

AMBASSADOR ROBERT BRADTKE
Senior Advisor for Partner Engagement on Syria Foreign Fighters
Bureau of Counterterrorism, Department of State
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Chairman Poe, Chairman Ros-Lehtinen, Ranking Member Sherman, Ranking Member Deutch, and distinguished Members of these Subcommittees, thank you for the opportunity to appear today on behalf of the State Department with my colleague from the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) at this hearing on “ISIS and the Threat from Foreign Fighters.”

The State Department, along with other agencies of the United States government, is deeply concerned about the threat posed by foreign fighters, who have travelled to Syria and Iraq to participate in the conflicts there. The intelligence community estimates that since January 2012, over 16,000 Foreign Fighters have travelled to Syria from more than ninety countries, including the United States. These fighters, many of whom have joined ISIL, al-Nusrah Front and other terrorist organizations, are a threat to people across Syria and Iraq and endanger the stability of the entire region. They are also a serious threat to the United States and our partners globally. We are concerned that these trained and battle-hardened fighters will try to return to their home countries and carry out deadly attacks. Indeed, we have already seen this happen, as was the case in May with the arrest of a French national, with ties to ISIL, for the murder of four persons killed outside the Jewish Museum in Brussels.

To respond to this threat the United States has been working closely with our partners for the past two years, and this summer, with the growing threat posed by ISIL, the United States intensified its response by building a coalition of more than sixty partners with the goal of degrading and defeating ISIL. In September, President Obama appointed General John Allen to lead a comprehensive and coordinated strategy across five lines of effort including:

- Military support to our partners;
- Disrupting the flow of Foreign Fighters;
- Stopping ISIL’s financing and funding;
- Addressing humanitarian crises in the region; and,

- Exposing ISIL's true nature.

Diplomatic Engagement and Inter-agency Coordination

Today, I would like to describe for you how we are pursuing the foreign fighter line of effort not only within the context of our anti-ISIL strategy, but also within the broader framework of the threat posed by other extremist groups such as al-Nusra, the Khorasan Group, as well as "lone wolf" fighters. Indeed, the horrific recent events in Canada show us that the threat from foreign fighters must also include radicalized individuals who may never have travelled to Syria or Iraq, but are inspired by the terrorists operating there.

Critical to countering the threat posed by foreign fighters is our engagement with our foreign partners. As President Obama said in speaking to the United Nations Security Council in September:

For if ever there was a challenge in our interconnected world that cannot be met by any one nation alone, it is this: terrorists crossing borders and threatening to unleash unspeakable violence.

The Department of State has been leading a whole-of-government outreach effort with foreign partners to highlight the threat posed by foreign fighters, as well as their violent extremist ideology, and to urge steps to interdict these fighters wherever possible. This effort is being carried out across the United States government at all levels, including by our intelligence agencies, the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC), the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the Department of Justice (DOJ), the Department of Treasury (DOT), the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), our military commands, and our Embassies overseas.

In my capacity as Senior Advisor for Partner Engagement on Syria Foreign Fighters, since early March, I have led inter-agency delegation visits to seventeen countries from Europe to Southeast Asia, as well as to our partners in organizations, such as the European Union, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and EUROPOL. We and our partners recognize that there is no one solution to the threat posed by foreign fighters. We must use all of the tools at our disposal and cooperate across a range of activities.

Let me outline for you seven areas where we are engaging with our foreign partners.

First is the sharing of information. To prevent and interdict the travel of foreign fighters, it is critical that we and our partners share the names of suspected terrorists and facilitators of their travel. We are working bilaterally to share information with our partners, and to ensure that not only are known and suspected terrorist identities shared, but are actually entered into traveler screening databases and travelers screened against those holdings. We have also called upon our partners to make increased use of multilateral arrangements for sharing information. The United States has also supported the establishment of a Foreign Fighter Fusion Cell at Interpol to help disseminate the names of suspected terrorists, and we have urged greater use of Interpol's database for lost and stolen travel documents.

Second is law enforcement cooperation. We are using Mutual Legal Assistance Treaties and other mechanisms to help police and law enforcement authorities in our partner countries share and develop evidence to bring suspected terrorists to trial. We have also dispatched FBI agents and experienced prosecutors to some of our partner countries, such as those in the Western Balkans, where the experience of the United States in managing complex terrorism cases may help them sharpen their own approach.

