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Violent Islamist Extremism: Government Efforts to Defeat It

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I want to thank you, Mr. Chairman, and the Committee for inviting me today to testify on U.S. Agency for International Development programs to counter violent Islamist extremism and our efforts to coordinate our public diplomacy activities with the Department of State.

The National Security Strategy of the United States (2006 edition) provides the foreign policy and national security strategy of the United States. It is especially succinct with regard to the measures needed to meet this nation's national security challenges in the age of global terrorism. The President has reiterated that our national security strategy is founded upon two pillars: "The first pillar is promoting freedom, justice and human dignity - working to end tyranny, to promote effective democracies and to extend prosperity through free and fair trade and wise development policies... . The second pillaris confronting the challenges of our time by leading a growing community of democracies..." in the fight against pandemic diseases, terrorism, human trafficking and natural disasters around the world.

The President's National Security Strategy is emphatic in calling for a more robust role for development in our national security architecture. Development "reinforces diplomacy and defense." It reduces "the long-term threats to our national security by helping to build stable, prosperous, and peaceful societies." It is essential to bring hope and opportunity to societies subject to terrorist subversion and vulnerable to terrorist messaging. By helping "expand the circle of development" and "building the infrastructure of democracy" in these societies, we work to reduce the areas in which terrorists thrive as we marginalize their operations.

To support the strategic policy positions set forth by President Bush in both the 2002 and 2006 National Security Strategies, the Department of State and U.S. Agency for International Development have collaborated on publication of two Joint Strategic Plans (2004 and 2007 editions) which set forth the Secretary of State's direction and policy priorities for both organizations in the coming years. And to better align foreign assistance with the national security objectives of the United States, Secretary Rice has initiated the most sweeping reform of foreign assistance since the origins of USAID and the Marshall Plan. Over the last year, she has helped put in place a new framework or structure for foreign assistance and given it strategic direction under her Transformational Diplomacy agenda.

In line with these reforms, public diplomacy is undergoing equally dramatic changes designed to reverse the retrenchment in our public outreach efforts that followed victory in the Cold War

A DIPLOMACY OF DEEDS

Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs Karen Hughes has been tasked by President Bush with leading efforts to promote America's values and confront ideological support for terrorism around the world.

Our experience shows that when people around the world know that America is partnering with them, partnering with their governments, partnering with groups in their communities to improve their lives, it makes a real difference in how they think about us. I am going to be calling on our ambassadors and our public diplomacy professionals in the field to find opportunities to work with other agencies, to work with USAID, ... to highlight the work that America is doing in ways that are relevant to people's lives, to show that we're helping provide clean water or food for their

families or to educate young people.

For the moment, I would like to draw attention to a phrase she coined as part of her communications strategy. She spoke of a "diplomacy of deeds" as among the most effective means of defusing hostile propaganda purveyed by extremist enemies of the United States and of showcasing the best of America's spirit and values.

As the principal Agency of the United States Government delivering development assistance and humanitarian aid around the world, USAID's "deeds" - day in and day out in over 80 Missions around the world - play a critical role in the diplomacy that Secretary Hughes is talking about. In working to stabilize fragile societies, mired in poverty and menaced by conflict and disease, it also plays a critical role in advancing the national security of this country. For it is mostly from such countries that the terrorist threat arises, searches for opportunities and finds support.

USAID has missions in 27 of the 49 countries that have more than 50 percent Muslim population. Significantly, approximately 50 percent of USAID funding goes to predominantly Muslim countries. This Agency has extended a lifeline to countries in the Muslim world that have been devastated by natural disasters, unprecedented droughts, tsunamis, and earthquakes.

Development funds are allocated to a wide range of programs, including health, education, and job creation.

I would like to mention one of these job creating efforts to remind us of the human dimension behind the budget numbers and bureaucratic language that broadly describes our foreign assistance programming.

Thanks to a small loan made available by USAID, Ghada Gharib of Egypt now sells beaded jewelry in a local Cairo market. She borrowed \$34 through the U.S.-funded loan program and now has a small table set up in the market to display the many beaded necklaces and other items she has made. She makes payments of only 20 pounds a week -- \$3.40 - as she pays off her fourth loan.

"The money came from America. I benefit because I can make a profit. I used the loan to buy materials I use in my embroidery. My mother also took a loan that she used for beadwork and sewing; my sister too." She now has two paid helpers and is using some of her profits to send her daughter to school - the cost is 200 pounds a year.

