DEPUTY SECRETARY BLINKEN
TESTIMONY ON COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM
SENATE APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE ON STATE, FOREIGN OPERATIONS, AND RELATED PROGRAMS
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Chairman Graham, Ranking Member Leahy, Senators – thank you for having me here today. I want to focus my remarks on our efforts to counter violent extremism, but I would welcome any questions you may have on the administration's response to the global refugee crisis

I traveled to Paris a little over a year ago, shortly after the Charlie Hebdo attacks opened a raw wound in the city. Our Ambassador, Jane Hartley, convened leaders from faith communities across the city: Muslim, Jewish, Christian – as well as activists who were working to bring the people of these faiths closer together.

One of those activists was a woman named Latifa Ibn Ziaten, a French-Moroccan Muslim woman, the mother of five, including a son named Imad.

Imad was a member of the first paratroop regiment of the French Army, stationed near Toulouse in 2012, when he was murdered alongside three brothers-in-arms, three children, and a rabbi by a radicalized 23 year old from Izards, France.

Soon afterwards, Latifa traveled to Izards. She talked to those who knew her son's murderer – first as the sweet, shy boy who liked football, but also later as someone who had racked up 15 charges for petty crimes and spent a year in jail for assault, where he would become radicalized.

When Latifa returned home, she started the Imad Ibn Ziaten Youth Association for Peace, working in France's at-risk communities to promote interfaith dialogue and help families steer their children away from radicalization to violence—the path that had resulted in her son's horrific death.

While Latifa's story shows our capacity to find love and understanding even in the midst of great tragedy, the memory of her son's death reminds us of the complexity and opacity of the origins of terrorism in the modern world—and only hardens our resolve to defeat it.

The United States has mobilized countries around the world to disrupt and defeat terrorist groups and individuals who threaten our common security – starting with

Daesh and al-Qaeda and including Boko Haram, al Shabaab, AQAP and others. Our comprehensive strategy is making significant progress

The most visible part of this effort is the battlefield and our increasingly successful effort to destroy Daesh at its core in Iraq and Syria. Working by, with, and through local partners, we have taken back 40 percent of the territory Daesh controlled a year ago in Iraq and 10 percent in Syria—killing senior leaders, destroying thousands of pieces of equipment, all the while applying simultaneous pressure against key chock points and isolating its bases in Mosul and Raqqa. In fact, we assess Daesh's numbers are the lowest they've been since we began monitoring their manpower in 2014.

Our comprehensive strategy includes training, equipping, and advising our local partners; stabilizing and rebuilding liberated areas; stopping the flow of foreign fighters into and out of Iraq and Syria; cutting off Daesh's financing and countering its propaganda; providing life-saving humanitarians assistance; and promoting political accommodations so that our military success is sustainable.

These hard-fought victories undermine more than Daesh's fighting force. They erode the narrative it has built of its own success—the perception of which remains one of Daesh's most effective recruiting tools. For the danger from violent extremism has slipped past war's frontlines and into the computers and onto the phones of people in every corner of the world. Destined to outlive Daesh, this pernicious threat is transforming our security landscape, as individuals are inspired to violent acts from Paris to San Bernardino to Jakarta.

So even as we advance our efforts to defeat Daesh on the frontlines, we know that to be fully effective, we must work to prevent the spread of violent extremism in the first place – to stop the recruitment, radicalization and mobilization of people, especially young people, to engage in terrorist activities.

That effort begins by better understanding the drivers to radicalization – what makes a person or even a community susceptible to violent extremism? There is much we still need to study and learn. But we already know some challenging truths. There is no single type of violent extremist; no single method of recruitment; no single source of motivation or support. There is no single story, no easy synonym for one region, religious tradition, or culture. Some violent extremists are more focused on what they are running to; others more driven by what they are running from. Some become disillusioned. Others become very, very dangerous.

Some believe that they are pious. Others do not. Some lack critical thinking skills and education, while others have advanced degrees and knowledge. Some are beyond reach. Others will still listen.

In short, the nature and range of possible drivers can vary greatly – from individual psychological problems to community, sectarian and religious divisions.

That said, some repeat factors stand out that elevate the risk:

First, state sponsored violence and abuse correlates with the emergence of violent extremist groups. The more repressive a state, the higher the risk factor.

Second, personal experience with petty state corruption – like having to pay bribes for services – is a frequent denominator.

Third, an individual's perception of discrimination against his or her ethnic, sectarian or religious group – broadly, a sense of injustice and a challenge to the individual's identity – raises the risk.

