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THE STATE DEPARTMENT'S CENTER FOR STRATEGIC COUNTERTERRORISM COMMUNICATIONS: MISSION, OPERATIONS AND IMPACT

HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON TERRORISM, NONPROLIFERATION, AND TRADE

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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THE STATE DEPARTMENT'S CENTER FOR STRATEGIC COUNTERTERRORISM COMMUNICATIONS: MISSION, OPERATIONS AND IMPACT

THURSDAY, AUGUST 2, 2012

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON TERRORISM,
NONPROLIFERATION, AND TRADE,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
Washington, DC.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 2:05 p.m., in room 2172, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Edward R. Royce (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Mr. ROYCE. This hearing of the subcommittee will come to order. Today we examine the State Department's Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications. Terrorist organizations, as we know, use the Internet. They use it to propagandize, and they use it to recruit, and they use it all over the globe. So prevalent are these extremist Web sites today that they have been described as a "virtual caliphate" in cyberspace. Several witnesses appearing before this subcommittee in the past have urged a more vigorous U.S. effort to combat terrorist use of the Internet.

And to go back to recent hearings on this, one cited "the absence of an effective campaign to counter al-Qaeda's extremist ideology" and made the point that that is a central challenge, an ongoing challenge. Another witness said that our efforts up until now have been "anemic." Stepping into this void is the Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications, which was established by executive order last fall.

While other U.S. agencies may hack into extremist chat rooms to sew confusion or to render them useless, or for the purpose of collecting intelligence, CSCC's mission is a very straightforward one. Its mission is to identify, confront, and undermine al-Qaeda or, as the Ambassador likes to say, "get in their heads."

Arabic, Urdu, and Somali speakers "contest" in these online chat rooms and media Web sites and these forums that are set up where al-Qaeda and al-Qaeda affiliates operate. As we will hear, the aim of its "digital outreach team" is to expose the inherent contradictions in al-Qaeda propaganda and bring to light al-Qaeda's atrocities. One recent effort caught headlines after the al-Qaeda affiliate in Yemen posted photos of coffins. And in these pictures, they had coffins draped in American flags. The center produced a counter ad that replaced the flags with the flag of Yemen, conveying, of course,

that most of the victims of the attacks in Yemen have been local people. And these videos, of course, got a quick reaction. And they were applauded by analysts for the use of the "out-of-the-box" thinking. And the use of ridicule is pretty common here in terms of this interaction that goes on with al-Qaeda on these Web sites.

So this is new. And there are issues for us to consider in this. Can the center keep from becoming just another office that is bureaucratic? Can we make sure the innovation isn't beaten out of it, you know, keep it fresh? Is it responding to events on the ground with what I think you call the appropriate "counternarratives" for those situations? And the digital outreach team, which includes many contract personnel, have also got to master here some pretty sensitive and complicated issues, or they could do harm in this situation.

So how does the State Department oversee their work? How do you avoid some of the quality control issues that have plagued some of the U.S. international broadcasting efforts over the years? I am thinking about some of the problems we have had with respect to Iran, for example. So those are the issues. And should it go beyond al-Qaeda as a target? Does the center face legal constraints is another issue.

But an overriding question facing the center is the ability to measure its impact. Terrorist propagandists have felt compelled to react to the center's work with vitriolic attacks. We have anecdotal evidence in terms of the effectiveness. In December, a top al-Qaeda Web site began discussing ways to counter the videos posted by the digital outreach teams that are reaching their audience. State Department officials take the attitude that it is better to be hated than ignored when it comes to al-Qaeda's watchers. But at the end of the day, we need a measure of effectiveness. We need to know, are opinions changing? And if so, is the center a significant influence, or is it just a commendable but ultimately futile attempt to empty an ocean of militancy with a spoon?

Those are the issues we are going to be discussing today. And we look forward to hearing from our witness. And I will turn now to Ranking Member Sherman for his opening statement.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Royce follows:]

Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade

The State Department's Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications: Mission, Operations, Impact

Opening Statement - Chairman Ed Royce

August 2, 2012

This hearing of the Subcommittee will come to order. Today we examine the State Department's Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications.

Terrorist organizations use the Internet to propagandize and recruit across the globe. So prevalent are extremist websites that they have been described as a "virtual caliphate" in cyberspace.

Several witnesses appearing before the Subcommittee in recent years have urged a more vigorous U.S. effort to combat terrorist use of the Internet. One cited "the absence of an effective campaign to counter al-Qaeda's extremist ideology" as a central challenge. Another called U.S. efforts in this area "anemic."

Stepping into this void is the Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications, established by Executive Order last fall. While other U.S. agencies may hack into extremist chat rooms to sow confusion, render them useless, or collect intelligence, CSCC's mission is to "identify, confront, and undermine the communications of al-Qaeda and its affiliates." Or as the Ambassador will testify: "get in their heads."

Arabic, Urdu, and Somali speakers "contest" the online space, media websites and forums where al-Qaeda and its affiliates operate. As we will hear, the aim of its "digital outreach team" is to expose the inherent contradictions in al-Qaeda propaganda and bring to light its atrocities. One recent effort caught headlines: after the al-Qaeda affiliate in Yemen posted photos of coffins draped in American flags, the Center produced a counter-ad that replaced the flags with Yemeni ones - conveying that most victims of terrorist attacks are locals. These videos have been applauded by analysts for their use of "out of the box" thinking and ridicule.

This is all new. There are many issues to consider. Can the Center keep from becoming just another office, plagued by bureaucracy, with any innovation beaten out of it? Is it responding to events on the ground with appropriate "counter-narratives," to use the term of art? The digital outreach team, which includes many contract personnel, must master sensitive and complex issues, or it could do harm. How does the State Department oversee their work and avoid the quality control issues that have plagued U.S. international broadcasting efforts? Should its targeting go beyond al-Qaeda? Does the Center face legal constraints?

An overriding question facing the Center is its ability to measure impact. Anecdotally, terrorist propagandists have felt compelled to react to the Center's work with vitriolic attack. In December, a top al-Qaeda website began discussing ways to counter videos posted by the digital outreach teams. State Department officials take the attitude that it is better to be hated than ignored. But at the end of the day, we need a measure of effectiveness. Are opinions changing – and if so, is the Center a significant influence, or is it just a commendable but ultimately futile attempt to empty an ocean of militancy with a spoon?

We look forward to discussing this promising initiative today. I'll now turn to Ranking Member Sherman for his opening statement.

Mr. SHERMAN. Thank you, Chairman, for holding these hearings.

Back in September 2010, I was sitting there. You were sitting immediately to the right, and this same subcommittee held hearings called U.S. Strategy for Countering Jihadist Web Sites, in which we focused on the efforts to counter the radical messages online. And while I know our focus here is going to be online, television and radio continue to be even more important communications media in most of the world that we are trying to reach.

The State Department Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications, CSCC, has as its mission to identify, confront, and undermine the communications of al-Qaeda affiliates. A principal focus is digital outreach. The staff of the center is about 45 by the end of this year, I understand, with about 20 native speakers of Arabic, Urdu, and Somali, and I hope other languages as well. And perhaps in your statement you can indicate all the languages that you have native speakers communicating in. And they are battling on forums and other sites where al-Qaeda and its affiliates spread propaganda and recruit followers. They expose the work of hate, contradictions, false and empty ideology of al-Qaeda.

And I hope that you are working hand in hand, and maybe you will tell us in your opening statement, with the CIA and others to identify who the bad guys are, rather than just to argue against them. There are some we are not going to be able to convince.

These are open Web sites, forums where vulnerable minds can be swayed by al-Qaeda recruiters. According to the State Department, the center focuses on two themes in counterterrorism communications, that al-Qaeda-inspired violence kills disproportionately Muslims, and then violence is not necessary for political change. Pakistan is a nuclear-armed Islamic state on the front line of several conflicts. With so many extremist groups, Pakistan is a pressing international problem for us. My hope is that you are reaching out to the Pakistani people, not just in Urdu, which is the politically correct language that the government and the ISI in Pakistan would have you use, but also in the other languages, particularly Sindhi. The people of Sindh, who predominantly speak Sindhi, have been under attack by governmental bodies. And that is why the Government of Pakistan would just assume you not use that language. They are so helpful in so many ways, that perhaps you might want to ignore their advice. The U.S. must reach out to Sindh, when of course the Sindhi language is spoken by more people than Urdu, even though I know you have native Urdu speakers. So I hope you will be discussing your efforts to outreach to southern Pakistan. I would point out that this committee passed an amendment stating that at least $1.5 million be spent on radio broadcasts, preferably AM, perhaps based in the Emirates, to reach out in the Sindhi language.

The terrorist organizations use the Internet to get their message across and spread propaganda. We are told that we should simply compete with them by posting things where they post things. The more aggressive thing to do is just take down their sites. And we invented the Internet, and we ought to perhaps be aggressive, either by serving notice on certain servers in certain countries or through more surreptitious means. Are you so sure that you are

going to outdebate them that you want them to have the run of the Internet?

Another issue is the budget. You have had some belt tightening, a 2011 budget of $6.8 million. In 2012, it was $5 million. The request now is for $5.15 million. I would just point out that even if your work is 100th of 1 percent as important as our military, you are a real bargain. And it has the additional advantage of not having to pay in both blood and treasure for our anti-terrorism efforts.

So I look forward to hearing from you as to what we can do to block terrorist communications as well as to answer them. I yield back.

Mr. ROYCE. Thank you, Mr. Sherman.

Now we go to Mr. Duncan from South Carolina.

Mr. DUNCAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

You know, I am grateful for the work that the State Department Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications is seeking to do. In addition to serving on this subcommittee, my work on the Homeland Security Committee has enabled me to study this issue in depth. And I believe strategic communications is crucial.

This issue is really an issue about the war of ideas. How do we achieve victory on a battleground for the hearts and minds of individuals who not only commit violent actions, but who seek to destroy America, our values, our freedoms, and ultimately our Constitution? So what do we do with a war that involves conflicting visions of the world; western civilization, which values freedom, versus a totalitarian political ideology of Islamists espoused by al-Qaeda and other terrorist organizations, including the imposition of a rigid form of sharia? Radical Islamist clerics and terrorist organizations have become masters at using social media. Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Internet chat rooms, and al-Qaeda's Inspire allow the publication of religious commentary and religious opinions to large audiences instantaneously.

In the course of this hearing, I would like know to know to what extent social media plays in the role of the center's identification of current and emerging trends of extremist communication. Does the center have an alternative or counternarrative to al-Qaeda's Inspire? Additionally, I want to understand how the center defines strategic counterterrorism communications. What is so strategic about what the center is doing? In other words, by strategic, does the center mean coordination of communications all across government channels? More a bureaucratic messaging strategy? Or does it mean that the U.S. Government communications will have a strategic effect? I believe the center is on the right path in seeking to steer individuals away from violence.

However, I believe that we can take it further by, one, understanding the ideology of Islamists; number two, directly countering the ideology by attacking Islamists' authenticity, delegitimizing groups, individuals, and movements that support Islamist discourse and power; and number three, neutralizing Islamist propaganda by showing the parallels between Islamism and other forms of political ideology, like totalitarianism and fascism and other things. And so Ambassador Fernandez, thank you for being here today to testify. I look forward to your testimony.

