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## U.S. Government Approach to Foreign Terrorist Fighters in Syria and the Broader Region

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We are facing an unprecedented flow of foreign terrorist fighters to Syria and Iraq, which necessitates an integrated, comprehensive, global response. Approximately 19,000 foreign fighters from more than 90 nations have traveled to Syria since the beginning of the conflict, including at least 3400 from the West. Over 150 Americans have traveled or attempted to travel to Syria. Many of these foreign terrorist fighters have joined the Nusrah Front—the al-Qa’ida affiliate in Syria—or smaller extremist factions, but most significantly, these foreign terrorist fighters have bolstered the ranks of ISIL, contributing to its gains last year and its expanded influence outside the region. ISIL has hundreds of Western foreign terrorist fighters and at least a dozen U.S. persons within its ranks. ISIL videos featuring British members executing hostages have painted a particularly Western face on its foreign terrorist fighter cadre, and much of its propaganda appears designed to target those in the West.

We are concerned about the foreign terrorist fighter threat not only because they can return home with the training, battlefield experience, and new terrorist networks they obtain in Syria, but also because of the threat they pose to the wider region and to the West from Syria. The Internet and social media have made it relatively easy for terrorists based in Iraq and Syria to maintain contact with, radicalize, and inspire lone offender attacks at home. An Australian foreign terrorist fighter has been among the first to demonstrate that they can now be just as dangerous from afar. In the fall, while fighting alongside ISIL in Syria, he reached back to direct an Australian cell to behead Australian citizens or U.S., British, or French tourists. Fortunately, Australian authorities disrupted the cell before they could carry out their plans.

Foreign terrorist fighters are drawn to ISIL by its propaganda, its false claims of religious legitimacy, its promise of adventure, and their perception of the group’s success and battlefield momentum, which the international coalition’s military efforts have recently halted. Foreign terrorist fighter flows remain a considerable problem, which the global community must do more to counter, but at the same time, foreign terrorist fighters are growing more and more disillusioned in Syria. It is becoming clear that ISIL views its foreign terrorist fighters as expendable. In Kobane, where local anti-ISIL fighters now control roughly 90% of the city, ISIL continued to send fighters—many of them foreigners—to their deaths in droves. It has lost at least 1000 fighters there alone, to the point that some fighters refused to go and as a result, were executed by ISIL. There are also reports of ISIL executing foreign terrorist fighters who have attempted to escape the

group to return home. We must do more to lift up this reality and counter ISIL's propaganda, which is its best recruitment tool.

Disrupting the flow of foreign terrorist fighters and their facilitators is a counterterrorism priority and a key line of effort in our counter-ISIL strategy, and the White House continues to lead an interagency effort to address this threat at home and abroad. The recent attacks in France and the wave of arrests in Europe have only strengthened U.S. and global resolve to address the threat foreign terrorist fighters pose. Our approach brings together homeland security, law enforcement, justice sector, intelligence, diplomatic, military, capacity building, and information sharing efforts. It is focused on improving border and aviation security, bolstering legal and prosecutorial capacity of partner nations, improving information sharing, and addressing the problem at its roots by countering violent extremism. It is key that we identify interventions at every step of the foreign terrorist fighter development cycle, from initial recruitment and radicalization, to mobilization, to travel to and from a conflict zone, to return home.

The U.S. employs a whole-of-government outreach effort with foreign partners, multilaterally and bilaterally, to highlight the threat posed by foreign terrorist fighters and to stem the flow of foreign terrorist fighters wherever possible. The countries involved in this effort are long-time counterterrorism partners, and together, we are committing significant resources to track and disrupt foreign terrorist fighter travel and recruitment. President Obama, while serving as the rotating President of the UN Security Council (UNSC), chaired a meeting of the Council focused on foreign terrorist fighters in September 2014 that led to the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 2178. This resolution expands upon current obligations within international law and requires countries to take concrete steps to counter foreign terrorist fighters, to include preventing suspected foreign terrorist fighters from entering or transiting their countries and implementing legislation to enable their prosecution. It also underscores the centrality of efforts to counter violent extremism to suppress the foreign terrorist fighter threat. It was adopted with a record number of co-sponsors—second only to the UNSCR on Ebola—demonstrating the global reach of the threat and the magnitude of the international community's concern.

