AMBASSADOR DANIEL BENJAMIN
Coordinator for Counterterrorism

GLOBAL COUNTERTERRORISM: A PROGRESS REPORT
(As Prepared)

Brookings Institution
Falk Auditorium
1775 Massachusetts Avenue
Washington, DC

Tuesday, December 18, 2012
10:30 am

It is wonderful to be back at Brookings and in the Falk Auditorium – and to see so many old friends. I particularly want to thank Dan Byman for inviting me and Bruce Riedel for joining as a discussant. As many of you know, Brookings was my home before I entered the Obama Administration, and looking back, I am deeply grateful that I had the chance to think through many of the policy issues that I would confront before reentering government and to have a chance to try out some thoughts on outstanding scholars and practitioners such as Dan and Bruce. Indeed, it was in this room that I spoke a little more than four years ago on a paper entitled "Strategic Counterterrorism." I know I speak for many of my colleagues in government when I say that Brookings is a national treasure, and deserves our gratitude for incubating so many of the smarter things our government has done.

As we move from the first of President Obama's terms to his second, it a fitting time to take stock of our fight against terrorism and violent extremism. Of course, to do so, we need to remember how things stood when the President took office almost four years ago.

At that time, the al-Qa'ida (AQ) core was a formidable and dangerous organization, deeply dug in to the Federally Administered Tribal Areas and capable of committing a catastrophic attack.

Yemen, a country where we had largely been disengaged from for several years, had become a worrisome hotbed of terrorist activity. Al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) established itself as the first AQ affiliate with the determination and capability of striking the United States, as we saw clearly with the December 25, 2009 attempt to destroy an airliner bound for Detroit. The following year,

AQAP tried again with a plot to destroy several U.S.-bound airplanes with bombs timed to detonate in the cargo holds.

In Somalia, al-Shabaab controlled all but a few blocks of Mogadishu and much of South and Central Somalia.

Against this backdrop, we began our tenure with some thoughts about what we needed to do to be more effective. In general, we believed, we had to be more comprehensive, more genuinely strategic in our approach. We had to invigorate our diplomacy to strengthen the foreign partnerships that are vital to our success. We knew, moreover, that while the military, intelligence community, and law enforcement agencies were firing all cylinders, civilian agencies – here in the U.S. but also in governments around the world -- were not yet sufficiently engaged. And we recognized that kinetic action was not enough to reduce the threat as much as we wanted to.

With that in mind, we put a high priority on two key areas: capacity building, so countries around the world could do a better job dealing with the threats within their borders and regions; and, recognizing that we had to address what Deputy National Security Advisor John Brennan labeled the "upstream factors" of radicalization, we resolved to strengthen our work on countering violent extremism – or CVE – so we could blunt the attraction of violence and reduce the number of recruits to our enemies' cause.

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Today, four years later, things look different, both on the ground and, as I'll discuss a bit later, in what the US is doing – especially on the civilian side of the house.

In South Asia, AQ's core has been seriously degraded. Without a doubt, Usama bin Ladin's departure from the scene was the most important milestone in the fight against al-Qaida. The removal of AQ's founder and sole commander for 22 years was a testament to the work of countless intelligence and counterterrorism professionals across the government. That operation further demonstrated as never before the extraordinary proficiency our military and intelligence communities have achieved in the realm of counterterrorism. And, of course, it was not just bin Ladin. We have removed more than 20 of AQ's top 30 leaders. Now, the core finds it difficult to raise money, train recruits, and plan attacks outside of the region.

In Yemen, the fight against al Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula is a work in progress, but the trend lines are positive. In particular, the resolve of President

Hadi and the Yemeni people has made a major difference: after holding a considerable swath of territory, AQAP has been rolled back from the gains of last year. Yemen illustrates the value of a truly comprehensive approach: So while we are training Yemeni security forces to combat terror, we are also addressing the needs of the Yemeni people by assisting the political transition and delivering humanitarian and economic aid. We're working with the international community to redouble its support for Yemen. We do this not only because is right to help a country Yemen's challenges, but also because this work addresses human needs that, unmet, can accelerate radicalization and because our partners should know that we are in it for more than our security.