ENGAGING HUMAN RESOURCES

It may come as somewhat of a surprise to learn that most of the employees at USAID are not American citizens. Over 5,000 of our employees are what are termed Foreign Service Nationals, that is, citizens of the country where USAID has a presence. They are the backbone of our missions in Muslim countries and are regarded among its richest resources. And they often work in some of the most dangerous and forbidding regions of the world. Last year, the Agency lost two of these heroes. One was assassinated because he worked for our Baghdad mission. The other, Dr. Bijnan Acharya, worked with USAID/Nepal for more than a decade as an Environmental Officer and died when the helicopter he was traveling in crashed in the Himalayas.

These individuals often bring language skills U.S. officers sorely lack and serve as a link with the broader spectrum of these societies that we are now trying to reach. Our programming initiatives in country are indebted to the cultural sensitivity and political acumen that they bring to the table.

Many Foreign Service Nationals, or FSNs, go on to serve their countries in important government posts following service to USAID.

Ana Vilma de Escobar worked at USAID for nine years in the 1980s before she was elected vice president of El Salvador in 2004, the first woman to hold that office. While at USAID, she managed a \$50 million project that promoted non-traditional exports, encouraged foreign investment and supported the development of small- and medium-sized businesses as a tool for economic growth. She also played a critical role in USAID's support for the Salvadoran Foundation for Economic and Social Development, a think tank whose policy recommendations helped two successive governments design the country's successful economic reform program.

Dr. Mohammed Mubaid is another example of how former USAID FSN's can achieve positive accomplishments within a society which also happen to support U.S. foreign policy and public diplomacy interests. Dr. Mubaid used to work at the USAID Democracy and Governance Office at our mission in West Bank/Gaza. He then became Chief of

Party of TAMKEEN, a USAID funded project focusing on democracy and rule of law issues in Palestinian society. Currently, he works at Bayan, a USAID funded legislative transparency and accountability program. Dr. Mubaid is one of the prominent leaders in the Palestinian civil society sector. He successfully led the largest ever civil society and democracy strengthening project in the West Bank and Gaza during a challenging and politically sensitive period. He established and worked to strengthen the capacity of 100 civil society organizations throughout the West Bank and Gaza, including the most marginalized NGOs.

Our engagement with FSNs is a "capacity building measure" of a wholly different order from specific programming in this regard. In short, USAID has been a "school" where some of "the best and brightest" in these societies have matriculated and there is a major public diplomacy benefit we cannot forget to engage, empower and support.

MESSAGING WHAT WE DO

The war on terror has many fronts and facets. Winning hearts and minds in the Muslim world is certainly a key. Post 9/11, we cannot remain indifferent to our nation's image abroad. If the "diplomacy of deeds" is to have its full amplitude, it is incumbent on us to make those deeds better known and to rescue them from the distortion of our enemies.

The Department of State has the lead in America's public diplomacy work - having the direct authority over communications vehicles to provide the full range of public affairs, international information programs and educational and cultural exchanges. USAID's authorities in this regard are more narrowly drawn, but have not been fully exploited until now. Section 641 of the Foreign Assistance Act (1961) requires us to clearly identify to audiences within the countries where we work our assistance under the act as "American Aid." USAID's role in public diplomacy has been focused on telling America's assistance story to the world.

To the degree that U.S. assistance plays a role in fostering a positive view of the United States, USAID strives to disseminate and amplify the story of that assistance in support of the United States' overarching public diplomacy goals as articulated by the Department of State. Our work is in direct support of the Department of State's overall public diplomacy goals and seeks to complement the fine work that the dedicated officers staffing the public affairs sections of our U.S. embassies do every day.

In the aftermath of 9/11 - USAID expanded it's activities under this authorization in several ways:

- Organized and implemented a new comprehensive U.S. branding and marking effort across the foreign assistance landscape;
- Established a professional, trained communications field capacity; and
- Developed and produced targeted public affairs/public information campaigns in target countries which receive U.S. foreign assistance.

BRANDING AND MARKING

USAID has established detailed policies, regulations, and guidelines for marking and publicizing its assistance to ensure that U.S. taxpayers receive full credit for the foreign assistance they provide. Further, USAID has established a universal brand that conveys that the assistance is from the American people.

The 9/11 terrorist attacks amplified for us the connection between U.S. national security and the good will that could be created toward the United States if more accurate information about U.S. foreign assistance was widely known. USAID determined that we should portray more complete and accurate information about the Agency's foreign assistance. To help focus its image abroad, USAID, under the close supervision of the Administrator, developed a new brand by updating our traditional USAID logo or seal, and combining it with a new U.S. foreign assistance brand name and the tagline, "From the American People." USAID's foreign assistance branding campaign and other efforts ensure that United States foreign assistance overseas is visibly acknowledged and that the American people receive direct credit for their contributions and funding through our foreign assistance programs.

