

Statement for the Record
Before the House Armed Services Committee

The Honorable John Scott Redd
Director, National Counterterrorism Center
Vice Admiral, United States Navy (Ret.)

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Chairman Hunter, Ranking Member Skelton, distinguished members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you and address an issue of critical importance to our national security.

As the President has stated on numerous occasions – and as the subject of this hearing recognizes – we are at war.

Some aspects of this war are familiar. Like the Cold War, it is likely to be a long war. Although I hope to be proven wrong, I expect that my grandchildren will be adults long before this conflict is in our wake. Also like the Cold War and its struggle against communism, this war has a strong ideological content.

But in many ways this is a very different war. The ideological dimension is framed in religious language. The enemy is not a defined state but more often a shadowy group of individuals. Indeed, there are numerous incarnations of the terrorist threat that endanger our Nation.

First, of course, al-Qa'ida remains our preeminent concern. Although we have made significant progress in eliminating much of al-Qa'ida's leadership and disrupting its ongoing operations, the organization continues to plot against the Homeland.

Second, other Sunni terrorist groups have been inspired by al-Qa'ida and have largely adopted al-Qa'ida's premise that the United States is the root of most of the problems affecting Muslims. These groups constitute a significant threat to our allies and interests abroad, and may attempt to extend their geographical reach.

Third, and one of our greatest long-term concerns, is the emergence of new jihadist networks and cells that are unaffiliated with al-Qa'ida or other terrorist organizations. These grassroots or "homegrown" elements may draw inspiration from al-Qa'ida but operate independently, with little or no centralized guidance and control. They may exist under the radar for years, known only to a small circle of members. As a result, they represent a serious challenge for the Intelligence Community. Their existence raises new questions about how we can draw close to the communities from which these extremists may arise and understand the complex forces that give rise to their violent ideologies.

However one characterizes the nature of the enemy and the war, one thing is clear. To win the war, the United States and its allies must bring all elements of power to bear on the problem.

That, in a nutshell, is why the National Counterterrorism Center was established.

With your permission, I would like briefly to review with you the role the National Counterterrorism Center – or NCTC -- is playing and will play in the Global War on Terror.

As you know, NCTC is a new organization, just over a year old. We began life almost three years ago as the Terrorist Threat Integration Center. Since then, our role has been dramatically expanded, primarily by the legislation which established us, the Intelligence Reform and Terrorist Prevention Act of 2004 (or IRTPA, for short).

Today, NCTC performs two critical functions in the war on terror. In a sense, as Director I wear two hats.

One of those hats involves an important - albeit familiar – role: That of Intelligence. In that hat, I report to Ambassador John Negroponte, the Director of National Intelligence. More recently, as his Mission Manager for Counterterrorism, I serve as his focal point for all intelligence matters relating to Counterterrorism.

The second hat involves a new and, I believe, revolutionary role. That is the responsibility for conducting Strategic Operational Planning for the Global War on Terror for the entire U. S. Government. In that hat, I report to the President.

To summarize in military terms, we are responsible for producing the government's plan for the Global War on Terror, and the Intelligence Annex that supports it.

Let me review briefly that first hat, our intelligence role. In particular, let me highlight three aspects of our intelligence and information functions: Analysis, Information Sharing and Mission Management.

In the area of Analysis, the IRTPA expanded our responsibilities substantially. In addition to integrating all counterterrorism analysis performed by the Intelligence Community, NCTC was assigned the primary role for actually performing CT analysis. That assignment derives logically from the law's mandate that NCTC be the one place where all sources of counterterrorism intelligence, both foreign and domestic, from across the IC and CT communities, come together. Indeed, our analysts have access to an unprecedented number of classified networks, databases and intelligence sources. This rich information base provides them with a unique ability to scrutinize the terror threat and “connect the dots” in a comprehensive fashion never before possible in the US Government. This, in turn, results in a product set ranging from strategic CT analysis for the President to tactical threat reports that assist the warfighter and first responders at the State and Local levels.

The second aspect of our intelligence operation is information sharing.

I would argue that NCTC is the U.S. Government's model for information sharing.

Beginning with the current threat, NCTC runs a 24/7 high-tech operations center. Three times a day we chair a secure video-teleconference with the key players in the Intelligence Community, ensuring all have the latest threat information. This is augmented by near-continuous cross-talk among watch standers throughout the IC.

NCTC also serves the CT community by compiling the U.S. Government's central data base on known or suspected international terrorists. Designated the Terrorist Identities Datamart Environment, or TIDE, this database contains all source highly classified information provided by members of the Intelligence Community such as CIA, DIA, FBI, NSA, and many others. Today, there are more than 300,000 records in TIDE. When aliases and transliteration issues are taken into account, this represents over 200,000 unique identities. From this classified TIDE database, an unclassified extract is provided to the FBI's Terrorist Screening Center. That information, in turn, is used in compiling various watch lists such as the TSA's No-Fly list, State Department's Visa and Passport Database, Homeland Security's Boarder System, and FBI's NCIC (National Crime and Information Center) for state and local law enforcement. This represents a major step forward from the pre-9/11 status of multiple, disconnected, and incomplete watchlists throughout the government.

