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**INTERNATIONAL COUNTERTERRORISM POLICY  
IN THE OBAMA ADMINISTRATION**

**Jamestown Conference**  
**Wednesday, December 9, 2009**  
**9:05 am**

**National Press Club**  
**529 14<sup>th</sup> Street, NW 13<sup>th</sup> Floor, Grand Ballroom**

Good morning. It is a great pleasure to be here. I've been a devoted reader of Jamestown publications since you first stepped up to the challenge of the radically changed post-9/11 security environment, with the introduction of the *Terrorism Monitor*. I can still recall being interviewed by Jamestown for the third issue of volume one of the *Monitor*, and I had the pleasure of having this same speaking slot two years ago in a somewhat less official capacity. As you can imagine, I'm delighted to have the opportunity to speak to you today about the Obama administration's counterterrorism policy.

If memory serves, when I spoke to you two years ago, my view was that the United States had developed great skills at what I called tactical counterterrorism—taking individual terrorists off the street, and disrupting cells and operations. On the strategic side, I thought we were losing ground. Now, I believe the administration is redressing that gap. In my roughly six months in office, my view of our tactical capabilities in the areas of intelligence, the military, and law enforcement have more than amply been confirmed. One of the great rewards of government service is the chance to work with colleagues in all of these areas, and I must say that their level of competence and professionalism is really extraordinary.

When I consider how far we have come since my days at the NSC in the late 90s, I think it is quite remarkable.

And we are now working to match their proficiency by formulating the kind of policies that seek to shape the environment that terrorists operate in so that they find their efforts more constrained. We are rebuilding and reinvigorating old partnerships to combat terror and establishing new ones with others who have been on the sidelines. As we look at the problem of transnational terror, we are putting at the core of our actions a recognition of the phenomenon of radicalization—that is, we are asking ourselves time and again: Are our actions going to result in the removal of one terrorist and the creation of ten more? What can we do to attack the drivers of radicalization, so that al-Qaida and its affiliates have a shrinking pool of recruits? And finally— and vitally—are we hewing to our values in this struggle? Because as President Obama has said from the outset, there should be no tradeoff between our security and our values. Indeed, in light of what we know about radicalization, it is clear that navigating by our values is an essential part of a successful counterterrorism effort. Thus, we have moved to rectify the excesses of the past few years by working to close the prison at Guantanamo Bay, forbidding enhanced interrogation techniques, and developing a more systematic method of dealing with detainees. We are also demonstrating our commitment to the rule of law by trying Khalid Sheikh Muhammad and other al-Qaida operatives in our court system.

Finally, we have a strategy for success in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The President has put forward a clear plan to constrain the Taliban and destroy the al-Qaida core, and the administration is putting up the resources necessary to achieve that goal. Moreover, we are working with Pakistan to establish the kind of relationship, based on trust and mutual interests, that will lead to the defeat of radicalism in that country, which has in recent months seen so much violence. We understand the trust deficit, built up over decades that created the current situation. We know that challenges in the region will not be overcome overnight. But we believe we are now firmly on the right track.

Before going any further, we need to consider the threat today: On any given day, al-Qaida remains the foremost security threat the nation faces. Yet having said that, it is clear that for al-Qaida, it has been a difficult period. The group is under severe pressure in Pakistan and Afghanistan, where the U.S. and its allies have succeeded in severely degrading its operational leadership. The coming troop increase in Afghanistan will further reduce al-Qaida's capabilities and those of other extremist organizations. The Pakistani military has been working to eliminate militant strongholds in its territory. As a result, al-Qaida is finding it tougher to raise money, train recruits, and plan attacks outside of the region.

In addition to these operational setbacks in Afghanistan and Pakistan, al-Qaida has not been successful in carrying out the attacks that would shake governments in the Arab world, which continues to be a primary long-term focus. It has failed to mobilize the masses—and this is a key point—which they have repeatedly said is their means of establishing Islamic emirates in the region.

Finally, there has been a decline of support for al-Qaida's political program and there are several reasons for this: indiscriminate targeting of Muslim civilians in Iraq and Pakistan alienated many who were previously sympathetic to al-Qaida's larger aspirations. The result has been both popular disaffection and a backlash from clerics in Muslim countries who have issued fatwas against the killing of other Muslims, notably in Iraq, although I note that this has yet to happen on a large scale in Afghanistan.

