

An 'All Elements of Power' Strategy for Combating Terrorism

Featuring Ambassador Dell Dailey
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On December 12, 2007, Ambassador Dell Dailey, coordinator for counterterrorism at the Department of State, addressed The Washington Institute's special policy forum to discuss aspects of the "all elements of power" strategy for fighting terrorism. The following is the prepared text of Ambassador Dailey's remarks. [Read a rapporteur's summary of his remarks.](#)

In today's interconnected world, it is impossible to draw neat, clear lines between security interests, development efforts, and our support for democracy. American diplomacy must integrate and advance all of these goals together. Thus, our strategy to defeat terrorists is multi-structured -- a global campaign to counter violent extremism and disrupt terrorist networks; a series of regional collaborative efforts to deny terrorists safe haven; and numerous bilateral security and development assistance programs designed to build liberal institutions, support law enforcement and the rule of law, address political and economic injustice, and develop military and security capacity.

Our most important task in the war on terrorism is not the "destructive" task of eradicating enemy networks, but the "constructive" task of building legitimacy, good governance, trust, rule of law, and tolerance. Systems that are characterized by an absence of political choice, honest governance, economic opportunities and personal freedoms can create incubators for extremism. Ignoring human development problems is not an option.

It is imperative that we find ways to encourage and nurture democratization in societies where a lack of freedom destroys hope and leaves some feeling they are justified to lash out in rage and frustration at those they have been led to believe are responsible for their plight. Another key objective is galvanizing world-wide public opinion to reject as absolutely unacceptable the murder of innocent people to promote a cause.

We have made progress

Together, the international community has created a less permissive operating environment for terrorists. A key achievement is antiterrorism legislation, upgraded by scores of countries around the world since September 11. Many countries have now passed anti-money laundering and counterterrorism finance legislation, making it more difficult for terrorists to operate.

We have made progress in securing borders and transportation, enhancing document security, strengthening law enforcement capabilities, disrupting terrorist financing and restricting the international movement of terrorists.

We have likewise increased our own awareness and understanding of the terrorist threat and we have inflicted serious setbacks on our adversaries. The international community has captured and incarcerated or killed numerous senior operatives in al-Qaeda and affiliated terrorist groups, and has thus degraded the ability of terrorists to plan and mount attacks.

The failure of al-Qaeda-inspired bombings in London and Glasgow, and the thwarted attempt to mount attacks using passenger jets operating out of British airports in the summer of 2006, provide good examples of this. It is important to note these shared successes to demonstrate that when we work cooperatively, we get results that benefit all of us.

More work remains to be done

We should not be complacent about these successes, however. Core elements of al-Qaeda are adaptable and resilient. We have recently witnessed a shift in terrorist tactics, from building a terrorist team remotely to growing a team closer to target, usually made up of nationals of the target country. By making use of local cells, terrorists have been able to sidestep many of our border and transportation security measures.

Counter-radicalization is another key policy priority for the United States particularly in Europe, given the potential of Europe-based violent extremism to threaten the U.S. and its key interests directly. And, make no mistake about it, the leaders of al-Qaeda and its affiliates are extremely interested in recruiting and deploying terrorists in Europe -- people familiar with Western cultures and able to travel freely. We cooperate closely with our European allies on counterterrorism measures, but we need to intensify efforts to counter the extremist ideology that drives terrorism.

Communication can be a strategic weapon of mass influence to assure allies and dissuade and deter adversaries. Strategic communication, therefore, is a vital tool in our counterterrorism efforts. Using strategic communications, we can shape perception and counter terrorists in the information sphere; such efforts can influence attitudes, and ultimately behavior.

We are living in an entirely new information environment and are engaged in the first war of the information age. We are fighting our first networked enemy and that enemy has a highly professional and sophisticated propaganda machine that exploits electronic media, most notably the Internet, to disseminate messages globally, to recruit adherents, and to provide pre-recorded videotapes and audiotapes to sympathizers. Al-Qaeda and other terrorists' center of gravity lies in the information domain and it is there that we must engage it.

And, while we sometimes have trouble acknowledging this, it is clear that opposition to U.S. and Western policies in the Middle East, including support for Israel and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, can be exploited by for purposes of propaganda and recruitment. We are working to more effectively rise to this challenge. State Sponsors of Terrorism (Iran and Syria)

Al-Qaeda is not our only challenge. Certain states continue to sponsor terrorism. Iran remains the most significant state sponsor of terrorism. It continues to threaten its neighbors and destabilize Iraq by providing weapons, training, advice, and funding to select Iraqi militants. As the president has said, some of the most powerful IEDs we're seeing in Iraq today include components that came from Iran. Iran has also expanded its lethal assistance and funding for militant organizations, most notably Hizballah, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and Hamas, who oppose reinvigorated Arab-Israeli peace efforts. Iranian defiance of UN Security Council resolutions by providing weapons and assistance to Hizballah demonstrates that Tehran continues to be the most dangerous enabler of terrorism in the region.

