



IPI SPEAKER SERIES

International Counterterrorism Policy in the Obama Administration: Developing a Strategy for the Future

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WARREN HOGE: Good afternoon. I'm Warren Hoge, IPI's Vice President for external relations, and I'm pleased to welcome you today to a talk by Ambassador Daniel Benjamin, who is the coordinator for counterterrorism in the U.S. Department of State.

His topic, as your invitation indicates, is "International Counterterrorism Policy in the Obama Administration: Developing a Strategy for the Future." Ambassador Benjamin has been at his current post in the Obama Administration since the end of May, nine months ago. His prior record of achievement and advancement, both in government and at research institutes, as well as his productive life as an author, is chronicled in the biography we have circulated.

Of course, it gives me particular pleasure to put on stage someone who began his career as a newspaper foreign correspondent, and then ended up doing something meaningful with his life.

We are very glad Ambassador Benjamin chose IPI as the place to address the UN community, and if I may take just a moment, before we get to his remarks, I'd like to briefly review work that IPI does in the area -- his area of expertise. First of all, an IPI task force on counter- and global terrorism worked with over 60 countries to develop policy recommendations to strengthen multilateral capacity to address the issue. The product of that effort was one of IPI's signature Blue Papers, and it is among the IPI documents we've placed on the stand outside as you came in.

Secondly, our regional work has focused on South Asia, and in 2008, we held a conference and developed a set of policy recommendations and action points to help shape UN and member state engagement in the region. In that instance, we produced a paper with Eric Rosand and the Center on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation. Eric is an old friend of IPI. He has now joined the Obama Administration, and is the senior advisor on multilateral involvement in Ambassador Benjamin's office. And I want to thank Eric -- I know he's here -- for being the one who first raised the possibility of today's event here.

Also, on South Asia, IPI's senior program officer, Naureen Chowdhury Fink, authored a paper on Bangladesh, and I'm also happy to say that she is here, and she interrupted her maternity leave to come in and hear Ambassador Benjamin. Also, and finally, we have held and will continue holding conferences and round tables and closed door policy prescription meetings on subjects like deradicalization and disengagement from violent extremism, terrorism and the Internet, human rights and terrorism, and counterterrorism capacity building in East Africa. IPI publications on those aspects are also on the stand outside.

Now, a little over two months ago, on Christmas Day, to be exact, an attempted terrorist bombing of airplane headed for Detroit did not succeed in blowing up the aircraft and killing hundreds of people, as was intended. But it did succeed in stirring widespread new public alarm, in elevating terrorism back to the top of the international agenda, and in throwing into dramatic relief some apparent vulnerabilities in the U.S. counter-terror effort and its multilateral dimensions.

So, the timing could not be more apt for today's talk to this multilateral-minded community, and Dan, judging by the size of the turnout, there's enormous interest in hearing what you have to say. You have the floor.

DANIEL BENJAMIN: Well, thank you very much for that kind introduction, and you stole my thunder on that issue of being a recovering journalist, so I want to thank you for that. It is always a delight to find another alumnus of the Fourth Estate who has shown that there is life afterwards, so that's a great pleasure. I'm sorry I'm a little late today. You know, Benjamin Franklin once said that the only inevitabilities in life were death and taxation, but he did not live to find out just how certain it is that you will be late if you take the shuttle. So, I apologize for that.

Anyway, it is really a great pleasure to be here at the International Peace Institute, and it's an honor to be part of IPI's distinguished speaker series. As someone who participated in IPI events before entering the administration, I know that its reputation for stimulating open, constructive, and wide-ranging dialogue is richly deserved, and all the more reason why I am glad to be here today.

All of this, is of course, extremely important for producing the kind of innovative thinking required to tackle some of the 21st century's genuinely transnational challenges, and as Warren Hoge said, the events of December 25th reminded us that terrorism remains one of the most complicated challenges of a transnational nature that we face. Although al-Qaida's core is under perhaps the greatest pressure it has ever faced, the challenge we face remains acute, because of the strength of some of the group's affiliates in such

places as Yemen, Somalia, Iraq, the Maghreb, and the Sahel, and because of the distribution of the narrative. And so, in a sense, we have a more complex, more truly globalized threat than before, and it is both more networked and more distributed than anything we have experienced.