And with that, Mr. Chairman, I will yield back.

Mr. ROYCE. Thank you, Mr. Duncan.

Today we are joined by Ambassador Alberto Fernandez, the State Department's Coordinator for the Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communication.

Previously, Ambassador Fernandez served as U.S. Ambassador to Equatorial Guinea. He served as director for Near East Public Diplomacy from 2005 to 2007 and held senior diplomacy positions at the U.S. Embassies in Afghanistan, Jordan, and Syria.

I think you were stationed in Sudan for a while.

A career member of the Foreign Service, Ambassador Fernandez has received the Presidential Meritorious Service Award and the Edward R. Murrow Award for Excellence in Public Diplomacy, among others. He is fluent in Arabic and in Spanish.

We welcome you to the committee.

And I would like to acknowledge that the Ambassador submitted his testimony to the committee well in advance of this afternoon's hearing, a first I think. It is much appreciated, obviously, by the members of the committee.

Your complete written statement, of course, will appear in the record. What we are going to suggest is a shorter 5-minute opening statement, and then we will proceed with questions.

And again, Ambassador, thank you for joining us.

STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE ALBERTO FERNANDEZ, COORDINATOR, CENTER FOR STRATEGIC COUNTERTERRORISM COMMUNICATIONS, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Ambassador FERNANDEZ. Thank you Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Sherman, and Mr. Duncan, thank you for the opportunity to be here today. I am pleased to be with you this afternoon to discuss the interagency Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications. I will make brief remarks drawing on my formal testimony.

CSCC was established at the direction of the President and the Secretary of State to coordinate, orient, and inform government-wide foreign communications activities targeted against terrorism and violent extremism, particularly al-Qaeda and its allies. We are housed in the Department of State with the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs. I report directly to Under Secretary Sonenshine and work very closely with the Bureau of Counterterrorism, other department bureaus, and other agencies.

We have a steering committee chaired by Under Secretary Sonenshine with CT Bureau Coordinator Ambassador Benjamin as vice chair. The committee comprises nine agencies, including NCTC, the Departments of Defense, Treasury, Justice, Homeland Security, CIA, and USAID. We target a specific audience overseas through our products for U.S. Government communicators, projects, and the online engagement of our Digital Outreach Team.

As many of you know, al-Qaeda has repeatedly made clear the high importance it attaches to the media struggle. Ayman al-Zawahiri has described the communications space as more than half of the battle. And one scholar noted recently that al-Qaeda has transformed from a global terrorist organization that used the media into a global media organization that uses terrorism. So our

goal is to move quickly, to respond effectively and to contest the space which had been for too long monopolized by our adversaries.

For example, very recently as troubling developments in Timbuktu unfolded last month, we were writing a preliminary media strategy and producing new digital material specifically focused on al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and its allies' destructive activities in northern Mali. To achieve our goals, CSCC is divided into three distinct areas of operation, intelligence and analysis, plans and operations, and the Digital Outreach Team, or DOT.

The intelligence and analysis section gathers analytic support from the intelligence community, academia, and other sources of relevant expertise that is essential to our mission to counter violent extremism.

We subscribe to two guiding principles for the center's operation: That counterterrorism communications should be guided by the best intelligence and academic analysis of the audience, the adversary, and the appropriate communications themes and techniques; and that this must be an interagency effort, drawing on analytical and operational skills across U.S. Government agencies. The detail to CSCC of intelligence community and U.S. military personnel make this goal a feasible one.

The second part is the plans and operations team, which designs and implements nondigital CVE communications strategies, tools, and programs to counter al-Qaeda's ability to recruit and win support. This section focuses on undermining the efforts of al-Qaeda and its affiliates in and emanating from five priority areas using nondigital means. The five priority areas being Al-Shabaab in the Horn of Africa; al-Qaeda senior leadership and its affiliates and allies in Pakistan; AQIM and its associates across the Sahel through Northern and Western Africa; al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula; and al-Qaeda in Iraq and its offshoots in that general area of the Fertile Crescent.

These plans and ops teams provide CVE communications material for use by all U.S. Government communicators with foreign audiences. These tools include CSCC communications templates on topics such as highlighting Al-Shabaab's actions against Somalis and shorter Quick Thoughts documents, such as the recent, "A Plague of Locusts: CT Messaging Against AQIM and Ansar al-Din."

CSCC's third section is the Digital Outreach Team, or DOT, which directly counters the al-Qaeda narrative in the interactive digital environment. Most of this team's engagements, which number more than 7,000 since joining CSCC, consist of written text posted to online forums, Facebook, or the comments sections of media Web sites. But they also use video. They also use poster art, and other means. Engagements are branded. Writer analysts identify themselves as members of the Digital Outreach Team at the U.S. Department of State. This is overt communication in this digital space.

Three basic principles animate this team's activities: Contest the space, redirect the conversation, and confound the adversary. An early measure of effectiveness has been the irate responses from online extremists who fulminate on various occasions, expressing a desire to hack the Digital Outreach Team's YouTube channel, warning their followers to be wary of providing fodder for the team,

and even discussing the possibility of setting up their own radical Digital Outreach Team to conquer what we are doing. The digital environment is rapidly changing, as are al-Qaeda's efforts to exploit them. CSCC is committed to keeping pace and innovating. The rise of hand-held devices provides an opportunity to do so. And we have already deployed video with mobile platforms in one of our highest priority areas. A recent Yemen-focused clip garnered 15 to 20 percent of views on mobile devices.

Future plans include establishing a presence on mobile-based interactive environments, distributing audio and visual files over mobile devices, and finding new ways to deliver digital content to the physical environment through hand-held devices. As an example of our work, we recently have a campaign that just included a focus in the Urdu language in Pakistan for a 30-month period in June-July 2012, pushing back against extremist narratives in Pakistan with examples of U.S.-funded aid projects. For more than 30 days, the team carried out 255 engagements using 10 videos and 10 still images on 29 online platforms, reaching nearly 50,000 people through Facebook and forums, and generating over 400 comments. That was one very targeted, narrowly focused campaign on a very specific subject.

Gentlemen, thank you for your interest and your continued support, and I look forward to answering your questions and getting into greater detail. But thank you very much. And it is a real pleasure to be here.

Mr. ROYCE. Thank you, Ambassador.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Fernandez follows:]

Statement of Ambassador Alberto M. Fernandez
Coordinator for the Center of Strategic Counterterrorism Communications
before the
House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation and Trade

August 2, 2012

Chairman Royce, Ranking Member Sherman, Members of the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to be here today. I am extremely pleased to be with you this afternoon to discuss the interagency Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications (CSCC). As you know, representatives of my senior staff and I met with many staffers representing the House Foreign Affairs Committee two months ago on June 1st for an introductory briefing. We were very pleased with the offers of support that followed.

Al-Qa'ida has repeatedly made clear the importance it attaches to the media struggle. Al-Zawahiri has described the communications space as "more than half the battle," and Western scholars of this terrorist organization and its affiliates have noted the centrality of communications to the work of these groups. CSCC was established at the direction of the President and Secretary of State in September 2010 to coordinate, orient, and inform government-wide foreign communications activities targeted against terrorism and violent extremism. It builds on the pioneering work done in the previous Administration to respond rapidly and effectively to al-Qa'ida terrorist messaging and was formally codified by an Executive Order on September 9, 2011. CSCC operates under the broad policy direction of the White House and interagency leadership and is housed in the Department of State with the Under Secretary of Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs. I report directly to the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs Tara Sonenshine, and we work very closely with the Bureau of Counterterrorism (CT), other Department bureaus, and other government agencies. In addition, we have a Steering Committee chaired by Under Secretary Sonenshine, with Counterterrorism Coordinator Ambassador Daniel Benjamin as vice chair. The committee includes representatives from nine agencies, including the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC), the Departments of Defense, Treasury, Justice, Homeland Security, and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and held its initial meeting earlier this year.

I also want to acknowledge the superb effort of my predecessor, Ambassador Richard LeBaron, now retired, in working so hard and effectively to give CSCC its very specific focus and inter-agency character.

We target a very specific audience overseas through our products for U.S. government communicators, projects and the online engagement of our Digital Outreach Team (DOT). These efforts are conducted in collaboration with U.S. embassies and consulates, interagency partners, and outside experts. To achieve these goals, CSCC is divided into three distinct areas of operation.

Intelligence and Analysis
Analytic support from the Intelligence Community (IC), academia, and other sources of relevant expertise is essential to CSCC's mission to counter the actions and ideologies of al-Qa'ida, its affiliates and adherents, other terrorist organizations, and violent extremists overseas that threaten the interests and national security of the United States. During the past 18 months, we have taken several steps to integrate collection and analysis into our process for devising counter-narratives. We share this analysis in support of other efforts to counter the ideologies and activities of such organizations as well. The assignment of senior IC analysts to the CSCC staff and a Sensitive Compartmented Information Facility (SCIF) working environment integrates analysis into all aspects of CSCC activities and facilitates a robust working relationship with IC elements. We are pursuing additional opportunities to institutionalize an analytically driven process for CSCC that builds on these earlier efforts and will serve as a strategic roadmap for our future work.

CSCC subscribes to two guiding principles for the Center's operations:

Counterterrorism Communications must be guided by the best intelligence and academic analysis of the audience, the adversary, and the appropriate communications themes and techniques; and

This must be an interagency effort, drawing on existing analytical and operational skills across a number of U.S. government agencies. The detail to CSCC of Intelligence Community and U.S. military personnel make this feasible.

Drawing extensively on the subject matter expertise of the CSCC staff, Intelligence Community analysis, and academic work, CSCC has implemented a variety of projects directly supporting U.S. government communicators working with overseas audiences. Examples fall into four broad categories:

Orchestrate baseline analysis and solicit opportunity analysis: CSCC commissioned a research and analysis project to codify al-Qa'ida master narratives as perceived by different local audiences, focusing particularly on two case studies in Yemen and Algeria that are being used to shape effective counter-narratives. The Open Source Center (OSC) and NCTC were partners in this project which has been useful to our field posts and other communicators.

Identify and fill collection gaps: CSCC orchestrated interagency collaboration to commission a public opinion survey in Somalia seeking to understand local perceptions of al-Shabaab and other concerns, data that had been unavailable in the absence of an official U.S. presence. The Somali Unit in Embassy Nairobi, relevant bureaus in the Department of State, the Department of Defense's SOLIC and Africa Command, and other agencies, all contributed to the survey design and implementation. Results of the survey are being factored into our program planning and messaging.

Provide grist for confronting al-Qa'ida rhetoric through direct digital engagement: The managers for the Digital Outreach Team (DOT) draw on OSC reports and finished intelligence to shape CSCC's online strategy and to prioritize themes and counter-messages for the DOT.

Develop tools for U.S. government communicators: CSCC partnered with OSC to establish a community website that assembles content and is accessible to all U.S. government communicators through OpenSource.gov.