Although USAID first began marking assistance over four decades ago, it was not always systematically or effectively implemented and Agency guidance was minimal. In the not-to-distant past it was sometimes difficult for people to know that the foreign assistance they received was coming from the United States. Further, during much of that time the full set of our branding and marking rules did not apply to large amounts of USAID-funded grants and cooperative agreements. Traditionally, grantees were only required to acknowledge USAID-funding in publications

and therefore the bulk of U.S. foreign assistance provided through these grants were sometimes marked with only the implementer's logos and program names (causing potential confusion to the recipients) instead of providing credit to the American people.

In 2004, the Agency took steps to clearly and statutorily communicate that U.S. foreign assistance is "From the American People." This campaign included the development of a bolder, clearer graphic identity that clearly identified U.S. aid as coming "From the American People." The Bureau for Legislative and Public Affairs was designated by the Administrator as the implementer of the Agency's new branding and marking plan, and as one of its responsibilities published a comprehensive "Graphic Standards Manual" containing the new marking guidelines. This manual helped to clearly and concisely educate and guide implementers of U.S. foreign assistance both in Washington and the field. In addition, regular interactive and other in-person trainings in the field helped to ease the transition to these new requirements.

In January 2006, USAID revised its foreign assistance regulations to include new branding and marking requirements for USAID staff and all nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) receiving funding under grants and cooperative agreements. These regulations require that all programs, projects, activities, public communications, and commodities partially or fully funded by a USAID grant or cooperative agreement be marked appropriately overseas with the new graphic identity of a size and prominence equal to or greater than the recipient's or other donors' logos or identities.

USAID's Food for Peace program regulations prescribe the terms and conditions governing activities under Title II of P.L. 480, including provisions for implementing the marking requirements of Section 202 of that law. The regulations require that, to the maximum extent practical, public recognition be given in the media that Title II-funded commodities or foreign assistance have been "provided through the friendship of the American people as food for peace"; cooperating sponsors, to the extent feasible, display banners, posters, and similar items at project sites containing similar identifying information; and, unless otherwise specified, bags or other containers of commodities packaged for shipment be similarly marked. The regulations also require that containers of donated commodities packaged or repackaged by cooperating sponsors prior to distribution be plainly labeled with the U.S. aid graphic identity, and, where practicable, with the legend, "Provided through the friendship of the American people as food for peace."

In addition, USAID has established regulations prescribing rules and procedures for the marking of shipping containers and commodities under commodity transactions financed by USAID. These regulations require that suppliers of such commodities be responsible for ensuring that all export packaging and the commodities carry the U.S. aid graphic identity, except where USAID prescribes otherwise in the case of commodities. The regulations also prescribe the manner in which the export shipping containers, cartons, or boxes are to be marked; how the new foreign assistance graphic identity is to be affixed to the containers; the size, design, and color of the graphic identity; exceptions to the requirement to affix the graphic identity; and waivers to the marking requirement where it is found to be impracticable.

Overall, the Agency believes that the marking and branding effort has helped to finally bring credit to the American people for their foreign assistance generosity. For example, the first wide-spread application of the new U.S. aid graphic identity was during the provision of humanitarian supplies after the December 2004 tsunami that hit Southeast Asia. As a Pew Research Center study found: "The U.S. tsunami aid effort has been widely hailed there; 79 percent of Indonesians say they have a more favorable view of the U.S. as a result of the relief efforts." The U.S. brand was prominently displayed on all humanitarian assistance in close cooperation with our disaster response partners at the U.S. Department of Defense.

I must note that the reaction to the new branding and marking requirements from the contracting community was professional and business like. However, the Agency did initially experience hesitation among the non-profit community in this change of Agency policy. However, overtime, as we communicated with the organizations involved, their concerns were addressed. Grantees understood the urgent need to communicate the U.S. foreign assistance brand message, and have since been complying with few problems in the field.

ESTABLISHED NEW USAID COMMUNICATIONS FIELD CAPACITY

An assessment of public diplomacy in the Muslim world, issued in 2003 by the Advisory Group on Public Diplomacy for the Arab and Muslim World, concluded that too few people knew the extent of USAID's activities and recommended closer integration of the public diplomacy activities of agencies that administer foreign assistance.

In 2004, in order to improve public knowledge of foreign assistance in developing countries, USAID established new communications guidelines for the Agency and began building a network of over 100 communications specialists located at USAID missions around the world to help promote the Agency's foreign assistance abroad and to serve as a key humanitarian and development assistance content provider to U.S. Embassy PAOs.