In Somalia, after more than two decades of strife, this autumn marked the end of Somalia's political transition – with a new provisional constitution, parliament, and president. These are the hopeful signs of a new era in Somalia. That long-suffering country could reach this point because Somali National Forces and the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), with strong financial support and training from the U.S. and Western partners, expelled al-Shabaab from major cities in southern Somalia. While the group will undoubtedly try to carry out attacks against the new government and against neighboring countries, al-Shabaab is fragmented by dissension and much weakened.

That's good news, we can all agree: In short, the al-Qa'ida core is on the path to defeat. The two most dangerous affiliates, while still posing serious threats, have suffered their worst setbacks in years. If we only had a static set of challenges, we'd all be feeling great. But, as everyone here knows, the tumultuous events of the last couple of years in the Middle East and North Africa have added complications to this picture.

In Mali, the terrorists of al Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) are attempting to consolidate their safe haven. The return of exiled fighters from the ranks of Qadhafi's army to northern Mali and the subsequent Tuareg rebellion, dispersed weapons from Libyan stocks, and the coup in the Bamako, have brought a dangerous instability to the Sahel.

In Libya, the aftermath of the revolution has provided more opportunities for extremist groups to operate – as we saw so tragically in the deaths of Ambassador Chris Stevens and three others in Benghazi on September 11. Weakened domestic security institutions and especially civil strife, we know from hard experience, create exactly the kind of environment that terrorists are drawn to. Libya has provided one such case where extremists can cause real problems for states undergoing difficult transitions to democracy.

We see another example in Syria. There, al-Qa'ida in Iraq (AQI) seeks to establish a long-term presence under the pseudonym of al-Nusrah Front. By fighting alongside armed Syrian opposition groups, al-Nusrah members are working to hijack a long-repressed nation's struggle to suit their own extremist ends. Last week, we designated al-Nusrah Front as an alias of AQI, which is already a listed Foreign Terrorist Organization. As they try to wrap themselves in the legitimacy of the opposition, we have called the terrorists out – as a warning to all who wish to support the legitimate opposition of the Syrian people and *not* help a terrorist group put down roots in the Levant.

To add to this list of new challenges, in West Africa, the loosely-organized collection of factions known as Boko Haram – who have some ties to AQIM – continue to carry out attacks in Nigeria, exploiting the historical grievances of northern Nigerians to win recruits and public sympathy. The number and sophistication of Boko Haram's attacks is increasing, and while the group focuses principally on local Nigerian issues and actors, there are reports that it is developing financial and training links with other extremists and wants to operate on a bigger stage.

At this point, I need to make something of detour. Because while non-state actors such as al-Qaida remain at the top of our priority list, we have witnessed a resurgence of state sponsorship of terrorism, especially in the dangerous and destabilizing activities of the Iranian regime, through the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corp's Qods Force (IRGC-QF), and Tehran's ally Hizballah.

In addition to the critical support the Qods Force and Hizballah are providing for Syria's Asad regime, over the past year, there has been a significant escalation in Iranian-backed terrorism. In fact, Hizballah's terrorist activity has reached a tempo unseen since the 1990s with attacks plotted in Southeast Asia, Europe, and Africa and, it appears, the group has carried out an attack in Bulgaria, as we saw with the airport bombing in July. The Qods Force has also sought to attack in Georgia, India, Thailand, and most brazenly, here in Washington, DC.

Taking steps to crack down on all of these activities has been a top priority, and we have launched a whole-of-government approach to counter Hizballah and IRGC activities, including increased law enforcement, intelligence, and diplomatic initiatives. We are targeting Hizballah's finances, including through the seizure of 150 million dollars from the Lebanese Canadian Bank, which had facilitated a vast narcotics and money-laundering scheme. We are urging countries to take a wide range of steps to crack down on Hizballah and the Qods Force, including through sanctions, increased law enforcement/intelligence focus and through strong public messaging. We've been engaging with our partners in Europe, and we are

cautiously optimistic about the prospects for an EU designation of the group. We've been regularly working with our partners in other regions and countries where Hizballah has a significant presence and infrastructure, including in Southeast Asia, South America, and West Africa. We're pleased with the progress we're making and will continue to take action so Hizballah recognizes that its behavior is unacceptable and it can no longer operate with impunity, both at home and abroad.