Second, al-Qaida's ideological hard line has alienated more pragmatic organizations and individuals in the wider militant community. It has also created confusion over who carries the true banner of Islamic resistance to Western imperialism.

Third, denunciations of al-Qaida by extremist clerics have damaged the religious legitimacy of the group and raised questions about the proper use of violence in countries where there is no overt military action.

Fourth, al-Qaida and similar groups are becoming increasingly vague about who the primary enemy is, creating confusion in the militant community about the fundamentals of its strategic direction.

Yet despite these setbacks, al-Qaida has proven to be adaptable and resilient in two arenas. The first is in ungoverned or under-governed areas, often where there are tribal conflicts in which it can attach itself to the different parties. Thus in Yemen, al-Qaida operatives are marrying into the local tribes, and taking up their grievances against the government. In the sparsely populated Sahel, al-Qaida operatives, sometimes operating with local tribesmen and nomads, kidnap foreigners. In the FATA, operatives are marrying into local Pashtun tribes and are serving the larger interests of the Taliban insurgency by providing technical know-how and disseminating propaganda. And in Somalia, al-Qaida's allies in al-Shabaab now control significant tracts of territory. These weakly-governed or entirely ungoverned areas are a major safe haven for al-Qaida and its allies and to dismiss their significance is to misunderstand their historical importance for training, recruitment, and operational planning. Quite frankly, the problem of un- and under-governed spaces is one of the toughest ones this and future administrations will face.

The second arena where Sunni radicals continue to succeed is in persuading religious extremists to adopt their cause, even in the United States. A bus driver, Najibullah Zazi, was trained in Pakistan and now faces charges in federal court for planning to set off a series of bombs in the United States. An indictment that was unsealed Monday in Chicago portrays an American citizen—David Headley—playing a pivotal role in last year's attack in Mumbai, which killed more than 170 people and dramatically raised tensions in South Asia. So even if this radical movement is not mobilizing the masses, it is still galvanizing enough people to take to violence and poses a continuing, powerful threat. The

importance of these two cases should not be glossed over—the conspiracies these men were engaged in had roots in the FATA, and eight years after 9/11, should give us all pause. The threat to the U.S. remains substantial and enduring despite the operational constraints on al-Qaida central.

It is also multifaceted as we have seen in the movement of young men, many of them motivated by a sense of ethnic duty, who have left their communities in Minnesota, been radicalized in Somalia, and fought and died for al-Shabaab.

As the example of David Headley indicates, al-Qaida is not the only group with global ambitions that we have to worry about. Lashkar e-Taiba has made it clear that it is willing to undertake bold, mass-casualty operations with a target set that would please al-Qaida planners. The group's more recent thwarted conspiracy to attack the US embassy in Bangladesh should only deepen concern that it could evolve into a genuinely global terrorist threat. And let me say as an aside, very few things worry me as much as the strength and ambition of LeT, a truly malign presence in South Asia. We are working closely with allies in the region and elsewhere to reduce the threat from this very dangerous group.

As you know, I worked on terrorism in the White House when al-Qaida first surfaced in the late 1990s and I can tell you now, after having access to the intelligence again, that the threat has become far more complicated due to the proliferation of groups and the cross-pollination of networks. The global radical milieu has become thicker. There is so much more that we have to keep tabs on than there was in 1999.

So what are we doing to meet this challenge? Faced with this continuing and evolving threat, President Obama has articulated a clear policy – to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al-Qaida and its allies. That is our overriding objective, and to achieve it we are using all the tools at our disposal. In weakly-governed areas we are collaborating with the relevant local authorities to bolster their security forces to prevent al-Qaida safe havens. Moreover, our intelligence and law enforcement agencies and those of our

allies continue to disrupt terrorist plots at home and abroad—as we have here in Denver and New York, in London, and in other countries around the world. We are working with the international financial community to deny resources to al-Qaida and its supporters. Now, as al-Qaida affiliates turn to kidnapping for ransom to raise funds, we are urging our partners around the world to adopt a no-concessions policy toward hostage-takers so we can diminish this alternative funding stream in regions like the Sahel, the FATA, and Yemen.

But this is not enough, as the continuing flow of recruits—and the lengthening roll call of conspiracies testifies. As President Obama succinctly put it, “A campaign against extremism will not succeed with bullets or bombs alone.” We need to look to what my colleague Deputy National Security John Brennan has called the upstream factors. We need to confront the political, social, and economic conditions that our enemies exploit to win over the new recruits...the funders...and those whose tacit support enables the militants to carry forward their plans.