Metrics and Evaluation. A key component in refining our activities directed against violent extremism rests in developing a capacity to measure operational effectiveness, as well as evaluating resonance among our varied target audiences. While we have measures of performance, we are in the process of hiring a staff member who will be responsible for developing and refining measures of effectiveness (MOE) for our communications activities aimed at countering the activities and ideologies of terrorist organizations. The individual will collaborate with CSCC colleagues and others across U.S. government agencies to identify best practices among existing approaches to MOE development, data collection, and measurement, as well as commission new research or methodologies as needed for CSCC's mission.

Plans and Operations

The second area within CSCC is the Plans and Operations team, which designs and implements non-digital CVE communication strategies, tools, and programs to counter al-Qa'ida's ability to recruit and win support. The team has 13 positions with members from across the interagency including representatives from the Departments of Defense and State and the Intelligence Community. The section focuses on confronting, countering and undermining the efforts of al-Qa'ida and its affiliates and supporters in, and emanating from, five priority areas:

- al-Shabaab in the Horn of Africa
- al-Qa'ida senior leadership (AQSL) and its affiliates and allies in Pakistan and Afghanistan
- al-Qa'ida in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and its associations in North and West Africa
- al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) in Yemen and the broader Arabian Peninsula
- al-Qa'ida in Iraq (AQI) and its offshoots in the Fertile Crescent

The Plans and Operations team works closely with Department of State Regional Bureaus, the CT Bureau, U.S. missions and U.S. government communicators in key countries to strengthen the U.S. government's communications and engagement efforts against al-Qa'ida and affiliates. These efforts include:

- **Somalia:** CSCC's strategy for countering al-Shabaab has led to implementation of programs involving collaboration by Embassy Nairobi's Public Diplomacy section, as well as the Somalia Unit at the Embassy, DoD's Military Information Support Team (MIST), USAID in Kenya, State's CT Bureau, and the NGO community. This model – sharing responsibility across aligned objectives - promotes optimal use of each office's expertise, resources, authorities, and time to reach Somali audiences inside and beyond Somalia. For example, CSCC obtained a privately produced documentary showcasing al-Shabaab's tragic impact on U.S.-Somali families and developed it into a packaged project

for use by U.S. government communicators abroad to engage with Somali diaspora communities.

- **Pakistan**: CSCC coordinated Washington support and contributions for the Pakistan Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) Communications Framework and the creation of a Community Engagement Office at the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad. The Plans and Operations team supports CVE programs for Pakistan conducted by the Community Engagement Office, while CSCC's Digital Outreach Team reaches online audiences through Urdu language engagement.
- **Algeria**: CSCC is an active participant in an interagency team that worked with the U.S. Embassy in Algiers to create a strategy to guide programming and expenditures in that country to counter the activities and ideology of terrorist organizations. CSCC also managed three research projects to fill critical information gaps for planners, and designed and funded a program with the embassy that will reach vulnerable youth in areas known for al-Qa'ida recruitment.
- **Resilient Communities Program**: Throughout the world, survivors of terrorism inspire us with their strength and resilience. CSCC works with embassies from Argentina to Australia to support local NGOs and victim groups' efforts to amplify the voices of victims and communities. Through our Resilient Communities small grants program, we support projects that capture victims' stories and testimonies in these countries, often for the first time, and share them with audiences in their communities and beyond. The projects utilize a range of engagement tools and media, and many include online sites to make their stories available to audiences worldwide.

The Plans and Operations team also provides public communication materials that focus on countering AQ rhetoric for use by all U.S. government communicators with overseas foreign audiences. These tools include **CSCC Communication Templates** on topics such as "Al-Qa'ida Not Welcome in Arab Spring" and "Highlighting Al-Shabaab's Actions Against Somalis." CSCC also provides "**Quick Thought**" products to orient and inform U.S. government communication efforts – recent "Quick Thoughts" include "A Plague of Locusts: CT Messaging Against AQIM and Ansar al-Din," "One Path to Address CT Concerns in Syria without Helping the Regime or Alienating the Opposition" and "Al-Qa'ida and Al-Shabaab Merger: A Counter-Messaging Opportunity?"

CSCC Digital Operations

CSCC's third section is the Digital Outreach Team (DOT), which directly counters the al-Qa'ida narrative and propaganda in interactive digital environments, working in Arabic, Urdu and Somali and using text, still images and video. The team was initially created in 2006 as an online rapid-reaction unit focused on general Public Diplomacy goals. When it became a part of CSCC in late 2010, the DOT's mission shifted to counterterrorism, with a specific focus on al-Qa'ida and the constellation of like-minded terrorist groups associated and affiliated with al-Qa'ida.

DOT's current configuration and operations reflect the objectives and priorities in the Executive Order establishing CSCC and the National Strategy for Counterterrorism, which names Yemen, Pakistan, and Somalia as focus areas for counterterrorism efforts. The team consists of 10 Arabic-speaking writer-analysts, five Urdu speakers, and two Somali speakers, as well as a

director and deputy director. Three members of the team are video producers—two Arabic speakers and one Urdu speaker—in order to keep pace with an online environment that increasingly runs on video. The approximate budget for CSCC digital operations is $3 million annually, about half of CSCC's entire budget.

Most of the team's engagements, which number more than 17,000 since its inception and more than 7,000 since becoming part of CSCC, consist of written text posted to online forums, *Facebook* or the comment sections of media websites. The team works primarily in mainstream interactive environments where al-Qa'ida and its supporters seek to radicalize disaffected youth. Engagements are branded—writer-analysts identify themselves as members of the Digital Outreach Team at the U.S. Department of State. The team makes active use of video and graphics. In-house video producers put together mash-ups that illustrate arguments against al-Qa'ida using vivid imagery. Because these clips generally use publicly available footage under fair-use rules, production costs are low and mostly limited to staff time. We are seeking to expand more into video and other visual material in response to the changing tastes of our target audience.

Three basic principles animate the team's activities: Contest the space, redirect the conversation, and confound the adversary. The first involves establishing an overt U.S. government presence to push back at al-Qa'ida narrative and propaganda and counter the misinformation about the United States that frequently fuels extremist narratives. Put simply, where al-Qa'ida supporters attempt to post propaganda in mainstream environments, the Digital Outreach Team is there to quickly hit back. Team members do this by acting on the second principle—redirecting the conversation to topics that are detrimental to al-Qa'ida, like the group's atrocious record of killing Muslims, its own dissonance and internal contradictions and its failure to achieve anything positive. Finally, by denying al-Qa'ida the ability to spread its message freely in virtual environments, and by shifting discussions to uncomfortable areas for al-Qa'ida, the team seeks to "get in their heads," confounding and discomfiting al-Qa'ida's online supporters and sympathizers so that they can no longer operate with impunity in virtual environments.

In line with these principles, the team organizes much of its work around targeted campaigns. For example, when al-Qa'ida media units or supporters post banners, the team often mimics them, creating new banners that resemble al-Qa'ida propaganda in form but expose the group's destructive means and ends. The team then posts the new banners to interactive websites alongside the originals. As al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula made a bid to hold ground in Southern Yemen, the Digital Outreach Team countered with a campaign that began in late 2011 and have continued through mid-2012. With more than 600 engagements, as well as several video clips and banners, the team highlighted al-Qa'ida's abominable methods and aims on locally focused platforms, including Yemeni tribal forums, in order to reach the audience most at risk. An Urdu-language campaign in June-July 2012 pushed back against extremist narratives in Pakistan with examples of U.S.-funded aid projects—for more than 30 days, the team carried out 255 engagements using 10 videos and 10 still images on 29 online platforms, reaching nearly 50,000 people through *Facebook* and forums and generating over 400 comments.

The DOT receives strong support from CSCC's interagency partners. One concrete example: Open source intelligence is particularly important for a team engaged in attributed

communications. CSCC works closely with the DNI's Open Source Center to ensure that a steady stream of open source reporting on four types of materials detrimental to al-Qa'ida--reports about the victims of terrorism, defectors, derogatory information, and rebuttals of al-Qa'ida ideology--is channeled to the team for use in its engagements. More broadly, the Intelligence Community provides valuable analysis to inform strategic decision-making. Finally, the Team coordinates closely with the relevant Department of Defense components where mission sets overlap in order to achieve common objectives.

The team is relatively new, and while it has developed solid measures of performance, measures of effectiveness remain rudimentary, although CSCC is working hard to make them more rigorous. Measures of performance include ensuring the presence of counter-messaging in the same online environments where al-Qa'ida supporters post propaganda—a fundamental tenet of the team's work is to deprive al-Qa'ida of uncontested virtual space. An early measure of effectiveness has been irate responses from online extremists, who fulminated on various occasions, expressing a desire to hack the Digital Outreach Team's YouTube channel, warned their followers to be wary of providing fodder for the team, and even discussed the possibility of setting up their own Digital Outreach Team. Ongoing and planned efforts to develop more robust measures of effectiveness include the following:

- Adapting tools developed by Sandia National Laboratories to track the propagation of al-Qa'ida message and determine the concurrent presence of counter-messaging, and to use text analytics to fine-tune the supporting materials analysts use in their engagements. This ongoing project is funded mainly by the Department of Defense.
- Conducting focus groups to determine the effectiveness of video clips against al-Qa'ida. This project is slated for the fourth quarter of FY2012.
- Working with a fulltime metrics specialist, who will be part of the Integrated Analysis section of CSCC.

Digital environments are developing rapidly, as are al-Qa'ida efforts to exploit them. CSCC intends not only to keep pace, but to innovate. The rise of handheld devices provides an opportunity to do so. Our Digital Outreach Team has already deployed video with mobile platforms in mind in one of our highest priority areas—a recent Yemen-focused clip garnered 15-20 percent of views on mobile devices. Future plans include establishing a presence on mobile based interactive environments, distributing audio files over mobile devices to reach less literate audiences, and finding new ways to deliver digital content to the physical environment through handheld devices.

Chairman Royce, Ranking Member Sherman and other committee members, I would like to thank you for your continued interest and support. Our work is still very new and evolving and we operate in a highly volatile and dynamic environment so certainly welcome all perspectives and insights that would help us respond and anticipate this challenge rapidly and effectively. Thank you very much.

Mr. ROYCE. We appreciate your testimony.

Let me ask you a question that goes to your strategy. I can readily understand the video that you did, stressing al-Qaeda's willingness to kill fellow Muslims, and especially the concept of destroying the indigenous culture, which we saw in Mali, which we saw in Timbuktu, which we saw on the attacks on the Sufi mosques in Pakistan and the destruction there.

But moving to the issue of your team stressing the USAID projects in Pakistan, I have never seen our efforts win any points in Pakistan. We are about as unpopular as can be there. My last three trips there I saw that the Deobandi schools were still in full throttle. But why this particular message, as opposed to a message of what is being done to traditional Pakistani culture by this radical change, you know, on the order of what we saw in the Cultural Revolution in Mao's China? It is an attempt to destroy the past evidence of the culture. You saw that in Afghanistan. The destruction of art, of Muslim art as well as Buddhist. And so I think that that is probably a more powerful argument, but I wanted to see why we were going with this approach.

Ambassador FERNANDEZ. That is a very good question, sir. We use a variety of themes at different times. The theme you identify of the radical extreme, unusually extreme nature of al-Qaeda and its allies, its virulence, its alien nature from the mainstream of Muslims everywhere is one that we stress traditionally. So we do stress that in Pakistan and in the other areas we work. This specific campaign, as I said, we often try to highlight a specific campaign at a specific time. So we wanted to use AID's programs as a push back for this specific campaign that we did in the month of July. But the image, the thrust of what you described is our daily bread and butter. It is something that we do all the time.

