and Crisis Response**

Strong, stable, and responsive governments that provide security and economic prosperity for their citizens are an important source of strength against terrorist threats. This is why the CT Bureau works closely with partner countries to develop appropriate legal frameworks to bring criminal cases against terrorist offenders. In particular, we assist partners with strengthening their ability to **investigate, prosecute, and adjudicate** terrorism crimes. We also help them develop crisis-response capabilities to address terrorist incidents in real time.

**To investigate**, we work closely with our interagency partners to provide assistance to law enforcement units so they have the appropriate knowledge, skills, and tools to detect, thwart, and respond to terrorism. This includes training, equipping, and mentoring crisis response units, canine teams, bomb squads, fusion centers, and cyber investigation teams.

**To prosecute**, we work with lawyers to enable them to prepare persuasive, well-developed cases that draw on different kinds of evidence and that lead to convictions. Examples include case-based mentoring designed to help prosecutors secure convictions or working with countries to develop counterterrorism prosecution cells that are versed in terrorism case law.

**To adjudicate**, we work with judges on procedural and substantive issues so they have a better understanding of the complexity of terrorism cases and the types of evidence that will be brought to bear. We round out our efforts in the criminal justice system by working with prison officials to provide training and technical assistance so they can effectively punish convicted terrorists and identify those who may be receptive to rehabilitation.

For instance, we have partnered with Tunisia's security services to improve their ability to detect, respond to, and mitigate terrorist threats. In May, the Tunisian National Guard launched a raid that resulted in the death of a senior ISIS leader who was believed to be planning attacks during Ramadan. Just last month, Tunisian tactical and investigative units collaborated to arrest members of an alleged terrorist cell; an investigation is ongoing under the auspices of the Public Prosecutor's offices.

Promoting this kind of interagency coordination is a staple of the training and assistance we provide to our partners. We are also working with Algeria's national criminal forensics laboratory to provide forensics training to judiciary and law-enforcement personnel, which the Algerians are now able to share with neighbors.

And last month in Egypt, we concluded our first train-the-trainer course on Explosive Incident Countermeasures. This will help Egypt address bomb threats and train other first responders on the identification, neutralization, and safe disposition of explosive devices.

### **Information Sharing, Borders, and Aviation**

Terrorists do not respect borders, so it is no surprise that ISIS and al-Qa'ida adherents range across parts of the Maghreb and also further south in Mali, Niger, and other Sahel countries. They seek to exploit long, porous borders in remote and loosely governed areas of the continent.

This is why the CT Bureau focuses on improving border security—especially through information sharing at international borders, where there is a critical need to detect and prevent terrorist travel. With the FBI-administered Terrorist Screening Center (TSC), and in coordination with interagency partners, the State Department has concluded bilateral arrangements with a number of countries to exchange information about known and suspected terrorists pursuant to Homeland Security Presidential Directive 6 (HSPD-6), including in North Africa.

We also have encouraged our partners to stem the flow of suspected FTFs across their borders. This means getting countries to make greater use of INTERPOL's Stolen and Lost Travel Document and other databases and resources related to FTFs—resources that allow countries to screen travelers and to assist their law enforcement agencies in identifying and investigating terrorist travelers. We also continue to expand the Personal Identification Secure Comparison and Evaluation System (PISCES) program, which provides state-of-the-art border screening systems to 24 countries.

On aviation security, we are expanding our counterterrorism cooperation with Egypt, and we expect to provide enhanced explosives detection and screening technologies, training, and canines in 2018. Likewise, in 2017, the CT Bureau revitalized a dormant bilateral relationship with Libya and provided aviation security training to 24 participants of the Libyan Aviation Authority from six airports across Libya.

### **Designations and Countering Terrorist Finance**

A third important tool in our comprehensive approach is terrorist designations and countering the financing of terrorism. Designating individuals and terrorist groups exposes and isolates terrorists and their supporters, denies them access to the U.S. financial system, and enables authorities to prosecute them for their crimes and prevent them from entering this country. Moreover, designations can assist or complement the law enforcement actions of other U.S. agencies and other governments, whether through their own or UN designations.

