

Opening Statement of the Honorable Ted Poe (R-TX), Chairman
Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade Hearing:
“U.S. Department of State Counterterrorism Bureau: FY 2018 Budget”
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(As prepared for delivery)

The threat of terrorism remains a deadly challenge for us and our allies around the globe. So far in 2017 there have been over 900 terrorist attacks causing nearly 5,500 fatalities globally. Just last month, Europe was struck again as terrorists drove a vehicle into a crowd in Barcelona, Spain, killing 16 people. 60 percent of countries today see higher levels of terrorism than a decade ago. This surge in violence has been led by the rise of ISIS and fostered by weak states and toxic ideologies. Although we are making steady progress against ISIS on the battlefields of Iraq, Syria, and Libya, the recent spike in attacks in Europe as well as persistent violence throughout the Middle East, Africa, and South Asia remind us that we still have much to do to counter this menace.

The State Department’s Counterterrorism Bureau is a crucial instrument for completing this mission. Created in 1972 in response to the Munich Olympics attack, the Bureau forges partnerships with foreign governments, multilateral organizations, and NGOs to coordinate and advance counterterrorism objectives that enhance global security as well as our own. Under that broad mission it has several core responsibilities, including coordinating strategy across the State Department and other agencies, conducting bilateral and multilateral counterterrorism diplomacy, building capacity of partner nations to effectively combat terrorism and extremism within their own borders, counter violent extremism, and strengthen homeland security.

CT Bureau pursues these responsibilities through a number of programs. Its largest being the Antiterrorism Assistance program that provides training courses, mentorships, and equipment to law enforcement agencies of our allies. This assistance enhances their ability to conduct investigations, secure their borders, protect critical targets, respond to crises, and enhance cyber security. Since 1983, the Bureau has trained more than 90,000 law enforcement personnel from 154 countries.

Given the heightened threat from terrorism that we and our allies face it is crucial that CT Bureau does its job effectively and efficiently. It is our job in Congress to ensure that the American taxpayers are getting their money’s worth. We are talking about millions of dollars going towards programs abroad: the people of Houston need to know that these millions they are sending abroad are vital to their safety and security. This is all the more important given the Bureau faces a 45% cut to its assistance programs. With limited resources every penny must be spent wisely.

It has proven difficult to determine if the Bureau is spending its funding wisely since only five evaluations have been conducted in the last 6 years. With the large cuts the State Department is trying to implement, we should only be investing in initiatives that have a positive impact. We cannot afford to throw good money after bad. But how can anyone know this without evaluating the programs that are currently in place? For example, since 2012 the Bureau has promised to evaluate its CVE efforts, yet it still has not completed this evaluation. Since then, the Bureau has made CVE a cornerstone of its efforts. CT Bureau opened up a brand new CVE office last year and planned to hire new employees to staff it. To put it bluntly, it makes absolutely no sense to invest more and more money into a field that has not been proven to yield results.

Not only does CVE not have a tangible and proven track record of success, but since the Bureau has launched its CVE focus, ISIS has managed to attract tens of thousands of fighters towards its murderous cause. So obviously something is not working. If that were not enough, last year the State Department announced the establishment of yet another CVE-related office, the Global Engagement Center or GEC. The GEC is outside of CT Bureau and till this day we have not received a clear idea as to how the Bureau will engage and coordinate with the GEC and how duplication of efforts will be avoided.

Knowing that the dangerous cancer of Islamic terrorism is not going away any time soon, it is crucial that the CT Bureau expends its efforts and money wisely in ways proven to yield results. We simply cannot afford to lose this ideological battle. We must ensure that CT Bureau has the resources needed to carry out its mission and at the same time that the Bureau acts responsibly with the resources provided by the American people. Our security and those of our allies depends on it.

And that's just the way it is.