I should add, by the way, that what also complicates the picture is that al-Qaida is not the only terrorist group today with global ambitions. When we look at another group with an enormous capability such as Lashkar-e-Taiba, it's clear that it is willing to undertake bold, mass-casualty operations with a target set that would please al-Qaida planners. So, we shouldn't think too narrowly when we look at the problem set.

The global nature of the common challenge we face is clear. Citizens from dozens of countries around the world -- the vast majority of them not from the United States -- have been victimized by terrorism and violent extremism. President Obama recognizes that the United States cannot address this threat alone. Rather, we have and will continue to reach out and on the basis of mutual interests and mutual respect forge international coalitions. We are building, and in some cases rebuilding, partnerships, bilateral partnerships with multilateral organizations such as the UN and with the private sector and civil society. This is a critical part of our comprehensive approach to addressing the threat. It is based on the premise that military power, intelligence operations, and law enforcement alone are not going to eliminate the underlying political, economic, and social conditions that helped put so many individuals onto the path of violence.

Let me try to highlight some of the pillars of this new U.S. approach and, in particular, where our partnership with the UN is critical. First, we are focused on building political will through consistent diplomatic engagement with counterparts and senior leaders for common counterterrorism objectives -- again, both bilaterally and multilaterally.

Second, we are committed to addressing the state insufficiency that allows terrorists to operate freely by promoting effective civilian law enforcement, good governance, and the rule of law. A major focus of this work involves effectively building capacity and making counterterrorism training for police, prosecutors, border officials, and members of the judiciary more systematic, more innovative, and more far-reaching. CTED, UNODC, and the wider counterterrorism implementation task force can each make important contributions to this effort.

Third, we are working with partners, including with UN agencies such as UNDP, UNICEF, and UNESCO, to help countries confront what deputy national security advisor John Brennan has called the 'upstream factors,' the political, social, and economic conditions that terrorists try to exploit to win over new recruits. Accordingly, we are supporting the broader provision of essential social services to deny radicals that aspect of state insufficiency for the purposes of radicalization.

Fourth, we are strengthening our efforts to resolve longstanding political conflicts that fuel the grievances that violent extremists latch onto. At the very top of this list is the Arab-Israeli conflict, and as you all know, President Obama, Secretary Clinton, and special

envoy Senator George Mitchell are working very hard to restart direct negotiations between Israelis and the Palestinians.

Fifth, and at the very heart of the Obama Administration's approach, is an effort to identify the drivers of radicalization and to identify how to address them most effectively. We are asking ourselves time and again, "How do we take one terrorist off the street without creating ten more? What can we do to attack the drivers of violent extremism so al-Qaida and its affiliates finally have to cope with a shrinking pool of recruits? What steps can be taken to trump the narrative being offered by al-Qaida and its extremist allies?"

Our approach recognizes, finally, that our counterterrorism efforts can best succeed when they make central respect for human rights and the rule of law. Because, as President Obama has said from the outset, there should be no trade-off between our security and our values. Indeed, in light of what we know about radicalization, it is absolutely clear that navigating by our values is an essential part of a successful counterterrorism effort. We have moved to rectify the past excesses by working to close the prison at Guantanamo Bay, by forbidding enhanced interrogation techniques, and eliminating secret detention sites. And let me add, in anticipation of what will probably be the first question, we have found closing Guantanamo to be tougher than we expected, but the President remains absolutely dedicated to that end.

Let me look now a bit at enhanced multilateral engagement at the UN. As part of our effort to strengthen our partnerships around the globe, we have been re-engaging at the UN, and in multilateral fora. The administration's renewed commitment to working more closely with the UN extends far beyond counterterrorism, of course, and is done in the recognition of the essential role the UN plays in so many critical areas. But we also recognize the UN's important role in harnessing member states' efforts to further international counterterrorism objectives, and that's what I want to elaborate on now.