The State Department has designated a number of entities operating in North Africa as Foreign Terrorist Organizations, including ISIS-Sinai Province, ISIS-Libya, AQIM, Ansar al-Shari'a, and the al-Mulathamun Battalion. We continue to identify individuals and entities for designation to combat terrorism and disrupt terrorist financing in the region.

### **Preventing Radicalization and Recruitment**

There are a wide variety of reasons why so many FTFs come from North African countries. Some were motivated by a desire to overthrow the Assad regime and others by ISIS's call to join its false caliphate. Still others were exposed to radical ideology in environments that had struggled to build strong public and private institutions capable of countering messages of hate. This appears to have been the case in Tunisia, from which as many as 3,000 to 6,000 FTFs traveled to the

conflict zone in Iraq and Syria. By contrast, in Algeria, where the memories of the “dark decade” fighting Islamist terrorists remain fresh, the societal and institutional arrangements put in place seem to have prevented any major outflow.

Countering radicalization in a way that is tailored to each North African country is another critical component of a comprehensive approach to counterterrorism. We must do more than simply identify and stop FTFs from traveling or remove them from the battlefield. We need to delegitimize the violent ideology that attracts them and also prevent them from getting into terrorist pipelines in the first place. In Morocco, for example, we are using lessons from the fields of public health and disease control to confront radicalism in local communities by detecting, interrupting, and changing behaviors and community norms.

In addition, the CT Bureau works closely with the Strong Cities Network (SCN). The SCN is the first global network of mayors, municipal-level policy makers, and practitioners united to build community resilience to extremism in all its forms. The network has more than 100 city members from Los Angeles, New York, and Chattanooga, to Peshawar, Nairobi, and Vilvoorde. Tunis is the first North African member, and SCN also has cities from northern Cameroon and Mauritania in its Sahel ranks.

## **Military Action**

While I am not here to discuss in detail the use of force against terrorists, the Department of Defense continues to advance our counterterrorism objectives in North Africa by taking the fight directly to the enemy. We have come a long way from the middle of 2016, when Libya’s branch of ISIS was the strongest ISIS affiliate outside of Iraq and Syria. U.S. direct action and our partnership with Prime Minister al-Sarraj’s government and its aligned forces forced ISIS out of Sirte and placed significant pressure on the ISIS-Libya network, hampering its ability to conduct complex attacks and project significant threats outside the country.

Separately, on October 29, U.S. forces captured Mustafa al-Imam, who was allegedly involved in the 2012 Benghazi terrorist attacks, and transferred him to the United States for prosecution. We continue to investigate and identify all those who were involved in the attack, and we will spare no effort to bring the perpetrators to justice.

## **Working with Partners**

Finally, it is important to understand that our efforts in North Africa are not in isolation. To the contrary, we are working with European allies, other key partners, and multilateral institutions to amplify our efforts and make a larger impact. Morocco and Algeria in particular are regional leaders in multilateral counterterrorism initiatives, including those of the African Union, the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership, and the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF).

We welcome Morocco's support and leadership as our co-lead of the GCTF's Initiative to Address Homegrown Terrorism. Over the course of the next year, a series of regional workshops will identify innovative prevention programs for addressing the challenges of homegrown terrorism. Algeria also plays an important role in the GCTF, co-chairing the West Africa Region Capacity-Building Working Group, which helps mobilize assistance to help West African countries build capacity to counter terrorism. GCTF members remain committed to addressing returning FTFs, countering terrorist financing, enhancing border security, building capacity, and preparing national action plans in African countries.

## **Conclusion**

The United States uses a range of tools and resources and works closely with the governments of North Africa and other partners to comprehensively address terrorism. We are encouraged by reporting from our diplomatic posts about how our training and resources are directly assisting partners to disrupt terrorist operations, prosecute terrorist suspects, and protect borders. I will now turn the floor over to Ambassador Polaschik, who will discuss the political and diplomatic aspect of our approach to this region. We greatly appreciate Congress's support. Thank you and I look forward to your questions.