Mr. ROYCE. Let me ask you this. The center is beneath the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy. One of the things I thought about here is we have got this new counterterrorism bureau, which the department would like to empower. And given your specific mission, it would seem to me that it should be placed right there. I wanted to ask you about that.

Ambassador FERNANDEZ. Well, we are literally a stone's throw from the CT bureau. They are our next door neighbors, and we meet with them on a daily basis.

Mr. ROYCE. I understand that. But in terms of strategy and tactics, the Under Secretary is more focused, really, on cultural and educational exchanges and this type of thing. And I think the head of the counterterrorism bureau, given where we are trying to drive this policy, would be a lot better equipped to deal specifically with your mission. So I understand your argument that you talk with them. But I really think it is one and the same in terms of the strategy here. And there should be consideration in terms of readjusting that mission. Give me your response to that if you would.

Ambassador FERNANDEZ. Certainly. I can see value in both approaches. I mean, obviously, we are working in a communications field. So that is very germane to the work of the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs. And this is, as Mr. Duncan noted, this is an ideological question, this is a question of messages and narratives. So I can see that it has a public dimension.

On the other hand, we have to work very closely with our counterterrorism colleagues not only in the CT bureau, but across the interagency with NCTC, with CIA, and others. And so I can see the value of both of those arguments.

Mr. ROYCE. Thank you, Ambassador Fernandez.

Mr. Sherman.

Mr. SHERMAN. Thank you. You have native speakers in Arabic and Urdu and Somali. What other languages do you have native speakers in?

Mr. ROYCE. Ambassador, bring your mic a little closer when you answer, please.

Ambassador FERNANDEZ. Thank you, sir.

Generally, those are the three languages we focus on. Obviously, we have native speakers, for example some of our Urdu speakers speak more than Urdu. But our messaging has been in those three languages. But even that is new. We added Somali only recently. So we are certainly open to adding other languages. And we are certainly open in exploring the option that you discussed.

Mr. SHERMAN. I would hope very much that you would focus on Pakistan, which is the only nuclear state of interest to your organization, and that you would focus on the different languages of Pakistan, since Urdu is spoken by only 8 percent of the population and the Sindhi language is spoken by 12 percent. I am glad to see you are part of the overall public diplomacy effort.

But in the communications world, there is a tendency to just create some separate Web people, when in reality our overt communications on the Web are directly tied to what we do at Voice of America, radio and television, what we do under false flag Web postings, which I guess is another department, probably should be the same department. And how closely do you work with Voice of America to make sure that you are making the same points, especially when you are posting video, and they are making TV shows?

Ambassador FERNANDEZ. We certainly, they are colleagues, and as a public diplomacy officer, I know them. We see them frequently. We have staff that came from the BBG.

Mr. SHERMAN. Do you promote their programs?

Ambassador FERNANDEZ. Not really.

Mr. SHERMAN. Do you take their tape and put it up on YouTube?

Ambassador FERNANDEZ. That is not something that we have done. The reason I would say is our focus has been that there is a great deal out there that the U.S. Government is doing which is supportive, sending a positive message. What we are trying to do is attack the enemy.

Mr. SHERMAN. I would hope that the Voice of America is doing that, too. If you are the only one countering the terrorist message directly, and we decided to do it only on the Web, and not radio and television, a lot of us are here in the communications business, some of us have been involved in campaigns, none of us would dream of getting our message exclusively out on the Web and ignoring radio and television. And I guess these days none of us would think of doing the exact opposite of that either.

And then I pointed out in my opening statement, how closely do you work with those who could either take down a terrorist site or

identify terrorist individuals by looking at what is going on on the Web?

Ambassador FERNANDEZ. We work very closely with those who are identifying the appropriate recipients or individuals. Since we have an intelligence community component within CSCC, we have CIA officers working within CSCC. We have reach back into the intelligence community.

Mr. SHERMAN. You don't have to tell me what we have done, but has anybody taken down a major terrorist Web site, whether we did it or maybe, you know, some act of God did it?

Ambassador FERNANDEZ. That is of course a related but different field, which is called cyber warfare. And I think there have been some very big successes there.

Mr. SHERMAN. Have you noticed any of these sites that you are trying to oppose disappearing, which is a very good way to oppose them?

Ambassador FERNANDEZ. They seem to come and go and come back.

Mr. SHERMAN. Now, you have experts in the culture and language that you are trying to reach out to. But many of these arguments get down to the details of Islamic law and the Hadith, the Koran. Do you have people there who have read 1,000 fatwas from various respected clerics who can tell you what is a good Hadith and a bad Hadith? How good are you at having people that can argue on Islamic terms?

Ambassador FERNANDEZ. That is a very good question. What we try do is focus not so much on abstract questions of Islamic law, but on the enemy's actions and point to the internal contradictions, the incoherence and dissonance that exist in the enemy's own discourse.

Mr. SHERMAN. So you show that they are not—that they are hypocritical vis-à-vis their own statements, not that they are unIslamic because their actions contradict parts of the Koran.

Ambassador FERNANDEZ. That is exactly right.

Mr. SHERMAN. I don't know if Congress will give you enough money to do it, but I hope that you would go beyond showing that they clash with their own statements and show that they clash with the best in Islam. And I believe my time has expired. Do get back to me on your efforts to go into those other languages. Thank you.

Ambassador FERNANDEZ. Thank you.

Mr. ROYCE. We are going to go now to Mr. Duncan from South Carolina.

Mr. DUNCAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ambassador, what is the center doing to neutralize the communications of state sponsors of terrorism, such as Iran, especially in the areas of immediate importance to the U.S., like Iraq and Afghanistan, where the Iranian Government is really seeking to fill the political vacuum the U.S. is leaving in its rapid withdrawal?

Ambassador FERNANDEZ. Sir, since our focus has been mostly on al-Qaeda, we are so new, Iran——

Mr. DUNCAN. I think you need to start focusing on Iran. Just a word of caution.

Ambassador FERNANDEZ. I can see the value of that. That goes to a question that several of you have asked. Obviously, we have our main focus, which is guided from the National Counterterrorism Strategy, which focuses mostly, principally on al-Qaeda. But under the direction of the interagency, we are ready and willing to take up new tasks, whether it be new specific areas, new languages, or new adversaries.

Mr. DUNCAN. Okay. Define how the center views the long-term strategic goals of Islamist extremist groups that presently do not wage terrorism against the U.S., specifically the Muslim Brotherhood. How have you all addressed that?

Ambassador FERNANDEZ. Well, there is incredible hatred for the Muslim Brotherhood among al-Qaeda. You know, we see daily the daily vitriol, propaganda that al-Qaeda puts out every single day. And they call the Muslim Brotherhood traitors. They call them renegades. They call them people that are collaborating with this disgusting western thing which is called democracy and elections. Because they believe there should be no democracy, there should be no elections.

The idea that a Muslim, even a conservative Muslim, like the Muslim Brotherhood, would be elected is anathema to al-Qaeda. Because for them if you are elected one day, as you yourselves know, one day you are elected, one day you can be chosen not to be elected. And the way al-Qaeda sees it, that is not the role of the people. The people have no role in that.

So any Muslim, whether they be the most conservative, you know, anti-Western Muslim who participates in the political process, even Salafis, are seen as anathema by al-Qaeda. One of the most fascinating things which has happened over the last year, which I am sure you are well aware of, is that we have had the most dramatic, incredible political events in the Arab world in decades, maybe in centuries that have happened over the past year, and al-Qaeda had nothing do with it. Absolutely nothing. You had governments falling. You had people in the streets. You had millions marching, and al-Qaeda was not part of that conversation. This drives them crazy. This drives them crazy in the propaganda, that basically the most important thing that is happening in the Arab world, and al-Qaeda is basically an Arab organization, and they are completely irrelevant to that issue.

Mr. DUNCAN. That is kind of an interesting answer. I appreciate you bringing that up. That is something I want to chew on a little longer.

Just on a different line of questioning in my remaining time, reportedly the Fort Hood shooter, Major Hasan, was influenced over the Web. Has the center studied this indoctrination? And how has it influenced the way the center operates?

Ambassador FERNANDEZ. That is a very good point, and it goes to a point that the chairman mentioned as well when he talked about the virtual caliphate. And that is that one of the unfortunate things or one of the realities that we face on the Internet is that over time, you have a base of stuff that is out there. And so there is a you can say a hill or a mountain of poisonous stuff that has been spewed out by the extremists, whether photos, or videos, or words, and it is there. And even if the terrorists are eliminated,

that material is still there, and it can infect, it can poison young minds, impressionable minds, anywhere in the world.

Mr. DUNCAN. Are you also looking—you are looking at what al-Qaeda and the extremists are posting on their Web sites, but you are also in the chat rooms, so you are seeing what possibly a Major Hasan would post himself in a chat room and engaging in conversation. Are you all monitoring that? Are you sharing that with other intelligence agencies?

Ambassador FERNANDEZ. Since we have a relationship with the intelligence community, we get information from them, and we also, when we see things, we share that with them if appropriate, yes.

Mr. DUNCAN. I think that is important. You know, I am frustrated on Homeland Security when I hear some of the agencies aren't talking, aren't sharing information, especially when it comes to immigration issues. But I want to make sure that we don't have this stovepipe effect that we experienced after the 9/11, and what the commission report put out.

So, with that, Mr. Chairman, I will yield back.

Mr. ROYCE. Thank you, Mr. Duncan.

We will go now to Mr. Poe from Texas.

Mr. POE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

On Friday, a journalist who was angry with NBC's tape delay, which we are not going to discuss, of the Olympics, spoke out over Twitter. NBC complained to Twitter. By Sunday, Twitter had shut down the journalist's account. Twitter wouldn't restore that for 2 days.

But when it comes to a terrorist using Twitter, Twitter has not shut down or suspended a single account. According to Twitter's terms of policy, any "person barred from receiving services under the laws of the U.S. may not own a Twitter account." Terrorist organizations using Twitter, to me, is a violation of U.S. law.

Section 219 of the Immigration and Nationality Act states that it is unlawful to provide a designated FTO with "material, support, or resources, including any property, tangible or intangible, or services."

Among those, communication equipment and facilities. Terrorists are using Twitter. Twitter is a communication service. It seems like it is a violation of the law.

One example is the Somali al-Qaeda affiliate Al-Shabaab. Shabaab is an officially recognized foreign terrorist organization. Killed 74 people in a series of suicide bombings in Uganda during the 2010 World Cup. Shabaab has its own Twitter account. On December 7, interesting date, 2011, it tweeted, "The jihad being waged here in Somalia shall continue until the country is purified of all the invaders." Two more officially recognized foreign terrorist organizations, Hamas and Hezbollah, started tweeting in 2009 and 2011 respectfully. The Taliban, which the U.S. Government held accountable for the attacks on 9/11, has two official Twitter accounts. August 8, 2011, the Taliban tweeted, "Four American cowards killed, six wounded in battle, two tanks destroyed." I could go on with more and more, but I won't.