Since the UNSC meeting, Lisa Monaco, the Assistant to the President for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism, and other senior administration officials have maintained the international community's momentum and focus on foreign terrorist fighters to advance the President's initiatives through regular consultations with allied governments. Last week in Paris, Ms. Monaco met with the French Minister of the Interior and discussed governmental responses in addressing the full life cycle of radicalization and programs to prevent violent extremism. Earlier this month, Attorney General Holder of the Department of Justice (DOJ) and Deputy Secretary Mayorkas of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) attended the Paris Ministerial on counterterrorism and foreign terrorist fighters. DOJ has provided foreign partners bilateral technical assistance and expertise in reviewing their legislation for compliance with UNSCR 2178, and over a dozen countries have updated their laws since the resolution's passage. DOJ has also helped partners develop their investigative tools to effectively prosecute foreign terrorist fighter cases.

Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) is a centerpiece of this administration's counterterrorism strategy. In August 2011, the White House released Empowering Local Partners to Prevent Violent Extremism in the United States, the first national strategy to prevent violent extremism domestically. In December 2011, a corresponding Strategic Implementation Plan outlined the specific steps departments and agencies will take to achieve the strategy's central goal of preventing violent extremists and their supporters from radicalizing, recruiting, or inspiring individuals or groups in the United States to commit acts of violence. The President

will host a countering violent extremism summit at the White House in mid-February to highlight domestic and international efforts to prevent violent extremists and their supporters from radicalizing, recruiting, or inspiring individuals or groups in the United States and abroad to commit acts of violence. Through presentations, panel discussions, and small group meetings, participants will build on local, state, and federal government; community; and international efforts to better understand, identify, and prevent the cycle of radicalization to violence at home in the United States and abroad. These discussions will explore both ways to counter violent extremism by identifying and addressing the conditions that can lead individuals to commit violent actions as well as ways to prevent and intervene where appropriate – both of which are key elements of President Obama’s comprehensive national security strategy. Recognizing that preventing the spread of violent extremism in different communities requires localized, specialized, and expanded efforts, this Summit provides an opportunity to share best practices that could be applied across regions or issues and to mobilize resources and political commitments to build on effective programs and develop new, innovative ones. DHS, State, DOJ, FBI and NCTC will play an integral role in the summit and events surrounding it.

Over the last year, the U.S. has also discussed best practices and expanded collaboration to counter the foreign terrorist fighter threat with NATO, the European Union, the OSCE, Interpol, Europol, the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF) and the International Institute for Justice and Rule of Law, which opened last year in Malta to serve as a hub for training judges, prosecutors, law enforcement, and legislators on counterterrorism-related casework, beginning with a focus on foreign terrorist fighter facilitation. As reinforced in UNSCR 2178, we continue to encourage expanded cooperation between law enforcement on foreign terrorist fighters through INTERPOL’s notice advisory system. Through INTERPOL’s secure communications network, U.S. law enforcement authorities also share information on foreign terrorist fighters in real time with other member countries. In late February, to build upon the White House CVE summit, DHS and the Department of State will host the Global Counterterrorism Forum workshop, “Raising Community Awareness to Address the Foreign Terrorist Fighter Phenomenon,” to focus on ways in which communities and governments can develop specific programs to address foreign terrorist fighters.

