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Statement for the Record

Mr. Damon Stevens  
Assistant Director for Strategic Operational Planning and  
National Intelligence Manager for Counterterrorism

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**Non-Kinetic Counterterrorism Tools in a Time of Competing Priorities**

Non-kinetic counterterrorism is a critical part of the counterterrorism toolkit that rarely gets the credit it deserves for counterterrorism (CT) success over the last 20 years and it needs to be reconsidered as the CT enterprise is in a period of transition.

The national CT effort is changing, which is a true testament to the success of the CT community and the investment by the Executive Branch, Congress, and American people over the last 20 years. If the community does its job well to counter the efforts of terrorist groups, terrorism will hopefully not become the top national security priority again.

But for now, the terrorism threat has not gone away. While the threat from a strategic-level terrorist attack to the Homeland is lower than it has been in the past, the United States today is facing a more geographically dispersed and ideologically diffuse threat than in the past – a threat that is enabled by a more technologically complex environment than ever before. This juxtaposition challenges the CT community to look toward the future in a time of shifting resources, creating an opportunity to ensure that the U.S. is focused on investing in the right capabilities and partnerships as it works to transition to a sustainable and enduring resource and capability posture.

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The first natural question to ask is what combination of kinetic and non-kinetic actions are most attributable to the success of the CT community these past 20 years? If you talk to 20 practitioners and experts you'd probably get 20 different answers. "Kinetic" action has undoubtedly had its intended effect -- the direct pressure placed on the leadership of AQ and ISIS has made it difficult for those groups to plan and orchestrate complex attacks on our homeland and those tools are often the most visible ones that come to mind when one thinks of U.S. CT efforts. But what about other efforts?

Over the past twenty years, nonkinetic CT efforts have indisputably disrupted terrorist attacks, and have had a real impact on terror groups' recruitment efforts. The investments we have made over the years in working with domestic and international law enforcement, developing and imposing financial sanctions on suspected terrorists and their affiliates, and sharing intelligence within our government and with our foreign partners, especially those developing and using CVE tools, have undoubtedly paid off.

In addition, it is the aggregate impact of the efforts of the worldwide CT community that arguably does more day to day to address terrorism than anything the US can do alone. As Luke Hartig recently highlighted in his article in *The Atlantic*, our borders defense and homeland security apparatus are light years ahead of where they were 20 years ago. For terrorists hoping to enter the homeland, it is considerably more challenging to get through the multiple layers of screening and physical security. While not always included in category of non-kinetic CT tools, the screening and vetting tools we employ are the first, second, and third most important non-kinetic capabilities today. Furthermore, identity intelligence has become the most important discipline in the CT and transnational threats arena.

The bottom line is that there are a range of effective tools across the kinetic and non-kinetic spectrum, but there are no easy answers as to what is the right combination of CT tools to help determine what capabilities to protect or even invest in or more importantly, where we can

divest in to ensure our country can address other pressing challenges as well.

What is clear however is that as we wind down military deployments overseas, non-kinetic capabilities, both traditional and non-traditional, are going to be more important not less, and by default, represent a larger percentage of our national mix and therefore bear more responsibility for our continued success. So with that in mind, for those of you working to maximize the impact and efficacy of the efforts highlighted today, there are three thoughts regarding non-kinetic tools that are important if we're going to be successful in this area.

1. Non-kinetic CT tools require time and space to sustain their impact, which necessitates an enduring foundation of indications and warning intelligence;
2. Non-kinetic tools supporting homeland defense and resiliency should be prioritized and after 20 years, we have significant data on which of those have measurable impact and those that do not; and
3. In a time where other national security challenges may be receiving additional focus and support, CT specific non-kinetic tools likely will benefit from clearer alignment and even potential absorption into larger substantive portfolios.

On the first point, non-kinetic tools only work when they have the time and the operational and policy space to be effective. The policy community absolutely needs the time and space to be able to employ non-kinetic tools, so accurate intelligence is vital to be successful in non-kinetic CT. Surprise or exigent circumstances greatly narrow our options and if we are going to rely on a larger toolkit, and for those of you providing intellectual leadership for the development and deployment of these tools, we must focus on what support, and the conditions that must exist, to allow these tools to be utilized. Arguably, focusing on the support needed to use these tools may be more important than the tool itself.

Twenty years ago, we made a clear strategic decision to build an intelligence and operational

infrastructure to support the nation's CT efforts. Over this time, it has largely focused on putting direct pressure on terrorist leaders and organizations where they have sanctuary overseas. However, to the credit of countless professionals over the years from across the interagency— intelligence that supports kinetic operations also supports a full range of downstream non-kinetic activities, especially the ones you have focused on today, from law enforcement actions, to diplomatic and homeland security, to messaging and CVE efforts, to treasury and diplomatic actions. The post 9/11 CT Enterprise is the result in part from a lack of transparency and unified effort across the interagency but over the last 15-20 years has developed into one of the most integrated and mutually supporting communities within the national security spectrum.

This is why the maintenance and potential investment in capabilities and partnerships to provide indications and warning may be the most important thing we can do if we are serious about increasing the use of non-kinetics. Only accurate intelligence, information, and insights that provide timely warning about growing threats before they mature to a point where the policy maker believes their only option is direct action, will give us the time and space to sustainably use non-kinetic tools.

So here is the challenge that we think about and work on every day: as we shift resources away from military deployments and the associated infrastructure that comes with them, how do we ensure we are maintaining and improving an I&W capability that will provide us the warning and insights to allow us the ability to focus on non-kinetic opportunities? As we transition, how do we ensure those downstream non-kinetic efforts retain the support they need to be successful?