Twitter says it can't verify these accounts are really used by terrorist groups or someone claiming to be these groups. So Twitter

relies on the United States Government to verify accounts. Twitter says it will comply if the government asks them to shut down an account.

To my knowledge, not one terrorist Twitter account has ever been shut down by our Government.

And I want you to correct me if I am wrong on that, Mr. Fernandez.

There is a reason why Hezbollah tweeted an average of about 250 tweets a day since it opened its account in November. Twitter is a great way to spread propaganda and get new recruits and promote crimes against Americans.

My question is NBC was able to get the Twitter folks to close it down because some civilian complained about their news service or about the Olympics. Not saying that is right or wrong, but that did occur.

So my question really is, can you describe the terrorists' use of Twitter and what we are actively doing about it?

Ambassador FERNANDEZ. I would say, sir, that is mostly a law enforcement question. So it is not my area of responsibility in the sense that we are dealing with communications.

From what I see in Twitter, it is certainly in the languages that we are working, it is not a major issue in the vernacular languages. In other words, it is often used in English to communicate with English language constituencies. For example, Al-Shabaab using Twitter was in English, not in Somali.

So since we are focused on the vernacular languages, Arabic, Urdu, Somali, and potentially others, that is not our main area of focus.

But I certainly understand your concern. But I think that is a question for law enforcement authorities, both here and internationally, rather than a communications entity.

Mr. POE. Does the State Department have a policy regarding FTOs using Twitter? Do you have a policy about what the State Department is going to do or not going do? Any policy at all about Twitter? Or is that just somebody else's responsibility?

Ambassador FERNANDEZ. Twitter, obviously, is an American entity, and so it is all our responsibility.

But as I said, since we are focused overseas in foreign languages and not in English and not in something like Twitter, which is very narrowly defined; that is not an area where we work on on a regular basis. Al-Qaeda doesn't use Twitter.

Mr. POE. You would agree, would you not, that some foreign terrorist organizations do?

Ambassador FERNANDEZ. Definitely. Definitely.

Mr. POE. It works. They get recruits, and they spread propaganda. At least they claim to do things that have occurred throughout the world. And so I am just concerned about what the United States' position on that is and what we can do about it, if anything. Do you have a recommendation?

Ambassador FERNANDEZ. You know, since it is not something that we are working on in the Twitter field, it is not an area which I am very well versed.

Certainly we need to look at all the tools in the toolbox. And CSCC's view has always been that the area where the enemy fo-

cuses on, that is where we should go. The main focus, for example, of al-Qaeda's social media communications is video and text on Web sites, on media fora. For them, Twitter is not something that they look at.

As you mentioned very rightly, some other terrorist groups do use it, especially to communicate with sympathizers in the West. So to me, that seems that that is a very legitimate question for law enforcement individuals in the State Department and outside of the State Department.

Mr. POE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. ROYCE. Thank you. We are going to go through another round of questions.

Let me ask you this, Ambassador Fernandez. The State Department has a reputation, in terms of the clearance process, that a lot of times could hinder a rapid response, right? And the one thing you need to be effective is the ability to respond quickly. Is this a fair criticism, and how we can ensure that what you do isn't weighed down by a process which becomes very cumbersome, very bureaucratic in nature?

Ambassador FERNANDEZ. Well, sir, anyone who has worked in Washington in government knows the clearance process can be very cumbersome. It is not just in the State Department. That is true anywhere in government.

We are fortunate in CSCC in that the people that started this about 1½ years ago realized that this was going to be an issue. So when it comes to our digital operations, the clearance process is internal to CSCC.

Mr. ROYCE. I see.

Ambassador FERNANDEZ. Which means we are able to respond within minutes to an opportunity.

Mr. ROYCE. Very good. I wonder if you could just give us an example or two of the success beyond what we have talked about today in terms of what you do, how it works. Just share it with the committee.

Ambassador FERNANDEZ. Well, there are many. I would say that it is not an easy thing. It is a difficult thing. One day you feel you have made a success, and another day you feel like you are starting all over again. The one that garnered a lot of attention is an important one in that, as you know, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula tried to establish a foothold in south Yemen. We focused on that. We used all our tools and did, over a very short period, 600 engagements. We put out videos. We put out poster art like the one that you referred to. It received a very positive response by basically people adopting the rhetoric that we were using against the terrorists.

So, for example, one thing we did, al-Qaeda doesn't like to call itself al-Qaeda in Yemen. They are ashamed of that. And so they use a pseudonym. They call themselves Ansar al-Shariah. Because sharia in some Muslim circles is like, you know, mom and apple pie. And so we began in our messaging to call them Ansar al-Sharr, which means Partisans of Evil. And we noticed other people writing digitally adopting the nickname that we had given to them. And this organization, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, in its last newsletter before it had to head for the hills when the Yemeni

army drove them out of their safe havens, devoted an entire page to our operation, attacking what we were doing.

Mr. ROYCE. That was clever, and it was quick. I remember the 9/11 Commission, when they did their thorough study of our national security agencies, said we just lacked imagination. And the other concern is just that imagination can get quashed or destroyed by bureaucracy. So you have got a situation where everything is pre-cleared, you can basically use your best judgment to keep up with the terrorist networks.

But let me ask you this. The other thing we are really interested in is how to quickly close down these sites. Now, I know as fast as these sites move and spring up and you try to stay abreast of them, that that is a difficult process. But tell us how you work in conjunction to make sure that we do all we can do to get these things off the Web.

Ambassador FERNANDEZ. That is a good question. I mean, there are two issues here. There are terrorist sites where terrorists communicate to each other. And those are often password protected sites, those are basically terrorists have to sign in, you know, this is terrorist so and so from—known by somebody. Those are the object of cyber operations. Where we focus on is a slightly larger but more dangerous pool, which is, as I was telling Mr. Duncan, the terrorists want to go from the margins to the mainstream. They want to metastasize. They want to infect a larger population. So where we focus with our overt work are these—the middle ground of the contested space, which are sites that often are very political sites where people in the Muslim world are concerned about politics and reading about politics. And al-Qaeda trolls for people to radicalize them, to make them from maybe people who are unhappy with the United States or even angry at the United States to go that extra mile from being angry to being a terrorist. So that is the area where we are working.

Mr. ROYCE. Thank you, Ambassador Fernandez.

Mr. Sherman.

Mr. SHERMAN. One of the important things in protecting the American homeland is to prevent the radicalization of those who are fluent in English and could be the most effective terrorists operating here. Do you operate in English? And if not, who does?

Ambassador FERNANDEZ. Sir, we do not operate in English. Obviously, since our being with the State Department, our focus being overseas, our main focus is of course in those vernacular languages which I mentioned. A lot of what you are talking about of course is extremely important. It falls in the area of domestic radicalization, would be DHS and others.

Mr. SHERMAN. There is an international component to everything I am talking about.

Ambassador FERNANDEZ. Yes.

Mr. SHERMAN. U.S.-based sites don't say how to build a bomb in the kitchen of your mom. So all of this is international. The English language is international. And preventing someone fluent in English from becoming radicalized may be many times more important than preventing someone else from being radicalized in the sense of protecting the districts we represent. It is hard to criticize you for not doing more, because your budget is I believe the small-

est of any government entity that has come before this subcommittee, let alone the full committee.

And so let me continue my efforts to get you to do more without necessarily being part of getting you any more resources. You seem to be focused on Sunni terrorism. What about the Shiite extremist groups and the Farsi language?

Ambassador FERNANDEZ. Farsi has not been our focus at all. We focus on those three languages. There are obviously other terrorist groups, like Hezbollah, which are of great concern to all of us. That has not been a task that we have taken on yet. But if we are directed to do so through the interagency, we are very happy to engage on that issue with the same alacrity and the same tools that we have engaged in Arabic against al-Qaeda.

Mr. SHERMAN. Congress never said limit yourself to the Sunnis or limit yourself to the three languages you are doing. We would like you to do it all. And you may have to be larger. And I would hope that those a pay grade or two above you will indicate how we can make your operation larger without necessarily increasing the entire State Department budget.

I would like to get back to the idea of taking down the bad sites. You have indicated these sites come and go. Have any of them gone in the sense of the plug was pulled on them? And has there been traffic where people complain that there was a popular terrorist Web site, and it looks like the damn Americans or somebody else has taken it down?

Ambassador FERNANDEZ. That certainly has been things that have been said at times by terrorist groups and their sympathizers. But given the nature of the Internet, and given its very fluid nature, these things do tend to pop up. You know, when they are taken down, they pop up in a different—or a similar organization takes its place.

Mr. SHERMAN. The disadvantage to the terrorists there is that, you know, a lot of American companies spend a fortune to get you on their, you know, bookmarked, et cetera. And to the extent that you can have people say, oh, that site is not there, I got to go search, maybe they will end up at a reasonable site.

Ambassador FERNANDEZ. Make it more difficult.

Mr. SHERMAN. Yes, exactly.

Ambassador FERNANDEZ. Or put a cupcake on the picture, as I think I read on Congressman Royce's blog.

Mr. SHERMAN. You are searching the Internet more than I am. I have not read Congressman Royce's blog. I am sure he will tell me about it on the floor.

With that, I yield back.

Mr. ROYCE. I will do it on your time right now. Foreign Intrigue Blog, if you would like to access the Web site. The Foreign Intrigue Blog.

Thank you, Mr. Sherman.

Mr. Duncan.

Mr. DUNCAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

As I have been sitting here listening, I keep going back to a couple of things. I want to blend some of the things I asked earlier with what Congressman Poe had mentioned. You know, Twitter is used abroad. And I think the center's jurisdiction is focused on

abroad, communications abroad, the foreign audience, communicating with a foreign audience. So I disagree with one thing you said. I don't believe this is a DHS or an FBI law enforcement jurisdiction area. I do think the Department of State and your center does have some jurisdiction in this as regard to what foreign nationals do use Twitter for. And they are absolutely using Twitter. That is not a question. That is just a statement. If you want to respond to that in just a minute, I don't mind that.

But you keep going back to al-Qaeda. Is it the State Department and this administration's policy that al-Qaeda is our only threat?

Ambassador FERNANDEZ. We are guided by the National Counterterrorism Strategy.

Mr. DUNCAN. Would you pull the microphone up a little bit?

Ambassador FERNANDEZ. We are governed by the National Counterterrorism Strategy. The main focus of the National Counterterrorism Strategy is al-Qaeda. It also refers to other terrorist threats throughout the world. Given the sheer volume of poison that they put out in the digital world and in the communications world, it made sense for this organization, which is such a new organization, to focus on them. Certainly we are open to direction to do new tasks. But you have seen the threat information, as we have, and you have seen just the sheer volume of stuff that is put out there.

Mr. DUNCAN. And it is amazing. It is overwhelming. I agree with you there. We have had this conversation.

Ambassador FERNANDEZ. We are certainly willing to look at other opportunities.

Mr. DUNCAN. I just don't want the agency, the State Department or any agency, to get tunnel vision, to be so focused on what you perceive as the threat coming from al-Qaeda that we get blindsided. Now, I hope you have looked at the foreign terrorist organization list on the State Department Web site.