Constructive American leadership and engagement at the UN demonstrates, first of all, our commitment to multilateral rule of law-based approaches. We expect to work more effectively with a range of partners and with greater legitimacy to support counterterrorism efforts in this process. Such an approach can also be more cost-effective for all nations because of the ability to leverage international expertise and programs. In some instances, the United Nations, because of its impartiality and its expertise, is especially well suited to playing an important role in building counterterrorism cooperation among practitioners in regions that are rife with distrust and, in some cases, conflict.

For example, this is proving to be the case in South Asia, where CTED organized a trust-building workshop in Bangladesh that brought together senior police and prosecutors from across the sub-region last November. And it also has plans for a follow-up event in Sri Lanka later this year. Over the course of 2010 and beyond, the United States looks forward to working with others to find ways to strengthen our counterterrorism partnerships with the UN and to maximize the ability of the organization to contribute to our collective efforts to combat terrorism.

Let me highlight a few of the themes of this engagement. First and foremost, number one, we want all nations to benefit as we seek to engage member states from across the world, not just on the Security Council. As Ambassador Rice has underscored, the importance of reaching out is not just to the permanent five and to our Western partners, but to nations of all sizes in Africa, South and Southeast Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean, and the Pacific Islands. Clearly, we need to be inclusive and we need to build and sustain a global consensus on the fight against terrorism.

With this in mind, we are working with our partners on the Security Council to see that the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Committee becomes more transparent and finds ways of involving those countries that are not members of the committee and its work. And let me add that we are particularly encouraged by the strong leadership that Turkey is providing the CTC. A more transparent CTC, which is more accessible to the wider membership and to regional organizations and civil society, is absolutely critical to sustaining global support for the implementation of what remains the UN's pivotal response to the events of 9/11, Resolution 1373.

More broadly, we are interested in exploring ways to build practical, cross-regional counterterrorism cooperation at the UN. We need to move beyond the often polarized discourse on counterterrorism, and in particular on definitional issues that too often and unnecessarily block multilateral cooperation, even among countries who cooperate closely on a bilateral basis. This kind of engagement is a small part of a wider administration effort to seek a new beginning with Muslim communities around the world and to expand upon the partnerships that President Obama outlined in his Cairo speech last June. The President's appointment just last month of Rashad Hussain to serve as his special envoy to the OIC is just one sign of this commitment.

The UN should be a place where we focus on what brings us together, not what drives us apart, and in terms of counterterrorism, we can all agree on the urgent need to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al-Qaida and its affiliates, parts of a network that has killed thousands of people of many faiths and many nationalities. We can also agree that the UN plays a critical role in helping countries build criminal justice and other institutional capacities required to address this threat over the long term. We should work together to reinforce this.

Second, the United States will work to ensure that our comprehensive approach to combating and preventing terrorism is reflected in our activity and is consistent with the UN global counterterrorism strategy with its emphasis not only on short-term security and law enforcement measures, but on long-term preventive ones as well. For example, we are eager to engage multilaterally on countering violent extremism, one of my highest priorities, and to explore the possibility of having the UN assume a larger role here.

This engagement will consistently underscore the need for the UN to play its part to ensure that national counterterrorism measures are grounded in respect for human rights and the rule of law. And let me say, it was a particular, personal pleasure to represent the United States and reinforce its commitment in this area during the

Arria formula meeting on human rights and counterterrorism organized by Mexico last November.

When we talk about the human rights dimension in this regard, Security Council Resolution 1904, adopted last December, is a really important milestone. It not only reaffirms the global consensus against al-Qaida and the Taliban, but it strengthens the implementation of UN sanctions and improves the fairness and the transparency of the regime. We hope the resolution will help restore confidence in both the consolidated list and the wider sanctions regime. With improved confidence in this instrument, the implementation of travel bans, financial restrictions, and arms sanctions should be used more effectively and globally against terrorists and their supporters. In particular, we hope we can have an increasing impact against those who are hindering peace and stability in Afghanistan and Pakistan as well as in the Arabian peninsula.

