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**Joint Statement of
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U.S. Department of State
&
Senate Committee on Homeland Security & Governmental Affairs
Hearing: “Protecting America from the Threat of ISIS”
May 26, 2016**

Chairman Johnson, Ranking Member Carper, and Members of the Committee: thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. The Department of State is working closely with Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and other U.S. government agencies to counter the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL or Da’esh) and keep America safe. This morning, I’d like to briefly describe the evolving threat environment, particularly those threats confronting our European partners, and the steps that we are taking to counter these evolving threats.

Evolving Terrorist Threat Landscape

As this Committee knows, the United States faces a fluid and fast-changing terrorist threat environment. The international community has made progress in degrading terrorist safe havens. In particular, the U.S.-led coalition to counter ISIL has made significant strides in reducing ISIL’s control of territory in Iraq and Syria, as well as the finances and foreign terrorist fighters available to it. At the same time, continued instability in key regions of the world, along with weak or non-existent governance, sectarian conflict, porous borders, and widespread online presence provide terrorist groups like ISIL the opportunity to expand their influence, terrorize civilians, attract and mobilize new recruits, and threaten partner countries.

In the face of increased military pressure, ISIL, al-Qa’ida, and both groups’ branches and adherents have pursued mass-casualty attacks against symbolic targets and public spaces. Terrorist attacks in Bamako, Beirut, Brussels, Jakarta, Paris, and elsewhere demonstrate that these groups remain resilient and continue to target innocent civilians. We contend that ISIL attacked Brussels on March 22, in an effort to assert a narrative of victory in the face of steady losses of territory in Iraq and Syria and generate persistent violence and fear in the West.

The United States and our partners around the world face significant new challenges as we and they seek to contend with the return of foreign terrorist

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fighters from Iraq and Syria to their home countries. Evolutions in technology that enable terrorist groups to recruit adherents and inspire attacks using publicly-accessible platforms and applications are another challenge. We will release the annual *Country Reports on Terrorism* soon, which will describe these and other trends in greater detail.

Promoting U.S. Homeland Security

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and other domestic law enforcement agencies are in the lead on countering terrorist threats against the United States. The Department of State and our embassies work closely with these agencies to strengthen cooperation and information sharing with foreign countries and to prevent foreign terrorists from traveling to the United States. As this Committee knows, we have taken steps over the past year to enhance the screening of all potential travelers to the United States, including through the Visa Waiver Program (VWP).

The VWP itself helps reinforce some of our strongest counterterrorism partnerships and serves as an incentive to other governments to adhere to the strongest possible security standards. Watchlisting, screening, and intelligence gathering are some of our best tools for countering the threat of foreign terrorist travel and we use these tools every day in collaboration with our VWP partners.

The VWP is not a free pass to travel to the United States. **All travelers** coming to the United States undergo checks for ties to terrorism and are subject to **multiple layers** of security – regardless of whether they have a visa or come in through the VWP. Our VWP partners must uphold strict security standards such as sharing information on known and suspected terrorists and reporting lost and stolen passports to INTERPOL. We use VWP benefits to encourage greater information sharing and more systemic screening by our allies, and these requirements give our partners the impetus to tighten security in ways that can be politically challenging.

The 38 countries that are part of the VWP include many of our closest allies and they are proud of their status. VWP membership is so prized that many countries that are not currently members nonetheless complete program requirements, including strengthening security and information-sharing, in the hope of joining.

Countering Foreign Terrorist Fighter Transit

The Department of State is working to address and mitigate the threat posed by foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) around the world, particularly in Europe. We are working with partners to put in place the fundamental reforms necessary to address this threat, which include increased information sharing, augmented border security, and strengthened legal regimes.

We are now seeing a reduction in flows of FTFs to Iraq and Syria. We attribute the reduction in FTF flows to a range of factors, including military gains by the Counter-ISIL Coalition and proactive steps by governments to strengthen and enforce border security, counter-facilitation, and counter-recruitment efforts.

In line with the landmark UN Security Council Resolution 2178 in 2014 which we helped to orchestrate, approximately 45 partner countries have passed new laws or updated existing laws to address FTFs. Through our diplomatic efforts, the United States continues to establish information-sharing arrangements, and we now have in place agreements with 55 international partners to assist efforts to identify, track, and deter the travel of suspected terrorists. We also supported INTERPOL to enhance its ability to share critical FTF identity data with countries around the world. Fifty-eight countries, and the United Nations, now contribute FTF profiles to INTERPOL. At least 35 countries have reported arresting FTFs, and 12 have successfully prosecuted at least one foreign terrorist fighter. Turkey, a critical geographic chokepoint in the flow of FTFs to and from Syria and Iraq has also increased detentions, arrests, and prosecution of suspected FTFs, and has taken important steps to improve the security of its border. Information sharing remains critical to preventing terrorist travel and we applaud the April 11 passage and signing of the EU Passenger Name Record Directive.

In particular, we have ramped up our engagement with European partners significantly in the aftermath of the Paris and Brussels attacks. This year, to supplement the close cooperation that we already enjoyed with a number of partners, including France, we deployed U.S. interagency Foreign Fighter Surge Teams to several European countries, including Belgium and Greece. These interagency teams work with partners to identify concrete areas to tighten cooperation to identify, disrupt, arrest, and prosecute suspected FTFs. We are partnering with these governments in areas including: strengthening information sharing on known and suspected terrorists, increasing effective traveler screening, and building comprehensive financial investigations.