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So, as we've seen, the world of counterterrorism is changing fast. Some of the most dangerous threats have receded noticeably, but new ones are emerging. While perhaps not as threatening now, these cannot be viewed with complacency. The political transformations in the Middle East and North Africa are having a profound effect on our foreign policy, including our counterterrorism equities. AQ, it's important to underscore, was not a part of the popular uprisings that led to democratic transitions across the Middle East and North Africa, but violent extremists across the region are looking for opportunities to exploit the political transitions underway.

We never expected this to be a painless process – revolutionary transformations are by their nature dislocating and unpredictable. There are risks, particularly in the short run and we must seek to reduce them even as we work to help these states in transition find long-term success. So, we need continued engagement and we need strategic patience. We need to work towards our long-term objectives despite the surprises and setbacks that we encounter. We greeted the revolutionary events of the last two years with the belief that the turn to democracy and accountable governance would ultimately deflate extremism and marginalize its advocates, and I strongly believe that logic remains valid. We are still in early days and we need to see these transformations through.

Diplomatic engagement right now is essential. We have been clear in our dealings with the new governments that violent extremists pose at least as great – and probably a greater – threat to them and their peoples' aspirations as they do to the United States and to Western interests. Preoccupied by the difficult economic developments and political and constitutional reforms, and hobbled by weakened security institutions, some of these governments were slow to recognize the challenge.

The attack on our facilities in Benghazi and extremist violence elsewhere in the region began to change that, and these governments increasingly show the political will to tackle the terrorist threat. In many cases, though, they lack the resources

and expertise to handle this complex and difficult challenge. This is a unique opportunity for the international community to help build the capacity of these nations that are eager and willing to take on terrorism. This task comes with great urgency. We must address it now before the threat – which is proving durable – becomes more serious.

Some of these new governments have doubts about U.S. counterterrorism objectives. Some seek to implicate us in repressive acts carried out by former regime security services. We will have to work through these ideas, and in fact, we can agree with these new governments that a rerun of their predecessors' regimes is not what we seek, nor what is needed. On the contrary: though there are numerous factors that feed into the phenomenon of radicalization, repressive measures by security services were surely among the most potent. The goal of our counterterrorism assistance is and must be to help countries move away from repressive approaches toward developing true rule-of-law frameworks.

Let's be clear: the better our partners are at using their criminal justice agencies to prosecute, adjudicate and incarcerate terrorists, the less they will resort to extra-legal methods to crack down on a domestic threat. Moreover, our security benefits when countries deal with threats within their own borders – so that those threats don't balloon and demand that we act, and so we don't need to take the kind of dramatic steps that inevitably cause a backlash and radicalization. That is why we're working closely with our interagency partners –the Departments of Justice, Homeland Security, and Defense – to help foreign partners develop their law enforcement and justice sector institutions and to secure their borders.

Our Anti-Terrorism Assistance (ATA) program is the U.S. government's premier counterterrorism capacity-building program for criminal justice agencies of partner nations. From bomb detection and crime scene investigation to border, aviation, and cyber security, ATA builds capacity in a wide spectrum of counterterrorism skills, offering courses, seminars, and consultations. In just the last fiscal year, ATA that trained more than 9,800 participants from more than 50 partner nations.

This is indeed a whole of government effort. Working with the Department of Justice, our bureau at the State Department deploys Resident Legal Advisors to U.S. Embassies to develop host country government and law enforcement sector capacity, specifically to deal with terrorism. The RLAs, as we call them, will also provide the more basic mentoring and skills development to bring prosecutors and law enforcement agencies to a point where they can pursue more complex types of cases, including those involving terrorist crimes. We have these advisers in a growing number of countries.