Ambassador FERNANDEZ. Yes.

Mr. DUNCAN. I glanced as it just now. And I see Hezbollah, Abu Sayyaf, Hamas, Palestinian Liberation Front, Al-Shabaab, Haqqani, Boko Haram, FARC. There are a lot of threats to this Nation. And we look at what has happened just in the Western Hemisphere with Iran coming over and the Saudi Ambassador assassination attempt that was thwarted. There are so many things, I do not want you to get tunnel vision. I think America is threatened more by the State Department focusing solely on al-Qaeda.

And so as you are monitoring these sites, you know, you better monitor Hamas. You better monitor Hezbollah. You better monitor Abu Sayyaf, which is limited, but there are a number of others. I just want to raise awareness to that and ask you to respond to what is being done.

Ambassador FERNANDEZ. We are certainly very open-minded about the threat. Obviously, there is a lot the U.S. Government, including the State Department, does on counterterrorism aside from the communications field, a whole range of policies directed at all of those groups. But we are open to looking at those threats. We certainly aim not to have tunnel vision.

I think maybe because we have a small budget, we want to be nimble. We want to be agile. We want to be creative. And we have

been. So we will continue to be that way and monitor and look at the threat and go wherever the threat takes us.

Mr. DUNCAN. Was your area within the State Department created post-9/11?

Ambassador FERNANDEZ. Yes, very much so.

Mr. DUNCAN. Okay. We have seen that created. We have seen the Department of Homeland Security created, 15,000 employees, $3.4 billion complex out on the Potomac. We are spending a heck of a lot of money in this country to bring assets online. And I can go on and on, National Counterterrorism Center and other things. I want to make sure that you guys are all talking. I think there is—you know, State is looking foreign, but I think there is a tie in and a need to make sure that NCTC, and your group there at State, and Homeland Security, and everyone else are communicating, sharing information. As overwhelming as it is, there are ways to assimilate and tie that information together. Are you doing that?

Ambassador FERNANDEZ. Absolutely.

Mr. DUNCAN. Are there shared systems? Are there platforms, Google-based, where this information is all pulled together if you search one search word?

Ambassador FERNANDEZ. Absolutely. We think one of our distinctive features is our connection to the intelligence community. So that we are able to leverage the best analysis and thought of the intelligence community in our work. And it goes both ways. We sometimes find things that are of great use or interest to them, and they also help us in the whole question of collection of data, whether they be images, information, material that we can use to disparage and discredit the enemy. So, yes, I think there is an excellent relationship, excellent communication with CIA, with NCTC, and with others.

Mr. DUNCAN. Ambassador, you have a challenge. And so thank you for sharing this. It is something I think we, as Congress, and the administration needs to work on to protect America. I appreciate your efforts.

Ambassador FERNANDEZ. Thank you.

Mr. ROYCE. I thank you. I think the members are supportive of your efforts here. You are taking on a very difficult mission. We will want to keep the conversation on this going. I wouldn't be surprised if at some point you run into some of the same quality control issues that we have had with VOA and RFA on the Persian Service with respect to some of the Farsi speakers. It just seems to go with the territory. But as long as you are attuned to it, I think that would be important. As I mentioned, we will have some specific questions for you on the record. And again, we appreciate all your efforts. We stand adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 3:04 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

Material Submitted for the Hearing Record

SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING NOTICE
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON, D.C.

Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade
Edward R. Royce (R-CA), Chairman

July 26, 2012

You are respectfully requested to attend an OPEN hearing of the Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade, to be held in room **2172 of the Rayburn House Office Building (and available live via the Committee website at http://www.hcfa.house.gov):**

DATE:	Thursday, August 2, 2012
TIME:	2:00 p.m.
SUBJECT:	The State Department's Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications: Mission, Operations and Impact
WITNESS:	The Honorable Alberto Fernandez Coordinator Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications U.S. Department of State

By Direction of the Chairman

The Committee on Foreign Affairs seeks to make its facilities accessible to persons with disabilities. If you are in need of special accommodations, please call 202/225-5021 at least four business days in advance of the event, whenever practicable. Questions with regard to special accommodations in general (including availability of Committee materials in alternative formats and assistive listening devices) may be directed to the Committee.

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

MINUTES OF SUBCOMMITTEE ON *Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade* HEARING

Day *Thursday* **Date** *August 2, 2012* **Room** *2172*

Starting Time *2:04 pm* **Ending Time** *3:03 pm*

Recesses [N/A] (____to ____) (____to ____) (____to ____) (____to ____) (____to ____) (____to ____)

Presiding Member(s)

Rep. Ed Royce

Check all of the following that apply:

Open Session [✓]
Executive (closed) Session [ ]
Televised [✓]
Electronically Recorded (taped) [✓]
Stenographic Record [✓]

TITLE OF HEARING:

"The State Department's Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications: Mission, Operations and Impact."

SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Reps. Royce, Sherman, Duncan, Cicilline, Poe

NON-SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT: *(Mark with an * if they are not members of full committee.)*

HEARING WITNESSES: Same as meeting notice attached? Yes [✓] **No** [ ]
(If "no", please list below and include title, agency, department, or organization.)

STATEMENTS FOR THE RECORD: *(List any statements submitted for the record.)*

Rep. Connolly

TIME SCHEDULED TO RECONVENE _____
or
TIME ADJOURNED _____

Subcommittee Staff Director

Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade Subcommittee

Member Attendance

Republicans

- ☑ Rep. Edward Royce (Chair)
- ☑ Rep. Ted Poe
- ☑ Rep. Jeff Duncan
- ☐ Rep. Bill Johnson
- ☐ Rep. Tim Griffin
- ☐ Rep. Ann Marie Buerkle
- ☐ Rep. Renee Ellmers

Democrats

- ☑ Rep. Brad Sherman (Ranking Member)
- ☑ Rep. David Cicilline
- ☐ Rep. Gerry Connolly
- ☐ Rep. Allyson Schwartz

The Honorable Gerald E. Connolly (VA-11)

TNT Subcommittee Hearing: The State Department's Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications: Mission, Operations and Impact
Thursday, Aug. 2, 2012
2pm

Various organizations and individuals around the world have taken advantage of the convenient, instantaneous nature of the Internet. Jihadists are no different; they have harnessed the power of technology and created websites to disseminate propaganda and recruit new followers. One of the challenges for law enforcement is how to gather information from these websites without giving them so much operating room that they foment extremism—whether this extremism cajoles lone wolves or entire groups of people.

We have all heard reports of Jihadist websites that post extremist videos. These websites are used as a recruiting tool, spouting bits and pieces of disjointed, anti-Western propaganda. Oftentimes grisly images or videos, including executions, are posted to these websites. Despite the somewhat amorphous nature of the Internet, these images never fade into obscurity. Jihadist websites are also known to host online forums with member-only sections. The danger is obvious—two extremists based anywhere in the world can link up and share tips with a few simple tools, whether those tools are a smartphone or tablet. Two extremists can discuss the nature of their underlying ideology or exchange tips about the best bomb making material. The consequences can be lethal.

Enforcing behavior on the Internet presents quite a challenge for federal entities. The lack of physical boundaries in cyberspace is a major complication. For example, authorities must determine whether a website is owned by an American company and if American citizens have a role in the website. If these criteria are met, the national security community can work within the law to shut down the website. But there is a different set of challenges for other situations. If, for example, the website espouses a certain ideology, like the YouTube channel for al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), what steps should American authorities take? As this committee has heard in the past, the AQAP YouTube channel includes messages from the organization's leaders, justifying terrorist attacks and posting interviews with individuals such as Anwar al-Awlaki.[1] Suffice it to say, any dismantling of the YouTube channel would require cooperation among law enforcement, several U.S. Government entities, and YouTube.

This displays another layer of complexity—how to interact with technology companies in a collaborative manner to address this issue. The relationship with such companies has not always fallen in line with democratic goals. For example, some entities have collaborated with autocratic regimes to suppress democratic ideals—an issue which the Full Committee has addressed in the past. Other companies could conceivably cite the issue of free speech or privacy as a concern. It is up to all parties to agree on best practices for addressing these types of situations.

I look forward to Ambassador Fernandez's thoughts on this and other dilemmas. Thank you Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

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[1] Christopher Boucek *U.S. Strategy for Countering Jihadist Websites: Testimony by Christopher Boucek* (September 29,2010).

2185 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-0540
(202) 225-4111
FAX: (202) 226-0335

1100 E. CHAPMAN AVENUE
SUITE 209
ORANGE, CALIFORNIA 92866
(714) 744-4100
FAX: (714) 744-4086

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UNITED STATES
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Asia and the Pacific

FINANCIAL SERVICES
Subcommittees:
Capital Markets and Government Sponsored Enterprises
Financial Institutions and Consumer Credit

EDWARD R. ROYCE
Fortieth District-California

August 14, 2012

The Honorable Alberto Fernandez
Coordinator
Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications
U.S. Department of State
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Ambassador Fernandez:

Thank you for your recent testimony at the Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade's recent hearing, "The State Department's Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications: Mission, Operations, and Impact." As you could tell, Members have a keen interest in your important work. I would like to bring to your attention an issue of particular interest that we touched upon during the hearing.

Given the nature of the CSCC's work, you inevitably must tap the language skills of contract workers. As we discussed, these individuals must master complex communications, touching on religion, culture and U.S. policy -- all under tight time constraints. This calls for properly balanced oversight, allowing these team members to react quickly, while at the same time maintaining a critical eye on their product. Needless to say, quality control is an important management challenge.

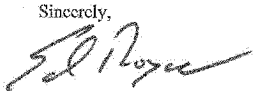
The management experiences of U.S. international broadcasting is cautionary. For example, with respect to the Voice of America's Persian service, a March 2009 BBG Inspector General report noted "perceptions of unfairness, charges of political bias, and the operation of cliques, and the hiring and rewarding of unqualified people." Similarly, the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia heard testimony in recent years that the network was "poorly managed by people who do not know Iran or its politics." There have been reports of nepotism too. The result can only be poor quality broadcasts. These critiques apply to other U.S. broadcasting entities as well.

To your advantage, the CSCC is dramatically smaller than these broadcasters, and your mission is more narrowly defined. I also presume the hiring process for the CSCC differs from international broadcasting agencies. Still, awareness is in order. Years from now, it would be disappointing to learn that the Center's Arabic, Urdu and Somali speakers were facing similar

criticisms. Your attention to this management and personnel challenge now, when your organization is still a start-up, can help prevent these problems from occurring down the road.

Thank you again for your recent testimony in front of the Subcommittee. I appreciate your consideration of my views and stand ready to assist you in any way I can.

Sincerely,



EDWARD R. ROYCE
Chairman, Subcommittee on
Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade

United States Department of State

Washington, D.C. 20520

AUG 30 2012

Dear Mr. Chairman:

Thank you for your letter of August 14 regarding oversight and quality control in our online engagements in Arabic, Urdu, and Somali.

The Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications (CSCC) has put in place a variety of procedures to ensure that its digital operations are subject to rigorous oversight and quality control while at the same time maintaining the operational tempo needed to keep pace with the messaging efforts of al-Qa'ida and its supporters. The main elements in this system are the hiring process, internal review of outgoing messages, in-house expertise, and detailed record-keeping.