Syria, both directly and in coordination with Hizballah, has attempted to undermine the democratically-elected government of Lebanon and roll back progress toward democratization in the Middle East. Foreign fighters and terrorists continue to transit Syria's borders into Iraq. Syria also continues to provide political and material support to Hizballah and political support to Palestinian terrorist groups including Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Hamas, who base their external leadership in Damascus.

The Pursuit of Middle East Peace

Peace between Israelis and Palestinians is a national interest for the United States, and Annapolis provided a real opportunity to make progress. Success is vital for securing a future of peace, freedom, and opportunity in the Middle East. As you know, Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas announced that they will begin vigorous, ongoing and continuous negotiations to establish a Palestinian state and to achieve Israeli-Palestinian peace with the goal of concluding an agreement by the end of the year 2008. A Palestinian state will never be born through terror, but rather through the commitment of responsible Palestinian leaders like President Abbas and Prime Minister Fayyad to fundamental principles of peace.

We must now work with the international community on next steps.

On December 17th the French Government will host a donor's conference in Paris to support Palestinian reform and institution building. This conference will be an essential opportunity for the international community to pledge tangible and generous assistance to the economic development of Palestinian society and to provide maximal resources for the Palestinian Authority's program of institution building in preparation for statehood. We expect broad international attendance at this meeting.

Moving Forward: A Holistic Approach

Defeating terrorism will require a comprehensive effort executed locally, nationally, regionally and globally. We are working with partner nations to eliminate terrorist leadership. But I will stress that incarcerating or killing terrorists will not end terrorism -- it only buys us time.

We must tailor regional strategies to disaggregate terrorist networks, eliminate terrorist safe havens, and

disrupt all terrorist links, including financial, travel, communications, and intelligence.

Finally, and most challenging, we must address the underlying conditions that terrorists exploit at the national and local levels and use to induce alienated or aggrieved populations to become sympathizers, supporters, and ultimately members of terrorist networks.

In addition, we have yet to fully harness the power of the private sector, which offers enormous potential, such as economic might and fast and flexible responses to market and security conditions. We need to find better ways to deploy this energy against terrorists. The private sector, of course, has a vested interest in partnering against violent extremists to secure its existing and future investments/economic opportunities.

Al-Qaeda and its affiliates gain strength from making local conflicts their own -- we saw this in the last few AQ video releases, where Bin Laden held forth on the topic of global warming. Besides appropriating every conflict from Darfur to the environment, al-Qaeda is working at the local level in many locations. We must destroy these terrorist networks and we must create resistance to terrorist propaganda.

We can destroy terrorist leadership, disrupt terrorist networks, and eliminate terrorist safe havens, but unless we prevent al-Qaeda from recruiting new members and expanding its global reach, we will not be truly successful.

Al-Qaeda exploits many Muslims around the world whose grievances are legitimate. The international community -- governments and international organizations, politicians, academics, religious and community leaders, in general, needs to do better at disputing terrorist propaganda and misinformation. We need to tackle head on the false narrative that the West is at war with Islam with both our words and our deeds.

At the same time, we must galvanize world-wide public opinion to reject violence and the murder of innocent people as a means of addressing any type of grievance or promoting any cause. There is no political cause that justifies the murder of innocent people. The terrorist message of hate and death holds no promise for anyone's future.

All humans belong to networks of trust, based on family, societal, religious, cultural and economic links. Building trusted networks of allies and partners -- state, non-state, and multilateral -- who support the rule of law and oppose the use of terrorism to resolve grievances will allow us to replace an ideology of hatred with an ideology of hope.

We must find ways to address local grievances, and we must think flexibly and creatively. Different situations require different responses. The tools we have to address a lack of political choice are different than the ones we have to build a free trade region, or to promote rule of law, or to assist countries in modernizing education. More importantly, we must work cooperatively to identify ways in which we can provide substantive educational, social, and recreational alternatives that will divert impressionable young people away from the recruitment process. These kinds of solutions not only allow us to break down terrorist networks, but -- more importantly -- to offer something better than what terrorists offer, which is nothing but death and destruction.