This is crucial because non-kinetic options are most viable as proactive measures, and least viable as reactive measures. Without timely intelligence and warning, all the advocacy and proper planning of non-kinetic efforts will simply be an academic exercise. So if you are interested in using non-kinetic tools, you must be sincerely interested in first ensuring there is

an underlying foundation to support their use.

That brings me to my second and related point.

Non-kinetic support to homeland defense and employing tools proven effective over the last 20 years must take precedence and be ruthlessly prioritized as we stay focused on continuing to keep the homeland safe and collectively transition our national efforts to a sustainable and enduring posture.

I mentioned at the opening, this is a time of opportunity for us in the CT community. We are at an inflection point where in the past there were times when non-kinetic focused resources, even more than kinetic action, were arguably spread too far, wide, and thin, against many different efforts potentially limiting the enduring impact of those non-kinetic efforts.

With resource constraints comes hard choices that can actually lead to more effective and efficient efforts. I mentioned the juxtaposition of lower threat to the homeland but greater dispersion of threat actors, but another important factor is that as numerous officials have testified, the analytic community believes the most significant direct threat we face from terrorism here in the United States is not an attack launched from overseas but from lone actors and self-radicalized individuals here.

Therefore at this point in history, we must take a hard look at that threat and resource picture and prioritize investments accordingly. This invariably means assuming some risk and possibly not being as proactive in some areas as we have in the past. In a time of declining resources, we should ensure that we use the experience we've gained over the last 20 years to focus on what we know works, and minimize continued focus on efforts that we wish worked, or theoretically should work but have been unable to date to demonstrate measurable impact.

So to ensure that our national efforts are ruthlessly disciplined, there are some areas where we

simply must prioritize:

1. First and foremost are border security and screening and vetting efforts, which as I mentioned at the outset I view as arguably the most important non-kinetic CT component. This is a space that continues to have significant policy, legal, technological, and logistic opportunities that need focus, expertise, and solutions from both within governments and intellectual leaders outside. Other efforts that focus on homeland defense and resiliency, to include diplomatic security, should also be prioritized as we do less overseas.
2. Next is the tracking and disruption of the financial actions of terrorist groups and their enablers. In a way, financial disruptions through sanctions or other means represent a proactive tool, like law enforcement or even traditional kinetic action that will become more important as traditional direct action options become less available.
3. The non-kinetic tools I think of most are CVE and TP. We know after many years of research and real data, that the radicalization process is very individual and subject to hyper-local conditions, which makes it a true challenge for the US Government to programmatically have enough impact in the aggregate to justify the resources expended, even in resource abundant times of investment in CT.

While some of the most exciting work in this space is now being led by State and USAID, this also means that finite dollars spent domestically in the space where we can ensure more localized impact may come at the expense of larger overseas investments that I know many of us have long advocated for. Similar to point one regarding indications and warning, we can't forget that it is ultimately the protection of the homeland that, again, provides the space to eliminate the need to rely on direct action and a heavy military presence.

And this leads to my third and final point.

CT specific non-kinetic tools will likely benefit from being merged into larger substantive

portfolios.

This may sound out of place at a CT discussion and coming from a person from the National Counterterrorism Center, but for many non-kinetic capabilities and tools, I believe if we focus less on just the CT-specific aspects of the tools, (as we like to do in the CT community), and strive to integrate the CT aspects into broader functional or regional applications of the tool, we will be more effective in actually using those tools for CT.

There is some merit in criticism of the CT community that over the years we did not do a good job of integrating regional counterparts and their respective issues into CT discussions, decisions, or resource investments. When CT was our top priority, we had a tendency to focus just on the CT aspects of a challenge, which in many cases limited our solutions.

My point here is simple: we'll be better served if we can get broader swaths of the national security community to incorporate CT targets better than we did in years past incorporating their issues into CT. This will help our efforts in a world of competing priorities and limited budgets, leveraging our mission partners in the most efficient way possible.

The real world is not neatly compartmented like our bureaucratic lines, as demonstrated by the increasingly diffuse nature of the CT threat increasingly intersecting with other functional and regional security disciplines to include strategic competition, transnational crime, and humanitarian operations. Put another way, our tools to counter terrorist use of advanced and emerging technologies or the exploitation of decentralized currency mechanisms is not dissimilar to those strategies being employed against transnational organized crime and in some cases, even state actors.

As another example, many of the underlying causes of terrorism are also underlying causes of poor governance, poverty, political unrest, humanitarian strife, environmental catastrophe, and other factors. This means that for those broader complex areas that have strong leadership, if we roll CT under or within those broader topics, the outcome will likely lead to

greater funding and focus than when they stand alone as CT specific niche areas.

Rather than holding on to notions that these efforts are so unique and special, there is an opportunity to work closer with, and even by, with, and through regional, political, humanitarian efforts that can amplify better results in the long run.

Conversely, the CT community has accumulated lessons learned, best practices, and scar tissue over the past 20 years in the development of these non-kinetic tools and capabilities that should serve to guide interventions against other emerging national security concerns.

So these are just a few thoughts I have to share as we work together to promote and improve the vital impact that these non-kinetic tools have for our aggregated national effort. There are no magic bullets or piles of money coming, but our experience and this once in a generation opportunity to re-look at how we prioritize and approach these topics I believe set us up for an even more enduring and sustainable national effort in this space as we all work to meet our shared goal of ensuring CT does not become #1 again.

Thank you again to Matt and the Washington Institute for hosting this event and the opportunity to speak today.