These are just two of our capacity building efforts, but there are others. For example, in the Sahel and Maghreb, the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP) has helped build the capacity of 10 countries across the region with training and support so they can tighten border security, disrupt terrorist networks, and prevent attacks. The program brings together civilian, criminal justice, and military experts to pursue a comprehensive approach to counterterrorism.

Capacity building, as we all know, has come in for criticism at times, but when a country has political resolve, it can make extraordinary strides with assistance from others. Let me cite one example. In Indonesia, perhaps my favorite example, the government dedicated itself to creating the civilian legal structures and law enforcement institutions to fight terrorism effectively, comprehensively, and within the rule of law. Indonesia has scored more than 160 convictions in terrorist cases, and the National Police has had major successes in breaking up terrorist cells linked to Jemaah Islamiya and other violent extremist organizations. Capacity building can work – and we must continue to innovate to improve our efficacy.

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I said at the outset that at the beginning of the administration, we were determined to do a better job at countering violent extremism. So let me tell you about our efforts to delegitimize the terrorist narrative. Under Secretary Clinton's leadership, we established the Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications (CSCC). The CSCC, which is housed at the State Department, is a true interagency endeavor, with a mandate from President Obama in the form of an executive order.

The CSCC does many things, including working with our embassies on a range of activities to undermine extremist discourse. Its Digital Outreach Team pushes back openly against AQ propaganda online in Arabic, Urdu, and Somali. In one effort, it conducted an extended campaign, much of it focused on Yemeni tribal websites, to counter messages from AQAP in 2012. This campaign, which included nearly 1,000 online engagements together with banners and videos that mimicked AQ's own messaging style with our CVE messages, clearly rattled the extremists, which saw how Yemenis picked up on our messaging. The extremists, through one of their online front groups, expressed concern about what it called the new U.S. policy of "intellectual and ideological challenge to the mujahidin in the general and jihadist forums and the social media websites."

These were not the only AQ supporters to take note of CSCC. Earlier in the year, in April, the Global Islamic Media Front, a group well-known to all scholars on the subject, warned participants on pro-AQ forums to be careful in their discussions of

Somalia to avoid playing into the hands of CSCC's Digital Outreach Team. More recently, in October, a prominent pro-AQ forum hosted an extended discussion of the threat they see emanating from the CSCC's efforts. While it is still early to evaluate the effectiveness of these efforts, we can say that they have made the enemy sit up and take notice of a simple fact: AQ propagandists can no longer spread their poison uncontested in virtual safe havens.

In our CVE efforts, another area we've also focused on is identifying and addressing key nodes of potential radicalization. One priority area for us has been prisons. First, many incarcerated terrorists will eventually be released, and we need to take steps to decrease the likelihood that they will return to violence when they're back on the streets. Second, prison is a time when individuals are cut off from their previous extremist contacts, making them potentially open to positive change. Third, there are real concerns about potential radicalization in the prison setting; effective prison management and good correctional practices can help reduce these risks.

To deal with this challenge, we've worked with the UN's Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI) and a Dutch NGO, the International Center for Counterterrorism (ICCT) to develop an international initiative on prison rehabilitation and disengagement. More than 35 countries, many multilateral organizations, and leading independent experts have participated in this initiative, which is providing policymakers, practitioners, and experts a chance to compare notes and best practices in this critically important area. UNICRI and other implementers are using a set of best practices to shape the technical assistance they're offering to interested governments. We believe that we've made an enormous amount of progress in tackling this vital CVE issue over the past several years, but there's still much that can and should be done in this area.

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As I hope I've made clear, there is a critical role for diplomacy in the broader counterterrorism effort. Whether it is creating new partnerships with transition countries in the Maghreb, strengthening older ties with traditional allies, expanding capacity building efforts or countering violent extremism in the many different contexts in which it flourishes, the State Department has a central role to play. This recognition led Secretary Clinton last year to transform the 30-plus year old Office of the Coordinator of Counterterrorism into a full-fledged bureau, thus fulfilling a key recommendation of the Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review.