The writer-analysts on the Digital Outreach Team are contractors, hired through a contracting company, who undergo multiple reviews before they are hired. They are also subject to background investigations.

All outgoing messages are translated into English and reviewed by CSCC staff with up-to-date knowledge of current policy and significant experience in public diplomacy and communications. After a rigorous, multi-step review that involves continuous oversight by the Digital Outreach Team director or deputy director, messages are usually composed, edited, approved, and posted in the course of, at most, a few hours.

The team posts at least 25 engagements a day. The procedures attempt to maintain as much accountability as possible while preserving the team's ability to communicate rapidly and effectively.

The Honorable
Edward R. Royce, Chairman,
Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade,
Committee on Foreign Affairs,
House of Representatives.

Video engagements undergo a separate and more extensive review, involving not only the director and deputy director of the Digital Outreach Team, but also the group director for digital presence and select interagency partners. The CSCC Coordinator (Ambassador Fernandez) personally reviews and approves all video engagements.

CSCC staff include a number of individuals with extensive expertise in the regions that are the main focus of CSCC's digital operations. For example, both the coordinator and group director for digital presence are fluent in Arabic, and one of the policy advisors in the Plans and Operations section is a native speaker of Arabic.

CSCC keeps meticulous records of all engagements. After posting a written engagement, writer-analysts record data in a Sharepoint database. The topics recorded for each engagement include: Subject of engagement, name of the writer-analyst, date, language, website name, full URL, view count at the time of posting, title in English, the text the writer-analyst is responding to, the main country referred to, the engagement in both English and the vernacular, and whether the post is part of an organized campaign.

As your letter rightly notes, we face the difficult task of allowing members of our team to react quickly, while maintaining a critical eye on their product. We are constantly reviewing our internal procedures and seek ways to improve them, but we believe that our hiring process, internal review of outgoing messages, in-house expertise, and meticulous record-keeping allow us to achieve the right balance between caution and action. We hope this information is useful to you. Please do not hesitate to contact us again if we can be of further assistance.

Sincerely,

David S. Adams
Assistant Secretary
Legislative Affairs

Questions for the Record Submitted to
Coordinator Alberto Fernandez by
Representative Ed Royce (#1)
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
August 2, 2012

Question:

U.S. law prohibits domestic dissemination of information communicated by the State Department to foreign audiences, and prohibits using State Department funds to influence U.S. public opinion. Given the possibility that the CSCC could engage in communications that reach domestic audiences or could even communicate directly to U.S. residents online, what steps has the CSCC taken to limit the domestic dissemination of its communications? In what ways, if any, do the legal limitations on domestic communications restrain CSCC communications efforts? Would the repeal of "Smith-Mundt" help your efforts?

Answer:

CSCC coordinates, orients and informs Government-wide public communications activities directed at audiences abroad and targeted against violent extremists and terrorist organizations, in accordance with Executive Order 13584. CSCC is housed within the State Department with an overseas focus and works online in the vernacular languages of Arabic, Urdu and Somali. CSCC does not operate in English. Domestic dissemination of materials or domestic communications falls under many agencies, including DHS and the Department of Justice. In accordance with the Department of State's mission and the restrictions of Smith-Mundt, our work is with U.S. Missions around the world and on websites that further CSCC's objective of reaching target audiences overseas, but

obviously the growth of technology over the past decades has transcended the initial restrictions of Smith-Mundt.

CSCC's direct communications occur primarily through the engagements of the Digital Outreach Team, which focuses its efforts exclusively on foreign audiences, taking the following steps to ensure that it reaches them. First, CSCC's DOT operates in Arabic, Urdu and Somali, and it addresses its engagements to foreign audiences that speak those languages. Second, it works closely with CSCC's Integrated Analysis section to ensure that the team operates primarily on websites that cater predominantly to users in the geographic regions where foreign target audiences are located. Finally, working once again with the Integrated Analysis section, the team strives to ensure that the thematic thrust of the team's engagements is directed at the specific interests and concerns of foreign audiences.

The Department supports the modernization of Smith-Mundt and is working with Congress to achieve this goal. We believe all Americans should have access to the same information that we broadcast overseas about the activities of our officials overseas, transcripts of interviews and other basic information about America that Smith-Mundt currently prohibits. We do however continue to fully support the spirit of the original legislation – there cannot be intent to disseminate solely for domestic purposes nor create new content directed only at the U.S. audience. Given the roles of other U.S. government

agencies in countering violent extremism domestically and CSCC's close coordination with those agencies, we do not believe the restrictions on CSCC in targeting U.S. domestic audiences weakens the mission and impact of CSCC.

Questions for the Record Submitted to
Coordinator Alberto Fernandez by
Representative Ed Royce (#2)
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
August 2, 2012

Question:

How does your "Digital Outreach Team" compare to Central Command's (CENTCOM) Digital Engagement Teams? How does its resources compare to yours? What does it do that you do not? How do you avoid duplicating efforts?

Answer:

CSCC's Digital Outreach Team (DOT) and CENTCOM's Digital Engagement Team (DET) are similar in format, as both engage online in vernacular languages in interactive environments like web forums and Facebook. Their missions are different, as CSCC's DOT is specifically focused on a counterterrorism mission, while CENTCOM's DET has a Public Affairs mission with the broader task of informing the public about operations that CENTCOM is conducting and events that are happening in CENTCOM's area of responsibility.

CSCC's DOT limits its focus to the specific range of issues associated with its mission of countering violent extremism through online engagement. CSCC's DOT coordinates routinely with CENTCOM's DET to avoid duplicating efforts. The DOT director and deputy director are in frequent contact with their counterparts in

CENTCOM's DET in order to manage working level coordination, and both teams exchange information about their engagements on a daily basis. The annual operating budget for CSCC's DOT is approximately $2,458,750. That number covers staffing costs for the DOT director, deputy director and 18 staff members (writer-analysts and video production specialists).

CENTCOM's DET uses social media sites such as You Tube, flickr, Facebook, Twitter, and various forums to directly communicate with the public to inform about CENTCOM news worldwide. For more detailed information about CENTCOM's DET to include resources, inquiries should be directed to **Central Command Communications Integration Public Affairs office at** (813) 529-0214**.**

Questions for the Record Submitted to
Coordinator Alberto Fernandez by
Representative Ed Royce (#3)
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
August 2, 2012

Question:

Somalia-based al-Shabaab is al-Qaeda affiliate of increasing concern. Al-Shabaab has proven effective at recruiting foreign fighters and Somali exiles, including U.S. and British citizens. This is a group that CSCC has decided to focus on. Please describe your efforts in this area.

Answer:

Al-Shabaab's affiliation with al-Qa'ida was made clear earlier this year when al-Shabaab's emir in Somalia and al-Qa'ida leader Ayman al-Zawahiri released a joint video to formally announce a merger of the two organizations. Al-Shabaab's attacks have primarily focused on targets inside of Somalia, but it has demonstrated a willingness and ability to conduct attacks elsewhere in the region, particularly in Kenya. Al-Shabaab directs notable effort at recruiting from outside Somalia, including among ethnic Somali Kenyans, members of western diasporas, and disenfranchised Kenyan Muslims. These foreign fighters have language skills, education levels, and passports that make them both more valuable to AQ and a potential threat to U.S. national security.

The flow of information between Somali diaspora communities and their friends and relatives inside Somalia is frequent and continual. Understanding that information received by one group is eventually shared with the other, CSCC plans programs to reach

each audience via the most appropriate means for that audience, whether online or on the ground. This two-way flow permits reinforcement of positive themes about the future of Somalia and negative themes about al-Shabaab's vision of the same. Significant gains have been made in degrading al-Shabaab capability and liberating areas from al-Shabaab administration over the last year. Yet much work remains to be done in this region to further reduce the threat of terrorism.

CSCC's efforts support broader U.S. government foreign policy and counterterrorism policies on Somalia by engaging with audiences that could be vulnerable to al-Shabaab propaganda. CSCC has worked closely with the Somali Unit in Nairobi, Kenya and other interagency partners to implement programs which undermine al-Shabaab's messaging through focused engagement with Somali and Somali diaspora audiences, and initial digital training for online Somali communicators who support views counter to al-Shabaab.

CSCC's Digital Outreach Team first added Somali capabilities in November of 2011 and actively engages online to confront and counter al-Shabaab. During the past 90 days, the Digital Outreach Team has provided 79 Somalia postings and published eight videos in Somali to YouTube. The Somali diaspora may be more susceptible to recruitment since they have not experienced personally the impact of Shabaab rule. Accordingly, our online outreach to the diaspora community focuses on highlighting Shabaab atrocities, showing evidence of progress in liberated areas, especially

Mogadishu, and encouraging positive support from the diaspora to developments in Somalia. In our digital outreach to communities inside Somalia, we have seen that positive historical and cultural references are particularly effective in providing an alternate and positive vision of Somalia to young people who have grown up in the civil war with a failed state and extremist violence.

CSCC draws on information and analysis solicited from various members of the Intelligence Community to inform and refine the content and tactics of each of these programs.

Questions for the Record Submitted to
Coordinator Alberto Fernandez by
Representative Jeff Duncan (#1)
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
August 2, 2012

Question:

Does the Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communication have a specific alternative/counter-narrative to Al Qaeda's Inspire?

Answer:

CSCC's work is guided by Executive Order 13584, which states: "The United States is committed to actively countering the actions and ideologies of al-Qa'ida, its affiliates and adherents, other terrorist organizations, and violent extremists overseas that threaten the interests and national security of the United States. These efforts take many forms, but all contain a communications element and some use of communications strategies directed to audiences outside the United States to counter the ideology and activities of such organizations. These communications strategies focus not only on the violent actions and human costs of terrorism, but also on narratives that can positively influence those who may be susceptible to radicalization and recruitment by terrorist organizations."

CSCC works with interagency partners to identify specific themes and narratives that will resonate most effectively in countering al-Qa'ida propaganda with a range of diverse communities and audiences. We also work on a continuous basis to monitor and

analyze al-Qa'ida's messaging efforts, so that our work effectively confronts and undermines AQ both in the digital realm and through the products and programs we provide to U.S. government communicators working with overseas audiences. Some aspects of al-Qa'ida propaganda reflects its broad objectives and narratives, similar to those contained within *Inspire*, while others focus more on specific regional issues, concerns, and opportunities. *Inspire* focuses primarily on English language diaspora communities, seeking to promote "lone wolf" attacks in the West. CSCC produced a paper noting the dissonance of *Inspire*'s treatment of Norwegian terrorist Anders Breivik and the French jihadi Mohammed Merah. A second strategy paper on "lone wolf" terrorists, specifically aimed to counter *Inspire*'s radicalization efforts is in the works. To be effective in its mission, CSCC must remain vigilant in identifying AQ's communication efforts and countering them in ways that will resonate most deeply with each specific audience of concern.

Questions for the Record Submitted to
Coordinator Alberto Fernandez by
Representative Jeff Duncan (#2)
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
August 2, 2012

Question:

The Foundation for Defense of Democracies recently released a book entitled, Facebook Fatwa: Saudi Clerics, Wahhabi Islam and Social Media, that reported that Saudi clerics with radical views have been flocking to social media and Twitter in particular. Is this a trend you see? What is the Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communication doing – in conjunction with the intelligence community – to monitor the Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook pages of radical imams, individuals associated with terrorist organizations, and the terrorist organizations themselves?