Fourth, inter- and intra-state conflicts are incubators for violent extremist activity.

Fifth and most broadly, marginalization – whether personal, social, political or economic -- correlates closely with extremism – pushing individuals to rebellion, to crime, to jail, to susceptibility and finally, in a small number of cases, to violent extremism. It's worth adding here that the relationship between economic status and violent extremism is complicated – we have plenty of examples of individuals who are not poor, or unemployed. But a perceived lack of opportunity and living in a marginalized community with high unemployment and low levels of educations does correlate.

Much has been written and said about religion as a radicalizer. In fact, those responsible for the attacks in France and Belgium seem to have been radical before they were religious. Their common denominator is a life of crime and stints in jail, not a background in fundamentalism. It appears they were radicalized in jail or in their neighborhoods around what one of France's leading terrorism experts called "a fantasy of heroism, violence, and death – not Sharia or some utopia." In that sense, as Fareed Zakaria has put it, for some Daesh is the ultimate gang, with violence for its own sake.

So what is to be done? Since President Obama hosted the White House Summit on Countering Violent Extremism over one year ago here in Washington, a diverse movement has grown of country leaders, company CEOs, municipal officials, young people, clerics and parents united by a common commitment to fight the ideologies of hate, to defeat agents of terror, to destroy networks of financiers, propagandists, and recruiters, to make marginal communities more resilient – in short, to strengthen our own ability not only to counter—but to *prevent*—radicalization in the first place.

The Department of State is playing a lead role in this growing international CVE movement through our diplomatic engagement and foreign assistance. We have notified Congress of our intent to empower a retooled Bureau of Counterterrorism and Countering Violent Extremism to lead this effort for the Department. The Bureau will be responsible for promoting a more strategic approach to CVE, alongside ongoing counterterrorism partnerships and engagement.

The President's FY2017 budget request seeks to build upon and expand our current CVE efforts, and includes $186.7 million towards CVE. That includes $59 million for CVE, which is a portion of the overall request for the Counter-Terrorism Partnership Fund (CTPF). The request also includes $21.5 million for the Global Engagement Center. Additionally, the Undersecretary of State for Public Diplomacy has set aside funds for innovative counter-messaging efforts and programs to make communities more resilient against extremism. We believe the resources we have requested for our CVE efforts across the board would provide us with the ability to expand partnerships with national and local governments, civil society, community leaders, and the private sector in key countries to address the drivers of violent extremism.

To carry out this vision of a more comprehensive approach, we have developed the first-ever joint USAID and State Department strategy on preventing and countering violent extremism, governed by five core priorities.

First, we will engage and amplify locally credible voices that can expose the true nature of violent extremism, its savagery, and its denial of human dignity.

Through the recently announced Global Engagement Center, we're empowering independent, positive voices to confront terrorist messages wherever they arise.

In Nigeria, where Boko Haram continues its indiscriminate killing in mosques and markets, we support Arewa24, the multimedia platform that catalyzes the capacity

and energy of young Nigerians to create, develop, and produce positive narratives about their lives and culture and to counter intolerance and political violence. Arewa24 shares their stories and innovative solutions with Hausa-speakers in Nigeria, across West Africa, and around the world.

We are beginning to see the space for extremist propaganda begin to shrink. Citizens around the world are notifying platforms of suspect content, and companies are moving faster to remove them. Twitter recently suspended 125,000 accounts for threatening or promoting terrorist acts, and Facebook deletes thousands of postings by terrorists or advocates of violent extremism every day.

Daesh posts are no longer as prominent on the most visited social media sites as they were a year ago. Now many sites are overwhelmingly populated by anti-Daesh messages, and it is beginning to have an impact—measured not only in tweets and followers, but also the growing networks of researchers, young people, and civic leaders inspired now to take positive action.

Second, we are looking to increase support for innovative regional, country-based, and thematic research on the drivers of violent extremism and on effective responses.

For example, we are supporting the Researching Solutions to Violent Extremism (RESOLVE) Network, which connects academics and researchers to study the dynamics of CVE in specific, local contexts and identify effective CVE interventions. The phenomenon of violent extremism is, of course, not new, but its manifestations in this century are—its tactics, its tools, its reach, especially, of course, through the internet and social media.

Third, we are working closely with our partners—at the national and local level—in Europe and around the world to actually adopt more effective policies to prevent the spread of violent extremism.

Through the Strong Cities Network, we are connecting local officials to share their experiences and, importantly, their best practices.

