

Oral Statement of State Department Acting Counterterrorism Coordinator
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Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa

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(U) Chairman Lawler, Ranking Member Sherfilus-McCormick [cher-fyl-us], Members of this esteemed subcommittee. Good afternoon and thank you for inviting me to testify today.

(U) It is a pleasure to appear before you today and discuss how the Counterterrorism Bureau is addressing counter-terrorism threats, supporting key diplomatic initiatives, and coordinating with functional and regional partners across the Department and agencies.

THE THREAT ENVIRONMENT

(U) The Trump Administration is committed to preventing a major attack on the homeland and has made tremendous progress in advancing safety and security at home and abroad by implementing Peace through Strength. Our focus is on destroying and disrupting terrorist networks, holding state sponsors accountable, securing our borders, and degrading the capacity of terrorist groups to threaten the United States.

(U) The Trump Administration's approach to counterterrorism also recognizes that America first does not mean America alone. We have strong counterterrorism partnerships across the globe, with a focus on proper burden-sharing from partners with shared security interests. President Trump expects our Allies and Partners to be even more concretely committed to defeating our shared threat from terrorism.

(U) The threat landscape today is dramatically different from what we faced on the eve and during the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks. Motivating factors driving terrorism are varied and often hard to define. In

addition to violent Salafism, anti-Semitism, and anti-government animus are major factors in today's threat environment.

(U) ISIS and al-Qa'ida continue to inspire their followers across the globe to conduct attacks in their home countries, including the United States and Europe. The New Year's Day attack in New Orleans, which killed 14 and injured many others, was a stark reminder of ISIS' reach.

(U) Additionally, Iran and its terrorist proxies, including the Houthis, Hizballah, and Hamas, continue to destabilize the Middle East and beyond. While Iran and its proxies were greatly weakened over the past year, they remain intent on continuing their campaigns of terror, targeting current and former U.S. officials, journalists, dissidents, and regional allies.

(U) Other jihadist groups like the South and Central Asia-based ISIS-Khorasan network continues to show ambitions beyond the region. Groups like East Africa's al-Shabaab and Jama'at Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin (JNIM) in the Mahgreb and West Africa also seek to expand their regional influence.

(U) The collaboration between criminal and terrorist groups presents a rising threat especially in our hemisphere. Transnational cartels and gangs, such as those in Mexico and Venezuela, devastate their communities and present a direct threat to U.S. security, including through their involvement in human trafficking and trafficking of drugs. We are pleased to see Canada and numerous Latin American and Caribbean partners designate the Venezuelan-based transnational cartel Tren de Aragua as a terrorist organization.

(U) Fentanyl, for example, caused over 100,000 deaths in the United States last year. This requires us to increase our attention to our own neighborhood.

THE ADMINISTRATION'S RESPONSE

(U) In this dynamic threat environment, the Administration is clear-eyed and focused on identifying these threats and using all means necessary to eliminate them.

(U) The Trump Administration has used military tools decisively when necessary, against terrorist groups threatening the United States. This includes successful strikes against ISIS Somalia leaders, against ISIS's second in command in March in Iraq, and several significant figures of Hurras al-Din, al Qa'ida's branch in Syria.

(U) Consistent with our Congressional mandate, the Department's Counterterrorism Bureau plays a critical role in developing, implementing, and supporting the administration's counterterrorism enterprise.

(U) The CT Bureau is deeply involved in U.S. interagency counter-terrorism decisions and plans, and in leading and building international coalitions to address transnational terrorism threats.

(U) We also ensure that U.S. partners, particularly those on the front lines facing these threats, take action to counter them. Our cooperation to help these countries better address terrorist threats keeps the United States safe.

(U) The CT Bureau leads on several critical lines of effort for the U.S. Government:

(U) **First**, to tackle terrorist travel before violent actors reach our borders, we work with countries to bolster their visa regimes; expand information sharing on travelers of concern so that we can enhance our terrorist watchlist and screening programs; and strengthen border screening systems and practices to detect and deter illegal migration and terrorist travel.

(U) As President Trump has made clear, "we must remain committed to engaging those countries willing to cooperate to improve information-sharing and identity-management procedures, and to address both

terrorism related and public safety risks.” CT will continue to engage our partners to ensure we detect and deter terrorist travel.

(U) **Second**, our designations authorities allow us to cut-off resources to dangerous groups. The Secretary has designated ten cartels and gangs in the Western Hemisphere as terrorist organizations, giving our law enforcement partners new authorities and tools to address these dangerous threats.

(U) These sanctions also allow us to incentivize behavior in U.S. interest. For example, following the collapse of the Assad regime, the United States seeks to support a stable and unified Syria. As directed by the President, the Secretary revoked the Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) designation of Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham, and the Administration removed other sanctions to facilitate a prosperous and peaceful Syria.

(U) CT will continue to monitor Syria’s progress in ensuring that ISIS does not take hold in Syria and Iran does not destabilize the new Syrian government through its terrorist proxies.

(U) **Third**, we ensure the enduring defeat of ISIS includes securing the ISIS detention facilities and displaced persons camps in northeast Syria (NES). As a result of our diplomacy, many countries have repatriated their nationals, prosecuted them where appropriate, and provided them with effective rehabilitation and reintegration services.

(U) The CT bureau also leads on countering Iran’s terrorist proxies. President Trump restored the Maximum Pressure Campaign on Iran in February of this year. The CT Bureau is spearheading international initiatives to mobilize our partners to address these threats. These efforts continue to yield results, with Paraguay recently designating the IRGC as a terrorist organization and expanding its designation of Hizballah to encompass the entire organization. 18 governments have taken action to ban, sanction, or restrict Hizballah since the CT Bureau launched this effort in 2019, under the first Trump Administration.

(U) Consistent with our Congressional mandate, the CT Bureau plays a vital coordination role in ensuring a whole-of government- approach to the current and future threats.

(U) We continue to lead the 89-member D-ISIS Coalition, the primary coordination body mobilizing global efforts to address the threats posed by ISIS. Coalition efforts promote burden sharing and include sharing resources, information, and best practices to thwart terrorist travel, stop ISIS financing, and counter ISIS messaging and recruitment. Since the start of this Administration, Armenia and Uzbekistan have joined the Coalition and strengthened our efforts to prevent ISIS-K from spreading its malign influence. The Coalition is working to choke-off ISIS-K before it can grow into a greater global threat and prevent an ISIS resurgence in Syria.

(U) Finally, we are also working to address the use of emerging technology for terrorist purposes, particularly those technologies that enable radicalization to violence and recruitment, improve terrorist tactics, or exacerbate the lethality of attacks. We are drawing on our existing channels with industry to address use of the internet for terrorist purposes, such as using virtual reality for training and unmanned aircraft systems to conduct attacks. We are also working with our foreign partners to establish policies, regulations, and tactics directly aimed at mitigating threats and risks posed by these weapons.

CONCLUSION

(U) The Trump Administration has made clear that counterterrorism will remain a top priority to keep the Homeland safe and we will do so in a focused, targeted manner, working alongside partners who are likewise committed to countering terrorist threats.

(U) Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today on this important topic, and I look forward to your questions.