Third is capacity building. A number of partners have little or no experience in dealing with the threat of foreign fighters. We have worked closely with these countries to help them strengthen their counterterrorism legislation, for example, to criminalize attending terrorist training camps. We have also shared our own experience with "fusion centers" as a means to strengthen inter-agency cooperation among intelligence agencies, police, and prosecutors. We strongly believe that one of the most important things our partners can do in the global battle against foreign fighters is to strengthen their own security.

Fourth is stopping the flow of external financing to terrorist organizations. Together with the Treasury Department, we have aggressively raised with our partners cases where we believe individuals or organizations are raising funds that are used to support ISIL or other terrorist organizations. In connection with this effort, we have promoted what we call "good giving" to make clear that for those who genuinely want to help with the humanitarian crisis in Syria, there are safe, deserving organizations to which they can donate. In recent months, as ISIL has gained control of more territory, the Treasury Department and the State Department are also engaging with our partners in the region to cut off funding that

ISIL derives from the sale of oil and to isolate it from the international financial system.

Fifth is counter-messaging. As President Obama said to the UN Security Council in September:

There is no military solution to the problem of misguided individuals seeking to join a terrorist organization. Potential recruits must hear the words of community leaders or former foreign terrorist fighters who have seen the truth – that groups like ISIL betray Islam by killing innocent men, women, and children, the majority of whom are Muslim.

We have sought to get out that message directly through the work of Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications (CSCC), which, with its digital engagement teams in Arabic, Urdu, Somali, and English, exposes ISIL on social media and the internet for the terrorist group that is. A number of our partners are exploring with us how they can build their own counter-messaging centers.

Sixth is countering violent extremism (CVE). In my meetings with foreign partners, I have found that all of us are looking for ways to keep individuals from being radicalized and attracted to terrorist organizations. Here too, there is no simple answer, just as there is no single reason why someone might decide to travel to Syria and join ISIL or al-Nusrah. Depending upon their own conditions, traditions, and legal frameworks, different partners are looking at different ways to mitigate the drivers of radicalization, such as reaching out to vulnerable individuals, whether through government, local communities, religious leaders, the media, or by offering help to families, who may see a son, daughter, or brother or sister tempted by the sophisticated online propaganda of ISIL or other groups. We have been sharing our domestic experience with CVE programs being carried out by NCTC, DHS, and the Department of Justice and working with partner nations to build their capacity to engage communities and disrupt the drivers of radicalization to violence.

Seventh, and lastly, is border and aviation security. My colleague from DHS will go into this area in greater detail. However, the State Department has joined DHS in strengthening our Visa Waiver Program, enhancing security measures at Last Point of Departure airports to U.S. destinations, and urging the EU to finalize a Passenger Name Record (PNR) directive as soon as possible and to tighten its Schengen Information System traveler screening process.

In parallel with this bilateral engagement, we have also joined with our partners in addressing the foreign fighter threat in multilateral fora, in particular the UN and the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF).

In September, President Obama presided over a session of the UN Security Council that approved UNSCR 2178, a binding resolution that calls upon all countries to “prevent and suppress the recruiting, organizing, transporting, or equipping” of foreign terrorist fighters as well as the financing of their travel or activities, and take action to prevent radicalization to violence. UN Member States must “prevent the movement of terrorists or terrorist groups” through their territory, and ensure that their domestic laws allow for the prosecution of foreign terrorist fighters. Several countries have already enacted or proposed legislation to permit such prosecution; other countries have stepped up their enforcement of existing laws. We continue to urge partners to meet their obligations under UNSCR 2178, and are offering assistance to partners who may need help in doing so.

Also in September, at a meeting chaired by Secretary Kerry and Turkish Foreign Minister Cavusoglu, the GCTF adopted the first-ever set of international “Good Practices for a More Effective Response to the Foreign Terrorist Fighter Phenomenon.” This set of “Good Practices” offers a roadmap for steps to deal with the foreign fighter threat, from radicalization and recruitment, to impeding travel, to re-entry and reintegration. The inaugural plenary of the GCTF “Foreign Terrorist Fighters” Working Group, chaired by the Netherland and Morocco, will take place in Marrakech, December 15-16, to discuss how to implement the “Good Practices” document.

Looking Forward

In May at West Point, President Obama made clear his view of the importance of working with our partners to deal with the terrorist threat of the future. “We must shift our counterterrorism policy,” he said, “to more effectively partner with countries where terrorist networks seek a foothold.” As I hope I have made clear in this statement, we are engaging with our partners, using all the tools at our disposal in the effort to deal with the threat posed by foreign fighters -- a threat, unfortunately that will be with us for years to come.

I look forward to answering your questions.