We also continue to maintain consistent dialogue with our EU partners about necessary EU reforms that will strengthen our partners' abilities to identify and disrupt FTF travel. We have been pleased with actions taken in recent months by the EU and member states to better address vulnerabilities, including the passage of the EU Passenger Name Record Directive, something we have advocated in favor of for many years. We also know the EU is undertaking significant efforts to better coordinate EU and national-level law enforcement databases and watchlists. We continue to stress to member states the need to populate existing systems with high quality data, and we support the EU's efforts to increase the interoperability of systems. All of these steps are aimed at ensuring that appropriate border security and law enforcement officials have access to the right information at the right time to identify and disrupt FTF travel.

Expanding CT Partnerships and Capacity

President Obama has called for the United States to develop more effective partnerships around the world to confront, disrupt, and defeat the global threat from terrorism, especially threats from ISIL. Through our diplomacy and our capacity-building assistance, the Department of State is leading efforts to build these partnerships.

The success of counterterrorism efforts in countries around the world depends upon capable civilian partners. As in our domestic experience, police, investigators, and prosecutors are on the frontlines of preventing and responding to asymmetric attacks by terrorist groups abroad, especially attacks on so-called soft targets. Border and aviation security officials are working to stop foreign terrorist fighters, transfer of materiel, and terrorist threats. Moreover, local law enforcement, prison officials, and community leaders are on the frontlines to prevent and counter radicalization and recruitment to violence in their communities. The Department of State is leading efforts in these areas to build capacity and cooperation among these civilian actors.

We appreciate Congress' appropriation of \$175 million for the Counterterrorism Partnerships Fund (CTPF) in Fiscal Year 2016, and we ask for Congress' continued support for CTPF in FY 2017. With these and other Department of State resources, we are building deeper counterterrorism partnerships with the governments most critical to confronting ISIL, its branches, and other forms of terrorism from the Sahel to Southeast Asia. We are strengthening the ability of key law enforcement and criminal justice sector actors

to more effectively disrupt terrorist threats in their countries and address factors that make communities susceptible to violent extremism. We are working with governments and communities in vulnerable locations across the globe to reverse support of violent extremism. Adequate resources are critical to implement the whole-of-government approaches necessary to defeat ISIL, al-Qa'ida, and other groups that threaten American lives and interests.

The Department is actively engaged in supporting partner nations to counter the spread of ISIL's affiliates and networks. For example, we have increased engagement with our North African partners to address the ISIL branch and other terrorist groups in Libya. We plan to significantly expand support for Tunisia as it copes with threats emanating from Libya. We are also providing significant support to countries in the Lake Chad Basin region as they contend with the threat posed by Boko Haram, which declared its allegiance to ISIL in 2015. For example, we are training law enforcement from Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria on skills for conducting border security operations and preventing and responding to terrorist attacks, especially attacks involving improvised explosive devices. We also continue to build the capacity of partner countries to counter threats posed by al-Qa'ida and its affiliates, especially al-Shabaab, al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), and al-Qa'ida in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS). We are also working with multilateral institutions such as the United Nations, the Global Counter-Terrorism Forum, INTERPOL, and many others to help build partner capacities and improve international cooperation.

For FY 2017, we have also requested additional funding for our Terrorist Interdiction Program (TIP), which provides a highly valuable capability for countries to strengthen border controls through enhanced technology and training. When terrorists attempt to cross an international border, they open themselves up to the risk of apprehension. There is no excuse for governments to not enforce effective border controls; many of our partners are attuned to this challenge and are eager for U.S. advice and engagement to improve their own systems. The TIP program provides critical funding and technical expertise to help countries to screen passengers at airports, seaports, and major land border ports of entry. Through this program, we provide and train countries with Personal Identification Secure Comparison and Evaluation Systems (PISCES), a proven technology. We have implemented PISCES in more than 20 countries around the world, and hope to grow that number over the coming year.

Countering Violent Extremism

Finally, we have significantly increased our focus on identifying and preventing the spread of violent extremism— to stop the radicalization, recruitment, and mobilization of people, especially young people, to engage in terrorist activities and empower communities to help themselves confront ISIL and other threats. The attacks in Paris and elsewhere have demonstrated the ability of ISIL to inspire radicalization to violence through its messaging, including on the Internet. The Department of State has enhanced our Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) efforts, including through expanded engagement with key countries in the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia; with our domestic colleagues on the CVE Task Force; and with sub-national leaders, including local mayors and civil society, for instance through the Strong Cities Network.

We are working very closely with USAID and the newly-established interagency Global Engagement Center (GEC) to advance our CVE efforts. In collaboration with the GEC, the Department of State and USAID have requested additional resources for CVE programming in Fiscal Year 2017 – including as part of CTPF – to expand partnerships with government, non-governmental, local communities, and civil society actors who can help address key factors that drive radicalization and support within communities for extremist organizations, including violent extremist messaging and narratives and the recruitment and mobilization to violence.

Conclusion

Mr. Chairman, there is no greater priority than keeping America safe from the threat of terrorism. The terrorism threat landscape remains dynamic, and we must continue to enhance and adapt our efforts to stay ahead of emerging threats. The Department of State is committed to working closely with DHS and other U.S. government agencies to counter the threat posed to the United States by ISIL, its adherents, and other terrorist actors. We greatly appreciate Congress' interest and support for our efforts. I look forward to your questions and our discussion. Thank you.