

U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs

"Violent Islamist Extremism: Government Efforts to Defeat It"

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2:30 p.m.**

Chairman Lieberman; Senator Collins. Distinguished Members.

Thank you for inviting me here today to discuss "Violent Islamist Extremism: Government Efforts to Defeat It." That I am appearing before this committee underlines the fact that public diplomacy is an important component in ensuring the national security of the United States. The relationships we build through international exchanges and information programs conveying an accurate picture of U.S. policy, society and values, over time, make America more secure by countering misperceptions and increasing understanding between ourselves and others.

The mission of the State Department's Bureau of International Information Programs, which I represent, includes countering violent extremist ideology overseas. We have specific programs dedicated to that purpose, including a new Counterterrorism Communication Center intended to coordinate interagency public diplomacy activity in this area. I will describe these programs briefly in a minute.

First, however, I would like to place our work in the broader context of public diplomacy overall because, as Under Secretary Hughes has said, the struggle against extremism is not just a clash of ideas to be settled quickly. The ideological struggle will take years and generations. We must not only counter the information threat of the moment; we must also reach out to the next generation and to broader populations that might be vulnerable to extremist lies and messages of hate.

Focusing on the longer term, the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, under Assistant Secretary Dina Powell, has extended our exchanges and educational programs to younger and more diverse participants in order to reach audiences earlier than ever before and to provide opportunities to audiences not traditionally served by U.S. Government exchange programs. ECA is creating a strategic continuum for engaging future leaders and at risk populations. Beginning as early as fourteen, English ACCESS micro-scholarships and other programs establish sustainable relationships with select populations in priority countries. As we speak, nearly 200 international journalists are in this country receiving professional training and learning more about our country under a program in partnership with the Aspen Institute and twelve American communications schools.

On the nearer horizon, Under Secretary Hughes has focused our information resources on populations and programs important to the ideological struggle. Citizen Dialogues, part of a new Strategic Speaker Program, sends teams of American Muslims abroad to engage Muslim communities in other countries. We also send individual speakers to talk about Muslim life in America, as well as topics on religious freedom and diversity and other values relevant to the ongoing ideological struggle.

IIP's Digital Outreach Team and Arabic web-based programs have established a USG presence in Arabic cyberspace, ensuring that U.S. policies and values are included in the conversation about issues central to the ideological debate. Through modern technology as well as traditional means, we are "present for the debate," as recommended by the Advisory Group on Public Diplomacy for the Arab and Muslim World headed by Ambassador Edward Djerejian. Our Persian-language website serves as a virtual embassy to Iran and allows U.S. officials and others to discuss issues like nuclear non-proliferation with the Iranian people. The Public Affairs Bureau's Rapid Response Unit monitors foreign media and provides embassies and military commands with background and talking points. New media hubs in Dubai, Brussels and London facilitate engagement by U.S. officials with Arabic and other foreign media, especially television, in real time.

For my bureau, International Information Programs, the Internet is central to our engagement strategy, as exemplified by the Digital Outreach Team, our Arabic and Persian electronic outreach programs, and other operations. We have increased our presence on Internet discussion forums and our webchat and

other activities. We are exploring the applicability to our mission of new cyber-technologies like Second Life. Our coordination with other agencies for monitoring and analyzing Internet activity, especially in Arabic and English, has increased substantially.

Public diplomacy does not thrive on technology alone. Even in this high-tech age of global communication, our diplomats in the field are the lynch pins that make it all possible. They know what works in local conditions. They deliver the message to editors and appear on local television. They manage our in-country websites, in local languages. They also manage our exchange programs and recruit participants. In Edward R. Murrow's famous phrase, our diplomats in the field take the message across "the last three feet, which is bridged by personal contact, one person talking to another." Under Secretary Hughes' pilot country initiative, an interagency effort, is intended to put more resources into the hands of our people on the ground.

Over the twenty months of Under Secretary Hughes' tenure, we have created or expanded exchange and information programs specifically to advance the strategy of countering Islamist extremist ideology, both in the long term and in the immediate present. Although funding for exchange programs has risen, we have also expanded our information programs countering extremist ideology by refocusing some existing resources. Our continued efforts depend heavily on the 2007 emergency supplemental appropriation and on increases requested in the FY-2008 budget.

The Counterterrorism Communication Center is an interagency initiative to develop and deliver effective messages to undermine ideological support for terror and to counter terrorist propaganda. The Center provides leadership and coordination for interagency efforts in the war of ideas and seeks to integrate and enhance the U.S. Government's diverse public diplomacy counterterrorism efforts. We have begun to pull together the Center's interagency team, which, this past weekend, issued its first product, counterpoints to the taped message from Zawahiri released Saturday.

The Counterterrorism Communication Center, like the pilot country initiative, the Rapid Response unit, the Digital Outreach Team and other programs, is an operational outgrowth of the Policy Coordination Committee on Public Diplomacy and Strategic Communication headed by Under Secretary Hughes. The Policy Coordination Committee draws together numerous U.S.

Government entities engaged in the fight against extremist propaganda internationally. Besides the State Department, the Defense Department, USAID, and other agencies are key to the effort. Together, these agencies manage a wide array of activities, from exchanges and media training, to Internet outreach.

In recent years, cooperation among agencies has been good, under the umbrella of the Policy Coordination Committee, and we have taken a number of steps to make it better. The Fusion Team, managed by State, provides a weekly forum through which State, USAID, DOD and others keep one another informed about current projects, research and academic work. The Public Diplomacy Working Group on the Internet explores new ways to use technology to counter extremist propaganda; the Digital Outreach Team has its origins in the Public Diplomacy Working Group. Mechanisms including the Under Secretary's Echo Chamber messages and the Rapid Response Unit ensure embassies and military commands have a common set of talking points on breaking issues. The International Information Bureau has created a Public Diplomacy Briefing Book which offers broader guidance on broader issues; the Briefing Book is also used by various agencies. On a day-to-day basis, State is in frequent discussions with a wide range of interagency partners, including CENTCOM and EUCOM, on public diplomacy issues, including the Internet. The Counterterrorism Communication Center will take interagency coordination of public diplomacy activities in the counterterrorism arena to the next level, with a tight focus on monitoring, analysis and messaging.

Mr. Chairman: Internet engagement and information programs are the cutting edge of public diplomacy efforts to confront and defeat violent extremism abroad. These programs do not, however, stand in isolation. To be effective, our public diplomacy must deploy all instruments available, pre-eminently international educational and exchange programs. More comprehensively, public diplomacy is one component of the very broad U.S. Government response to the threat of terrorism and those who promote its ideologies, a response that is domestic as well as international and global.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.