Our counterterrorism operations need to be partner-led, home-grown initiatives wherever possible -- developed with local partners to meet their needs and address the real conditions on the ground. They can not be imposed from outside or tailored to address conditions as they are perceived in Washington, or other international capitals.

The kinetic aspect of our counterterrorism policy represents about 15 percent of the overall effort. Globally, we need to work together to eliminate terrorist leadership by arresting and incarcerating terrorists. About 20 percent of the U.S. counterterrorism effort focuses on regional diplomatic efforts, bilateral security and training programs, and law enforcement, all aimed to disrupt terrorist networks, and to sever terrorists' financial, travel, communications and intelligence links. It will deny terrorists the safe havens they require to indoctrinate, recruit, coalesce, train and regroup.

The remaining 65 or so percent of our overall effort focuses on addressing the conditions that terrorists exploit. We can marginalize violent extremists by addressing peoples' needs and grievances, by giving people a stake in their own political future, and by providing alternatives, both physical and ideological alternatives, to what the terrorists offer. This element of our counterterrorism efforts is our greatest challenge. Let me outline some other thoughts for consideration:

Aid offers at-risk populations a better choice: Terrorists exploit despair and hopelessness to win recruits.

Systems that are characterized by an absence of political choice, honest governance, economic opportunities, and personal freedom can create incubators for extremism. Economically disadvantaged people are vulnerable to recruitment by extremists and by criminal "quick-fix" livelihoods, such as the poppy production that finances terrorism in Afghanistan. Combating corruption and fostering good governance in host governments are indispensable to our efforts to strengthen host government oversight of terrorist financing, and the longevity of our other training programs, such as those that help border guards interdict dangerous goods and people.

Mitigating conflict between groups: Terrorists exploit weakness, most notably sectarian violence, to create greater instability and to piggyback onto the conflict for propaganda purposes. Fostering reconciliation and strengthening community mechanisms is vital to eliminating terrorism.

We must delegitimize terrorism as an acceptable avenue for political change by bringing forth more appealing alternatives. Again, our efforts must be multi-faceted: we will need to work with our allies to connect European Muslims with the societies in which they live and to resist the lures of extremist recruiters. At the same time, we need to find ways within immigrant communities to sustain moderate voices and to fulfill the obligations of life in democratic and largely secular societies. We must engage the youth themselves as they understand the challenges and the needs of their demographic better than any local or foreign government. Achieving these goals will likely take time and require difficult choices. But we really have no alternative.

The Regional Strategic Initiative (RSI)

We have developed the Regional Strategic Initiative (RSI) as an effort to develop flexible regional networks to address safe havens and cross-border flows of people, money, ideas and technology.

We work with our ambassadors and interagency representatives in key terrorist theaters of operation to collectively assess the threat, pool resources, and to devise collaborative strategies and policy recommendations. We work through our partners at every level, whenever possible. For example, we work with Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines as they confront terrorist transit across the Sulawesi Sea; or with Mauritania, Algeria, Morocco, Niger, Chad, and Mali, to counter terrorist activity in the desert that sits astride national borders.

This is a long-term fight. Over time, our global and regional cooperative efforts will reduce the enemy's capacity to harm us and our partners, while local security and development assistance will build our partners' capacity. Once partner capacity exceeds threat, the need for close U.S. engagement and support will diminish, and the threat will be reduced to a level that our partners can manage for themselves over the long term.

RSI strategy groups are in place for South East Asia, Iraq and its neighbors, the eastern Mediterranean, the western Mediterranean, East Africa, the Trans-Sahara, South Asia, and Latin America.

In Conclusion

Al-Qaeda and its affiliates are promoting a world vision that is drastically at odds with our own. Where we promote hope and opportunity, they promote fear and hatred. To counter their efforts, we must support civic institutions, free speech, democratic organizations, free market forces and law-a society characterized by freedom and tolerance, prosperity and hope. These are values we are fighting for.

Fighting for these values will take time and will involve using a broad array of tools of national statecraft. We must measure counterterrorism success in the broadest perspective. Tactical and operational counterterrorism battles will be won and lost, but we must look at terrorism within a strategic context. We must fight terrorists with precise, calibrated force in order to buy space and time to transform the environment and the conditions that terrorist exploit, and to build enduring solutions that transcend violence.

Above all, we must enlist the support and cooperation of a growing network of partners. If we are to be successful, we must all work together toward our common goal in a strategic and coordinated manner. The war on terror will be won over time with dedicated commitment by us all. Our vision will win in the long run. Thank you for the opportunity to share these ideas and thoughts with you. I will be happy to take any questions.