Answer:

The formal task of monitoring social media and other Internet-based activity for collection purposes falls to select members of the Intelligence Community, including the Open Source Center, which are best positioned to explain exactly what sites they monitor and the trends that they observe. For more specific information, we must refer you to the Office of Congressional Affairs at the Central Intelligence Agency.

For CSCC's part, the Digital Outreach Team (DOT) participates in Facebook, YouTube, and other social media sites, and during the course of their routine DOT team members observe and sometimes engage with individuals who support al-Qa'ida and/or its affiliates, including radical imams or individuals officially associated with terrorist organizations.

Questions for the Record Submitted to
Coordinator Alberto Fernandez by
Representative Jeff Duncan (#3)
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
August 2, 2012

Question:

I would like some additional information on how the Fort Hood attack and the recent Webster Commission report have influenced the way the Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communication operates online. Please be specific with any changes that have occurred due to these events.

Answer:

The Webster Commission report on the November 5, 2009, shootings at Fort Hood clearly stated that "The Fort Hood shootings are a grim reminder that violent radicalization is a persistent threat to the United States and its citizens and residents." It also reminded us that "The Internet can provide individuals with remote, yet regular, access to the teachings and instructions of violent radical leaders, supplanting the real-world meeting places traditionally used to radicalize. The Internet also offers exposure to extraordinary amounts of information at little or no cost; the ability to join and participate in virtual networks of like-minded individuals, finding the group identity that is part of radicalization; and, of course, the potential for shrouding identities."

CSCC's Digital Outreach Team works to counteract the al-Qa'ida propaganda that has established such a pervasive presence in online environments. The team's writer-analysts confront al-Qa'ida propagandists and the supporters of associated movements

like Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and Al-Shabaab in Arabic, Urdu and Somali across a wide variety of interactive digital environments. DOT writer-analysts contest the virtual space, introducing evidence of the atrocities al-Qa'ida and its allies have committed the world over and providing a consistent alternative perspective.

The recommendations in the Webster Commission Report are specifically couched as being "for actions to be taken by the FBI and/or the Attorney General." Nevertheless, CSCC notes that its structure and staffing already reflect the animating spirit behind Recommendation B.1 (Continued Integration of Intelligence Analysis into Operations), which lauds the "increasingly effective integration of…Intelligence Analysts into the FBI's hierarchy and culture" and recommends that "the FBI continue to increase the number and participation of Intelligence Analysis in its operation divisions."

Questions for the Record Submitted to
Coordinator Alberto Fernandez by
Representative Jeff Duncan (#4)
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
August 2, 2012

Question:

What type of "strategic" effect does the Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communication seek to achieve? What are the performance measures and indicators that the Center is using to evaluate mission success or failure? Please be specific.

Answer:

CSCC seeks to diminish the influence and appeal of al-Qa'ida and its affiliates among potentially susceptible recruits and supporters. The Center engages in a variety of discrete communication activities and engagement efforts, but we are committed to ensuring that these are based on strategic analysis, planning and implementation. We start by reviewing available intelligence, analysis, and open source reporting to define the objectives and efforts of al-Qa'ida, their areas of weakness, and the specific foreign audiences that could be vulnerable to AQ propaganda. We then develop plans to use open communications and engagement to confront, counter, undermine, and marginalize al-Qa'ida in priority countries and regions. Our work must combine a strategic understanding of the objectives and tools with continued flexibility to act quickly in the face of changed environments and new developments.

CSCC is committed to developing and utilizing performance measures and other indicators to help us evaluate the effectiveness and impact of our messages on the

behavior of our target audiences. While we already have anecdotal evidence of impact, through the unhappy complaints and concerns voiced by al-Qa'ida supporters about the Digital Outreach Team, measuring our effectiveness remains a key challenge that we are working to address. We would highlight the following concrete initiatives aimed at establishing a more robust evaluation of our effectiveness:

- We currently have a major project underway in cooperation with the Department of Defense to measure the spread and resonance of both al-Qa'ida's and our online messaging with an eye to ensuring that we are countering the adversary's efforts.
- We are moving ahead to hire a metrics specialist in this area to develop CSCC-specific standards and methods to evaluate the effectiveness of our activities.
- We are cooperating with the Department of State's Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR) to conduct focus groups to evaluate the effectiveness of the DOT's Arabic language videos.
- We are in the process of setting up systems for the timely transfer of CSCC's operational information to our interagency partners in order to facilitate the sharing of best practices, particularly in the area of metrics and evaluations.

Questions for the Record Submitted to
Coordinator Alberto Fernandez by
Representative Jeff Duncan (#5)
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
August 2, 2012

Question:

What is the Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communication doing to insulate its messaging from infiltration or other influence by Al Qaeda and the other terrorist organizations that have been designated by the Secretary of State in accordance with Section 219 of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA), as amended?

Answer:

CSCC maintains a robust internal review process to ensure that outgoing messages are in accordance with U.S. policy and in line with the overall mission of countering violent extremism. In digital operations, this process involves authorship, brainstorming and proofreading of engagements by multiple writer-analysts, as well as final review and approval of digitally disseminated messages by individuals with significant experience in public diplomacy and communications. Additionally, CSCC retains copies of all outgoing messages in the vernacular and in full English translation, along with the URLs and other data associated with messages posted to the Internet.

Members of CSCC's Digital Outreach Team constantly monitor the team's social media websites (Facebook pages and YouTube channels) to ensure the integrity of the materials they post there.

CSCC staff and contractors undergo a variety of background checks as determined by their position requirements and employment status.

Questions for the Record Submitted to
Coordinator Alberto Fernandez by
Representative Jeff Duncan (#6)
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
August 2, 2012

Question:

Is it current practice that individuals working for the Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communication declare up front that they represent the US Government when they join Internet bulletin boards and chat rooms? Does US CENTCOM announce themselves with their "digital engagement team" when they undertake their efforts? Announcing one's affiliation with the US Government appears counter-productive by allowing a shift in conversation from the merit of the arguments to the identity of those making the arguments. Please elaborate on the Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communication's policy on this issue.

Answer:

The members of CSCC's Digital Outreach Team identify themselves as representing the U.S. Government when they engage online, as do members of US CENTCOM's Digital Engagement Team. The practice of announcing one's affiliation with the U.S. Government supports an important objective, which is to contest the virtual space where al-Qa'ida supporters have hitherto had the opportunity to spread extremist propaganda unimpeded by public pushback from the U.S. Government. The open presence of the Digital Outreach Team, which can only be achieved if team members clearly affiliate themselves with the Department of State, now confronts al-Qa'ida propagandists in numerous environments where they had previously operated with impunity.

In addition to contesting the space, members of CSCC's DOT also strive to redirect online discussions where extremists are trying to gain traction. The team does this in a variety of ways, one of the most important of which is by calling attention to the numerous and well-attested atrocities al-Qa'ida and its ilk have carried out everywhere, including in Muslim-majority countries. While CSCC recognizes that the open affiliation of its online communicators with the U.S. Government can sometimes shift conversations to the identify of those making the arguments, it treats this as an opportunity not only to draw attention to the ravages al-Qa'ida has exacted on those it claims to defend, but also to present an authoritative U.S. perspective, correct misinformation, and clarify misunderstandings about U.S. policies in online environments that are often rife with the distorted narratives that extremists exploit for their own ends.

Questions for the Record Submitted to
Coordinator Alberto Fernandez by
Representative Jeff Duncan (#7)
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
August 2, 2012

Question:

Has the Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communication sought to discredit the reputation of individual Al Qaeda leaders and radical imams that espouse a violent form of Islam? If so, please give some specific examples. If not, please explain why.

Answer:

In its efforts to counter the propaganda of al-Qa'ida and affiliated groups, CSCC does not focus on abstract questions of Islamic law, but rather on the enemy's actions and violence, pointing to the contradictions, incoherence and dissonance within the enemy's discourse. CSCC has been aggressive in its denigration of individual al-Qa'ida leaders. The following examples are representative but not exhaustive:

- After the death of Usama Bin Laden, CSCC's Digital Outreach Team released a short text "biography" documenting Bin Laden's many crimes, a banner declaring him a "murderer not a martyr," and a video exposing his misdeeds. The team promoted the biography through an online campaign, garnering over 15,000 views, 300 comments and eight repostings of the text by June 1, 2011.

- In February 2011, CSCC's DOT produced a short video mash-up contrasting Ayman al-Zawahiri's statements about the impossibility of peaceful change with examples of non-violent political action in Egypt. The video has been viewed more than 70,000 times.

- CSCC's DOT produced a video contrasting AQ leader Abu Yahya al-Libi's disparaging remarks about democracy with scenes of support for democratic change in the Arab world. The video has garnered more than 30,000 views.

- When al-Qa'ida released a eulogy for Anwar al-Awlaki in October 2011, and when the Al-Fajr Media Center released a video about Awlaki in December 2011, CSCC's DOT pushed back actively against the efforts of AQ supporters to promote these materials online.

- More recent examples of CSCC's efforts to expose the hypocrisy and criminality of AQ leaders include online engagements about Mokhtar Belmokhtar, a leader in al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghrib with longtime involvement in cigarette smuggling and drug trafficking, and a post about a leader in Somalia's AQ-affiliated Al-Shabaab who sent his family away from conflict-ridden Kismayo while forcing other civilians to stay in harm's way.

Questions for the Record Submitted to
Coordinator Alberto Fernandez by
Representative Jeff Duncan (#8)
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
August 2, 2012

Question:

How does the Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communication identify the online areas that it deems worthy of engaging from the perspective of counterterrorism? The Internet is rife with radicalization and terrorist incitement. How does the Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communication deploy its limited assets?

Answer:

CSCC focuses its online engagement efforts on mainstream interactive websites in Arabic, Urdu and Somali. The most fundamental aspect of this approach – the decision to work in these three languages – is derived directly from the priorities set out in the National Strategy for Counterterrorism, which identifies Pakistan, Somalia and a variety of locations in the Arab world as the sources of the most significant threats to U.S. national security, and thus the highest-priority regions for the overall counterterrorism effort of which CSCC is a part.

CSCC's Digital Outreach Team works primarily on interactive websites like forums, Facebook and the comment sections of media outlets because these provide the greatest opportunity for dialogue with individuals in the target audience. The team operates on mainstream websites because the contested space in the middle ground is one of the most significant environments where radicalization takes place, as uncommitted

individuals encounter extremist propaganda and the supporters of al-Qa'ida attempt to sway new recruits to their cause. Websites controlled by extremists normally exclude participation by the team.

CSCC makes use of all available research and analysis to identify the online environments that extremist propagandists are trying to infiltrate. The team frequently reviews the websites on which it operates, and team members are constantly monitoring the environment for new opportunities for counterterrorism-focused engagement. CSCC is also exploring additional venues for digital engagement, like the ever-evolving world of handheld devices and mobile platforms, to ensure that we are not just tracking and countering extremist propaganda reactively but are making every effort to confront it proactively.

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