Creating a bureau has given our efforts a real boost, but it is only a start. If there is one thing we have learned, it's that if our approach is to gain traction – and truly be sustainable – we cannot do it alone. Instead we need a broad coalition of foreign partners to press a common agenda, especially on capacity building and countering violent extremism.

So last year, we launched a major initiative and established the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF), thereby advancing the President's goal of building an international architecture for dealing with 21st century threats. The GCTF – 29 member-states and the European Union – brings together traditional Western donors, Muslim-majority nations, and major powers from around the globe. It offers counterterrorism policy makers and experts something unique: a dedicated platform to identify urgent needs and strengthen programming around the world.

Indeed, the group has already developed best practice documents in the areas of rule of law, combating kidnapping for ransom – now the preeminent means of funding terrorist groups -- and prison de-radicalization and disengagement.

With its core goals of strengthening civilian institutions and countering violent extremism, the Forum is ideally suited to play a central role in our collective response to these challenges in the Sahel, Horn of Africa, and in Southeast Asia – the Forum's three regions of focus.

Just last week, at the GCTF Ministerial in Abu Dhabi, we marked the opening of the first ever Center of Excellence for Countering Violent Extremism. The Center, based in the UAE capital, will serve police and educators, religious and community leaders, policymakers, and NGOs. It aims to give them the necessary training and practical tools to design and implement effective measures to defeat extremist ideology and blunting the spread of radicalization.

At last week's GCTF meeting, we heard from a range of members about the variety of ways they continue to contribute to the Forum's success. This includes mobilizing more than 150 million dollars in programming to help strengthen rule of law institutions. The GCTF is also supporting the creation of another international center that will form a kind of twin with the CVE center -- an International Institute for Justice and the Rule of Law, which we expect will open its doors in Tunis, the heart of the Arab Awakening, by the end of 2013.

The Institute will provide foundational and advanced training for police, prosecutors, judges, prison officials, and parliamentarians to help countries transitioning to democracy. More broadly, we believe the Institute can play an

important role, not just in ensuring that national criminal justice officials have the necessary counterterrorism training and skills, but in contributing to wider rule of law institutional development and reform efforts in the region. Its mission should not only be to provide training, but to educate a new generation of criminal justice officials so that the training and tools are used and the reforms stick.

The GCTF is making a real difference, but we're only scratching the surface in terms of its potential. At least now, though, we can look forward to the day when countries around the globe have more of a common understanding on the nature of the terrorist threat and a common playbook for tackling it. That's because if we keep this effort going, our practitioners and policymakers will have shared their expertise, trained, and networked together through the centers of excellence, through the Forum's working groups, and other GCTF-sponsored activities.

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Let me conclude with a few observations: First, there are clear indications that the al-Qa'ida message continues to wane in popularity. We see this, for example, in the election of moderates in Libya in July and the protest by Libyan citizens against militia dominance and extremism after the attack on our facilities in Benghazi. The violence and chaos on offer from the extremists does not resonate with the majority of people. We see similar signs elsewhere.

That is not a reason to relax. We know that in terrorism, small numbers can have outsize and even enormous impacts, and that with strong leadership or an influx of funding, groups can revive, expand and cause great damage. This is a moment for leaning into the problem of violent extremism, for continuing to degrade terrorist groups and to shape the environment they operate in to our and our partners' advantage.

Make no mistake: The United States will continue to use all the tools at its disposal to protect itself from terrorism. But as we go forward – capacity building, countering violent extremism, counterterrorism diplomacy – these are the growth areas of the future. Propagating what we and others have learned throughout the international community and establishing a durable coalition of like-minded partners is vital.

We've spent the last few years, with both our domestic and foreign partners, cutting a path forward along these lines, and I think we have a lot to show for our efforts. To achieve the success we need, and the security we want for the American people and the global community, we will need to push farther ahead, expand our efforts and yes, devote more resources and attention. As I prepare to

leave office, I’m convinced we can do this and make a real difference for our common future.

Thank you very much, and I look forward to your questions.