

TESTIMONY of:

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STABILITY-ENHANCEMENT INVESTMENTS AND THE FY18 BUDGET

June 13, 2017 – Senate Armed Services Committee

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity for us to share our testimony on a matter of monumental importance to our country and the men and women in uniform we have been privileged to serve.

Modern national security challenges require innovative national security thinking. Such thinking begins with recognizing one of the clear lessons of history: American security is advanced by the development of stable nations that are making progress on social development, economic growth, and good governance; by countries that enforce the rule of law and invest in the health and education of their own people. In short, America's interests are served by nations that give their people hope that tomorrow will be better than today.

Conversely, American security is undermined by frail and failing nations where hope is non-existent, and where conditions foster radicalism, produce refugees, spark insurgency, and provide safe havens for terrorists, criminal gangs, and human traffickers. In this light, it is clear to us that strategic development assistance is not charity — it is an essential, modern tool of U.S. national security.

U.S. development efforts should be respected — and budgeted — as investments in stability enhancement. The severe cuts to the State Department and USAID that the Administration has proposed will make America less safe, and Congress should reject them. Not only should we protect and properly fund the International Affairs budget, it is time for the United States and its allies to explore bold, dedicated funding for smart development efforts in fragile areas that build stability and prevent future threats from emerging.

As you know, a host of international terrorist groups — al Qaeda, al Shabaab, Boko Haram, and ISIS, among others — have taken root in highly fragile regions and countries with shared characteristics such as corruption and poor governance, weak institutions, high poverty and inequality, indignity, and low quality of life for ordinary citizens. Local populations frustrated with poor governance and lacking meaningful opportunities to improve their lives or provide for their families are prone to tolerate, if not actively support, extremist groups that challenge government authority or assume the government's role as social-service provider. To combat these groups and prevent such areas from serving as fertile recruiting grounds, training areas, and transit routes for violent extremists, the United States and our allies should become much more proactive in helping address underlying conditions that, left unchecked, invite and foment instability.

In our active duty days, we were honored to help lead the finest fighting force in the world. This experience helped inform our solid conviction that in the 21st century, weapons and warfighters alone are insufficient to keep America secure. We support DOD funding increases needed to maintain the readiness of our forces. These resources must be complemented and supported by a robust development budget to advance our national security objectives. Kinetic activities alone cannot prevent radicalization, nor can they, by themselves, prevent despair from turning to anger and increasing outbursts of violence and instability. This has been our national experience of the last fifteen years in Afghanistan, Iraq, in the Middle East, and now in Africa.

America has always relied on our men and women in uniform when called upon. Their faithful service, courage, and sacrifice deserves and demands that we address and develop the strongest possible strategy for conflict-prevention that our nation can muster. Cutting the International Affairs budget unilaterally will have the effect of disarming our country's capability to stop new conflicts from forming, and will place our interests, values, and the lives of our men and women in uniform at risk.

Congress can, and should, make America safer with a robust and strategic Phase Zero initiative that engages the U.S. government, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector to synergistically prevent conflict and promote security, development, and governance rooted in the rule of law. Such an initiative will fill a dangerous vacuum that military intervention alone simply can't. Proactive conflict prevention strategies are far less expensive in terms of resources and lives expended than reactive use of our Armed Forces.

Fighting extremist groups after they emerge as a well-trained and well-funded entity is costlier in lives and money than preventive efforts. It is also more difficult. Research suggests that investing in prevention is, on average, 60 times less costly than war and post-conflict reconstruction costs. Preventing terrorist groups from expanding requires starving them of the oxygen on which they flourish: hopelessness and a belief that their radical agenda can provide purpose and meaning to the lives of their recruits.

It is clear to us that development experts under the auspices of USAID, State Department, the Millennium Challenge Corporation, and other federal agencies must be fully vested as part of a coherent whole-of-government stability-enhancement strategy that will protect America's interests in the modern security environment while minimizing the exposure of our young men and women to harm's way.

We are part of a long history of U.S. military leaders who have noted how much more cost-effective it is to prevent a conflict than to end one.

Former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and retired Admiral Michael Mullen said, "A fully-integrated foreign policy requires a fully-resourced approach. Our troops, Foreign Service officers and development experts work side-by-side in unprecedented and ever-increasing cooperation as they execute our strategic programs."

Former Supreme Allied Commander and Commander of US Southern Command, retired Admiral James Stavridis, said, "In so many ways, the most important deployments we make are those supporting soft power via diplomacy and development: from our hospital ships to our humanitarian construction battalions, this are incredibly high 'bang for the buck' efforts supporting State and AID."

Former SACEUR and Commandant of the United States Marine Corps, retired General James Jones, summed up the strategic premise with a simple but time-proven equation: stability equals development plus security.

Helping to defeat the conditions that give rise to transboundary dangers such as radicalism, criminality, disease, and mass-migration at their place of origin will make America safer.

We urge you to avoid a reduction in the 302(b) allocation for State and Foreign Operations, and to the poverty-fighting programs it funds. We also would welcome the opportunity to discuss the importance to our national security of non-military Phase Zero operations and investments, and ideas for dedicated funding for development efforts in fragile states to help build stability and to prevent future threats from emerging.

Thank you.

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