These communications specialists are meant to be a comprehensive and complementary resource for information regarding USAID's work and its impact on the citizens of the host country. They oversee the Agency's branding and marking efforts in country; provide vital coordination with U.S. embassy's Public Affairs Sections; act as a content production point for the USAID mission's public information efforts; coordinate with public relations personnel hired by foreign assistance implementers; and seek to ensure that materials are consistent, well written and understandable in local languages and cultures. They also respond to inquiries about USAID programs, write speeches on relevant subjects for the Ambassador or USAID Mission Director prepare fact sheets and press advisories, and coordinate Web site updates of U.S. foreign assistance activities.

One of the Agency's new communications guidelines requires that its communications specialists develop a written "Communications Strategy" for the USAID mission that includes goals, objectives, messages, an Action Plan and budget, as well as methods to measure communications impact. In addition, USAID's overseas communications "Survival Manual" encourages communications specialists to monitor local media coverage and obtain and analyze locally conducted polls as a means to measure results. These strategies are drawn-up in coordination with the relevant U.S. embassy public affairs office and are reviewed and approved by the U.S. embassy, the USAID Mission Director and the public affairs liaison officers at USAID headquarters in Washington.

Annual communications training sessions were convened, starting in 2004, to enhance the skills of USAID communications officers who handle public outreach and communications and improve coordination among USAID staff, foreign assistance implementing partners, and the embassy public affairs sections. These training sessions sought to standardize knowledge, increase skills and explain Agency policy as well as communications protocols and procedures. Perhaps most importantly, these sessions encourage the examination of best practices with a view to wider application as well as a review of efforts that have yielded less than optimal results.

The last USAID communications training session focused on public opinion polling, communications measurement and evaluation. Also, we have just recently finished a new section of our overseas communications "Survival Manual" to provide guidance on communications research instruments, primarily focused on polling. The manual includes key criteria for evaluating the quality of the research instruments and a standard set of questions to include in research instruments. Sharpening quantitative research skills was also emphasized, such as surveys as well as pre- and post-tracking studies to benchmark attitudes and behaviors.

Here are some examples of communications initiatives these specialists have carried out in the field for USAID:

- In preparation for Malaria Awareness Day on April 25, 2007, known globally as Africa Malaria Day (AMD), USAID developed "Malaria Resources" to assist communications specialists in 15 focus countries targeted by the President's Malaria Initiative (PMI) and for use by all U.S. diplomatic missions across the globe in their outreach and education activities. Resource materials included: a sample news release, draft op-ed for signature by the local ambassador or mission director, a PMI fact sheet, updated country profiles, and a sample activity paper on how to get involved locally for AMD day. As a result, press coverage of Africa Malaria Day events this year was expansive and accurate in countries throughout Africa and indeed in Europe as well.
- A pilot communication campaign project in Indonesia, which was funded by USAID headquarters, involved communications officers overseeing the development and production of a radio, TV, and print advertisement campaign that focused on health care, education, and economic growth partnerships between the American and Indonesian people, especially in follow-up to the tsunami.

The purpose of this and other communication campaign pilots was to identify effective practices in foreign assistance publicity.

TARGETED PUBLIC AFFAIRS CAMPAIGNS

Another pilot activity funded by USAID headquarters was conducted by our mission in the West Bank and Gaza. In late 2004, we concluded that efforts to increase awareness of Palestinians to U.S. foreign assistance efforts could potentially achieve a measurable, positive change in the awareness of the populations of the West Bank and Gaza toward the United States.

Based on research that showed that in November 2004 only 5 percent of Palestinians were aware that the American people provided assistance to the Palestinian people, USAID designed a comprehensive public affairs campaign to:

- Increase awareness of U.S. aid;
- Tie that aid to the fact that it is being provided by the American people; and,
- Communicate the sectors of assistance where U.S. foreign assistance funding was being used and convey the results of those activities.

In a relatively few short months, USAID communications professionals in our West Bank and Gaza mission directed the development of our first-ever public affairs campaign. Using a combination of television, radio, print and billboard ads, the campaign was designed to highlight and explain American assistance and tie that assistance directly to a core theme which our focus groups showed would be positively received. We included a tag line to show the generosity of the American people by stating (in Arabic): "From One Human Being to Another....U.S. Aid, From the American People."

In April and May 2005, the campaign was launched. Public opinion research conducted in June 2005 by an independent public opinion polling agency demonstrates that an effective public affairs campaign can radically improve public perception of the American people's support for Palestinians:

- Over 46 percent of Palestinians surveyed had seen at least a portion of the campaign;
- Over 54 percent confirmed their awareness of the contributions of the American people to the well-being and development of the West Bank and Gaza;
- 33 percent could now identify the United States as the largest donor nation in the West Bank and Gaza;
- 61 percent of respondents indicated that their views toward the American people had become more positive because of the information campaign.