The threat is global and our enemies latch on to grievances on behalf of the entire Muslim world, so we must work to resolve the long-standing problems that fuel those grievances. At the top of the list is the Arab-Israeli conflict, and, as you know, President Obama, Secretary Clinton, and Special Envoy George Mitchell are working very hard to resolve it.

Even with their efforts, peace in the Middle East will take time, and as we know, it will not eliminate all of the threats. But while the big policy challenges matter in radicalization, local drivers are critical as well. We are developing tailored-approaches to alter them. How do these different elements of our global counterterrorism strategy fit together?

To be sure, terrorism is a common challenge shared by nations across the globe—one that requires diplomacy—and one that the United States cannot solve alone. As Secretary Clinton has said, “Today's security threats cannot be addressed in isolation. Smart power requires reaching out to both friends and adversaries, to bolster old alliances and to forge new

ones.” The Obama administration has worked hard to reach out and, on the basis of mutual interests and mutual respect, to forge international coalitions. The administration has been working at reinvigorating alliances across the board and reengaging in the multilateral fora concerned with counterterrorism— fora that, in all honesty, were neglected for some time at the many UN entities, the G8, and the vast range of regional organizations that are eager to engage on counterterrorism issues.

Building the counterterrorism capacity of our partners at the national level is also a top priority. Consistent diplomatic engagement with counterparts and senior leaders helps build political will for common counterterrorism objectives. When the political will is there, we can address the nuts and bolts aspect of capacity building. We are working to make the counterterrorism training of police, prosecutors, border officials, and members of the judiciary more systematic, more innovative, and far-reaching, and we are doing this through such efforts as the Antiterrorism Assistance Program. In its more than 25-year old history, the ATA program has trained more than 66,000 professionals from 151 countries, providing programs tailored to the needs of each partner nation and to local conditions.

ATA is just one of many programs—on the civilian and the military sides of the house—that is increasing the ability of others to ensure their own security. With this kind of work, we are making real the President’s vision of shared security partnerships as an essential part of US foreign policy. This is both good counterterrorism and good statecraft. We are addressing the state insufficiencies that terrorism lives on, and we are helping invest our partners more effectively in confronting the threat—rather than looking thousands of miles away for help or simply looking away altogether.

We are also addressing the local drivers of radicalization that still lead large numbers of people to adopt al-Qaida’s ideology, and as I said earlier, we understand the dangers of radicalization, and we are working both to undermine the al-Qaida narrative and to ameliorate the conditions that make it attractive. We know that violent extremism flourishes where there

is marginalization, alienation, and perceived—or real—relative deprivation. In recognition of this, my first step has been to build a unit focusing on what we in the government call “Countering Violent Extremism” in my office to focus on local communities most prone to radicalization. There is a broad understanding across the government that we have not done nearly enough to address underlying conditions for at-risk populations—and we have also not done enough to improve the ability of moderates to voice their views and strengthen opposition to violence.

Adopting a tailored-approach to countering violent extremism does not mean we can neglect broader structural problems. There is no denying that when children have no hope for an education, when young people have no hope for a job and feel disconnected from the modern world, when governments fail to provide for the basic needs of their people, when people despair and are aggrieved, they become more susceptible to extremist ideologies. But a tailored-approach to CVE requires identifying which of these problems are driving radicalization and are amenable to change with the help of local governments and leaders who understand the problems best.

Over time, the measures and the methods I have described above will reduce terrorists’ capacity to harm us and our partners. No element can be neglected if we are to succeed since they reinforce one another. Global engagement builds coalitions based on mutual interests and mutual respect. And these coalitions, in turn, help us partner with individual nations to enhance their capacity to counter extremism. This, finally, enables us to work with them to develop tailored-approaches to preventing extremists from becoming violent extremists.

I don’t want to leave you today with the impression that we have figured it all or that there won’t be real setbacks in the future. The contemporary terrorist threat was decades in the making and it will take many more years to unmake it. There is much we still need to learn, especially about how to prevent individuals from choosing the path of violence. But I believe we now have the right framework for our policies, and ultimately, I am

confident, this will lead to the decisions and actions that will strengthen security for our nation and the global community.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak here today.