The final example of information sharing involves what is arguably the most effective classified website in the world – what we call NCTC Online, or NOL. Essentially, we collect intelligence information and analysis from 28 different government networks which come into NCTC and post it on a single website, NOL, where it is then accessible by individual agencies. Thus, planners and analysts at headquarters or forward deployed in theaters worldwide can go online and immediately find all disseminated intelligence on a given subject, published by DIA, CIA, NSA, FBI, DHS and the rest of the IC. Today we provide access to this wealth of information to approximately 5,000 CT appropriately-cleared analysts around the world. Currently NOL contains approximately 5 million intelligence products. Prior to 9/11, such "one stop shopping" for CT intelligence was unavailable to the IC.

The third aspect of NCTC's intelligence function is CT Mission Management. This is a new, formal assignment by the DNI that grew out of a recommendation from the President's WMD Commission. Among the Mission Manager's many tasks are responsibility for understanding the needs of our customers, improving the quality of collection and analytic efforts; closing key information gaps that prevent us from understanding terrorist threats; and making the best use of our CT intelligence resources.

That summarizes our Intelligence mission.

Let me now turn to our second fundamental mission, that of Strategic Operational Planning.

When the term Strategic Operational Planning – or SOP - first became public in the IRTPA, I think it is fair to say few people could have given a coherent definition of what the term meant. Indeed, one of the first orders of the day was to put together an inter-agency effort to hash out what it was and how we would do it.

As has become clear, SOP serves to fill a long existing gap in government, one that has been present for most of my almost four decades of government service. Simply put, the White House, in the form of the National Security Council and, more recently, the Homeland Security Council has been in the business of developing broad strategy and policy. At the other end of the spectrum, the Cabinet Departments and Agencies have been responsible for conducting operations in the field. That dual apportionment of roles has been the norm for most of my lifetime. What has been missing is the piece in between policy and operations, a concept not unfamiliar to the military. That need has become even more obvious as we prosecute the Global War on Terrorism. Strategic Operational Planning is designed to fill that gap.

The goal of Strategic Operational Planning is straightforward: To bring all elements of National Power to bear on the war on terrorism in an integrated and effective manner. By all elements of national power, we mean the sum of our nations diplomatic, financial, military, intelligence, homeland security and law enforcement activities.

NCTC's charter in this regard is simple in description and extremely complex in execution. Basically, it involves three phases.

First, there is a planning process. This involves taking our national counterterrorism strategies and policies and translating them first into strategic goals, then into objectives, and finally into discrete tasks. Those tasks are then to be prioritized and assigned to departments and agencies, with lead and partner responsibilities defined. This process is not a unilateral drafting exercise by NCTC. Instead, it is an interagency effort, involving hundreds of departmental planners working under our leadership. This phase is well underway.

The second phase involves what the IRTPA describes as "interagency coordination of operational activities." This involves the coordination, integration and synchronization of departmental operations. We are just beginning this phase of strategic operational planning, but have already made significant contributions in certain compartmented areas.

The final phase involves an assessment process. NCTC is charged with monitoring, evaluating and assessing the execution and effectiveness of the plan and recommending changes where needed.

The bottom line is that this is an iterative process and there is great value in that process. As General Eisenhower once noted, "Plans are nothing, planning is everything."

That summarizes our second major mission, Strategic Operational Planning.

For completeness, I should also tell you what we don't do at NCTC.

First, we do not, as a rule, deal directly with State, local and tribal authorities. We are charged to support the Department of Justice and the Department of Homeland Security, who do have that remit.

Second, in our Strategic Operational Planning hat, we do not direct the execution of counterterrorism operations. We do not have command authority. That is the province of the Departments and Agencies, not ours. As Secretary Rice has noted, our role is somewhat analogous to that of the Joint Staff. That is, we coordinate and advise the President, but we are not in the chain of command.

In summary, NCTC is a truly "joint" team. All but a handful of our people are on assignment from other government organizations. We believe that is a significant strength, just as the implementation of Goldwater Nichols has been a decided boon in the Defense Department. Although growing, we are small, numbering just over 300 government employees today. We also are, in many ways, a work in progress as we take on significant new responsibilities while continuing to perform ongoing tasks. As we often say, we're building an airplane while we're flying it. That said, I believe we are providing a true value add which will only grow over time.

I would like to close by noting that across the Intelligence Community, on both sides of the foreign and domestic intelligence divide, there are many accomplishments in which we can justly take great satisfaction. After 36 years of Government service, I am accustomed to witnessing the dedication of our men and women in uniform around the globe. I am pleased to report that the same dedication to duty and excellence is on display every day within the greater counterterrorism community. We have many miles yet to travel, our race is not run—but it is clear to me that we are making substantial progress in our war against the terror threat.

Thank you for your attention. That completes my statement.