I should emphasize several items here:

- This was simply a pilot campaign to test whether the concept of "paid media" advertising could/would influence public opinion in a positive way in a target host country. As we see above, it did.
- As in almost all media campaigns of this duration, the changes in public opinion can be short-lived because only a concerted campaign over a sustained period of time could make permanent in-roads into the type of "attitudinal" change which would instill longer term positive perceptions of the United States.
- Public opinion is highly susceptible to other internal and external forces, perhaps even more so in developing countries. Just as learning about American foreign assistance changed stated awareness, news about certain U.S. foreign policy positions, regional conflict or other factors could reverse and mitigate positive public opinion improvements at any time. Again, this supports the need for a sustained effort to truly be effective at changing attitudes.

Several other pilots have been conducted as well. As mentioned, we funded a pilot activity in Indonesia that sought to capitalize on the well publicized U.S. humanitarian efforts after the Christmas 2004 tsunami. In the months surrounding the one-year anniversary of the tsunami, our USAID Mission in Indonesia engaged in a public affairs campaign (centered on a modest number of television, billboards and print ads) to inform the Indonesian population about the broad range of U.S. foreign assistance efforts and tie those on-going efforts to the higher profile post-tsunami humanitarian assistance work. The campaign produced results - an over 20 percent increase in the number of Indonesians aware of U.S. assistance in the health sector, and an almost 10 percent increase in awareness of U.S. education assistance. Most importantly, of those who recalled the ads, almost 82 percent reported holding "favorable" opinions of the United States.

In Jordan, following a modest public affairs campaign focused on print ads and bulk e-mails conducted in 2006 and 2007, over half of the Jordanians polled were aware of U.S. assistance, the highest recognition level of all bilateral donors.

What these modest public affairs pilots overseas have shown us is that U.S. aid efforts have a meaningful impact on public opinion toward the U.S. government and the American people. What has proved successful has been:

- Taking our cues from generally accepted commercial advertising practices;
- Tailoring public affairs campaigns to individual audiences with carefully crafted messages;
- Using local firms that know the local communications channels and cultural issues; and
- Using standard private-sector practices of monitoring, polling and focus group work.

These efforts provide credible reason to believe that this approach could be expanded to a larger group of countries with similar impact.

INCREASING CAPACITY IN WASHINGTON

Up to now, I have been talking about messaging in the field. USAID has also had a greater presence and input at the Department of State, specifically in the office of Undersecretary of State Karen Hughes and the R Bureau. To the credit of the Undersecretary, USAID's "story" has been mainstreamed into the Department's public outreach and messaging. This has been facilitated by the seconding of a USAID Public Affairs officer to key working groups there, periodic interagency meetings, and the sharing of public affairs information resources across departments and agencies.

Further, the Department of State has been pro-active at reaching out to USAID, including in key meetings, conferences and training opportunities for their public affairs staff. USAID has now participated in all of the recent Department of State regional public affairs conferences as well as the more recent world-wide public affairs conference hosted by Under Secretary Hughes for all U.S. embassy public affairs officers. These key opportunities have allowed both of us to understand each others needs, to realize the strengths and opportunities that our respective missions present and to work on coordination to take advantage of these opportunities.

Just one example here would be informative. Through a USAID partnership with Voice of America, hundreds of international broadcasters and journalists have been trained in health issues concerning reporting on child survival, HIV/AIDS, antimicrobial resistance (AMR), the worldwide effort to eradicate polio and emerging diseases like avian influenza. The success of this partnership is measured in terms of audiences reached, amounts of health programming aired on both TV and Radio, in-country training for health journalists, and costs. VOA, with a worldwide audience of over 100 million listeners worldwide, has produced over 40,000 health stories on polio, malaria, HIV/AIDS, TB, reproductive health and drug resistance over the past decade. Broadcasters have aired stories in over 30 languages. Recently, VOA has reached rural populations in Cambodia, Vietnam, Thailand, Indonesia, and China with news and information about preventing Avian Influenza. VOA has also created a special website at www.voanews.com on AI with support from USAID funds.

Under Secretary Hughes likes to say that she views her job as "waging peace". The word "waging" is used deliberately, she says, because she believes "we have to be very intentional about it." I hope this testimony makes clear that USAID wages peace throughout the developing world and we are taking pro-active steps to brand, mark, communicate and inform those audiences about how humanitarian and development assistance from the American people is helping them every day. Thank you.