The Department of State’s Senior Advisor for Partner Engagement on Syria Foreign Fighters plays a central role in integrating the U.S. government’s multilateral as well as bilateral efforts. Last spring, the Department of State created this position, and in January, Ambassador Thomas Krajeski became the second senior official to take on the role of marshalling representatives from a number of U.S. departments and agencies to encourage key European, North African, Middle Eastern, and Asian partners to prioritize the threat, address vulnerabilities, and adapt measures to prevent and interdict foreign terrorist fighters. The Department of State also hosts the interagency Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications (CSCC), established to counter recruitment and radicalization online through counter-messaging. CSCC is engaged in a sustained campaign against Syria and Iraq-based terrorists’ online messaging to combat their ability to recruit foreign terrorist fighters. We have encouraged partner nations to develop similar initiatives.

Separately, the U.S. Intelligence Community works closely with foreign partners to identify and assess both tactical developments as well as broader trends vis-à-vis foreign terrorist fighters. The Intelligence Community’s robust sharing of intelligence and analytic insights with foreign counterparts ensures that the proper authorities and senior officials are aware of relevant developments and are best placed to take steps to interdict foreign terrorist fighters and disrupt their support networks. In addition, the FBI’s 64 legal attaches, assigned to U.S. embassies around the globe, share foreign terrorist fighter and threat information with foreign law enforcement entities, and the FBI’s Terrorist Screening Center’s information-sharing agreements with over 40 international partners provide a mechanism for identifying and sharing terrorist travel activity.

Aviation security is also a key element of our approach to the foreign terrorist fighter issue, and DHS Secretary Johnson has made it his priority. DHS has mandated enhanced screening measures at certain overseas airports and is engaging with foreign partners and industry to support integrating similar enhancements over the long term. DHS has also shared best practices, tools, and programs with foreign partners to help address the challenges posed by porous borders in detecting foreign terrorist fighter travel. DHS is encouraging additional countries to join the United States and more than 60 other countries in using travel information like Advance Passenger Information and Passenger Name Record data to identify both known and previously unknown foreign terrorist fighters. Additionally, DHS has invested in collaboration with governments, carriers, and airport authorities to solicit applications for U.S. Preclearance, through which DHS provides additional security while facilitating lawful travel. In November, DHS strengthened the security of the Visa Waiver Program through enhancements to the Electronic System for Travel Authorization. DHS now requires additional data to improve its ability to screen prospective visa waiver program travelers and more accurately and effectively identify those who pose a security risk to the United States.

At home, the U.S. also has efforts underway to address U.S. foreign terrorist fighters at each stage of their development cycle. First, we are developing a comprehensive framework to counter violent extremist recruitment, including programs with non-traditional partners, such as mental health, social service, and education providers. Local communities are the front lines of defense and response, and are essential in addressing foreign terrorist fighter recruitment, especially as ISIL and other Syria-based groups focus on recruiting Westerners. Local law enforcement authorities and community members are often best able to identify individuals or groups exhibiting suspicious or dangerous behaviors and to intervene before they commit acts of violence or attempt to travel overseas to foreign conflict zones. DOJ, DHS, and NCTC work with local law enforcement and community leaders to build on community-based activities to strengthen resilience in communities targeted by violent extremist recruitment and undermine narratives used by foreign terrorist fighter facilitators. For example, DHS, NCTC, and U.S. Attorney Offices have co-hosted Community Resilience Exercises in Durham, Seattle, and Houston. DHS Secretary Johnson also hosted community outreach programs in Minneapolis, Los Angeles, and Boston in November and December 2014.

DHS has also developed tools to aide its front-line personnel—be they transportation security officers, customs or border patrol, or immigration officials—in identifying suspected violent extremists. In an effort to ensure threat information is shared with local law enforcement in a timely manner, DHS and FBI disseminate joint intelligence bulletins. Finally, the FBI has the lead in conducting counterterrorism investigations, working closely with DOJ, DHS, the Intelligence Community, and federal and state law enforcement agencies to share information and identify, investigate, and prosecute U.S. citizens with intentions to travel to foreign countries to support designated terrorist groups or those who have returned after doing so.