For instance, we can learn from cities like Dakar, Senegal, where a collaboration of 19 district mayors supports roughly 500 youth volunteers to help identify and address local concerns in partnership with police.

Fourth, we are strengthening diplomatic efforts and local partnerships to address the distinct underlying political, social, and economic factors that put countries and communities at high risk and make young men and women susceptible to the siren call of extreme ideologies.

In many environments where the risk of violent extremism is high, development has failed to take root, human rights violations are common, governance is weak and not inclusive of vulnerable populations, access to education limited, and corruption is high.

Together with State, USAID is bringing its development expertise to bear in precisely these environments—harnessing the full range of analytic tools to design, support, and measure programs and policies that reduce the vulnerabilities of local communities.

In Gao, Mali, where the rate of recruitment was particularly high during occupation by violent extremists in 2012, USAID piloted a program to reduce the isolation and marginalization of target communities. After fostering trust by responding to basic needs, the program quickly pivoted to activities that built ties between communities through things like soccer tournaments, dialogues, youth conferences. A social network analysis conducted during the program found that community integration had already increased by 11 percent and led, in particular, to more tolerant views on the rights and role of women in society.

Fifth, and finally, we will strengthen the capabilities of our partners to prevent radicalization to violence, particularly in prisons, and help ensure that former fighters are rehabilitated and reintegrated back into society whenever possible.

Imad Bin Ziaden's killer was not the only extremist to have found an ideology of nihilism and hatred inside prison walls. Two of the three perpetrators of the Charlie Hebdo attacks were likely radicalized in prison. The same is true of the terrorist who shot and killed four people at the Jewish Museum in Brussels in 2014 and of the gunman responsible for the attack in Copenhagen in 2015. And as we continue to learn more about those responsible for the Brussels attack, we've found a list of petty crimes and time spent in jail.

As a result, our partners around the world are increasingly embracing innovative ideas to mitigate prison radicalization. In one frontline state, we're working with a local NGO that provides pro bono legal assistance and vocational training to inmates, including juveniles, who have been detained for low-level, non-violent

offenses. By facilitating the release and reintegration of these prisoners, we help remove them from a setting where they are vulnerable to the recruitment efforts of violent extremists.

But prisons can also be effective environments to target rehabilitation and reintegration programs, in part because prison is a time when individuals can be cut off from negative influences and contacts of the past. Today, we are working with experts around the world to develop tools to assess the attitudes of prisoners to terrorism over a period of time to help both separate terrorist recruiters and ideologues from vulnerable inmates and identify good candidates for rehabilitation and reintegration.

Ultimately, at the heart of our strategy—at the center of each of these five pillars—is a commitment to the principles that have underwritten an unprecedented era of greater peace and prosperity over the last seven decades. Principles of good governance and pluralism. Of the rule of law and fundamental freedoms. Of human rights and human dignity.

And that extends to those we have seen flee the terror of violence around the world. When it comes to resettlement, our first priority has been and will continue to be safeguarding the American people. At the same time, we must continue to uphold our fundamental commitment to provide refuge to the vulnerable, which has been the bedrock of our country for centuries. Over the last several months, we have seen hateful rhetoric in all corners of the world, including the United States, conflating refugees with violent extremists and demonizing those fleeing persecution, violence, and terrorism. We reject any form of intolerance, ignorance, and prejudice, especially when directed against those in greatest need. Our ultimate success in the fight against violent extremism will be determined by our ability to hold fast to the very values terrorists oppose—our capacity for reason, wisdom, and compassion.

I went back to Paris a month ago to sit back down with that interfaith group to discuss what had changed in the year since we first spoke, a year that brought more tragedy to Paris. Latifa was not able to attend – she was actually in Washington where Secretary Kerry announced her as one of the 2016 International Women of Courage Award winners.

We must continue to invest in Latifa’s world where the vast majority of people recoil at the actions of terrorists and reject the ideology of violent extremists with every fiber in their being. People like Latifa, who have not given in to the

bitterness of loss, are critical to preventing more grieving communities and to bringing peace to homes, schools, prisons, and places of worship.

So, on behalf of Secretary Kerry, let me say in conclusion how we're grateful for the support and engagement of our Congressional leaders, including many of you in this room, have lent to this work through foreign assistance appropriations to carry out this very important work. It is not hard to see that—in their very acts of terror—violent extremists are precipitating exactly what they hope to destroy: a world more closely bound together in defense of dignity, justice, and peace.

Thank you very much.