Third, we recognize the important role of the UN as a forum to develop the capacity of national criminal justice officials and to enhance technical and other practical counterterrorism cooperation more broadly. During the past year, the UN has adopted a more targeted approach to much of its counterterrorism work. And this approach has proven itself increasingly adept in developing training and other capacity-building programs to address specific regional and sub-regional counterterrorism needs. This is part of a much-needed effort to connect these activities to the day-to-day work of national counterterrorism practitioners. Partly as a result of such efforts, such as those of CTED in South Asia and UNODC in West Africa, the organization's counterterrorism activities are also becoming more closely linked to its broader efforts to address international peace and security issues. These are all positive developments, and I want to add that we in Washington are particularly encouraged by the strong leadership that the various UN bodies that I've mentioned have today.

We will also explore how the various UN counterterrorism capacity-building tools can best be leveraged in the context of the wider international community's efforts to address peace and security challenges in priority countries and in regions such as South Asia, Yemen, the Sahel, and the Horn of Africa. Building the institutional capacities of weak, fragile, failing, and failed states to allow them to confront a range of transnational security challenges, promote the rule of law and good governance, and provide education and other basic services to their people is the bread and butter of the UN's day-to-day work. The UN work on counterterrorism is improved as member states are able to govern more effectively, control their own borders, and fight crime at home.

Certainly, individual counterterrorism actives have played important and successful roles. We believe, however, that the current approach to countering terrorism at the UN can often be stove piped and insufficiently linked with the organization's other institution-building efforts. And let me just say this is not an uncommon problem in many national governments, including, I have to admit at times, in my own. More holistic coordinated thinking on these issues is needed to make the organization's work in this field even more relevant and effective. And we look forward to continuing to work with partners, including within the UN

Secretariat, and its newly established counterterrorism implementation task force support office, to stimulate this thinking.

Finally, we will encourage the UN to focus more attention on highlighting the important role that a robust civil society can play in countering terrorism. So far, the UN's rich tradition of working with and empowering civil society around the world has yet to reach its counterterrorism work. Going forward, we would like to see the UN and, in particular, CTC and CTED and the broader CTITF engage more with non-government experts and civil society groups more broadly. By doing so, we can achieve the kind of constrained environment in which terrorists find it harder to operate.

In addition, these UN actors need to encourage states to provide civil society with the political space to allow it to be a responsible counterterrorism partner. The UN can lend its voice and remind states not to use counterterrorism legislation to justify the targeting of dissident and other civil society groups, as well as to resist efforts to clamp down on the freedom of association, speech, and assembly. These UN efforts should be balanced with the ongoing work and highlighting the importance of having safeguards in place to ensure that charities and other NGOs are not being used as conduits for terrorist financing.

Well, given this expert venue and -- I'm sorry, this expert audience and our venue, I've focused my remarks on the United Nations, but I do want to underscore that the Obama Administration has been re-engaging in a broad range of multilateral counterterrorism fora that, frankly, were underutilized for too long. This includes various regional bodies and the G-8's CTAG, where just last week we agreed with our partners on a series of important reform measures.

The net effect of increased U.S. engagement has been manifold. We are increasing the pool of donors for capacity-building, we are working to strengthen the international resolve against terrorism, and we are also strengthening global norms so that countries do a better job of building security together. This broader multilateral effort we see as essential, because it can multiply the impact of U.S. policies and also bilateral efforts, and at the same time it underscores the larger point that counterterrorism is a truly global issue, and it supports our common security by investing in our common humanity. And I should add here that we take it as an essential principle of our engagement that this is not just about the enemies that we face, but those that our partners face as well.

The events of December 25th underscore the continuing peril we all face -- the determination and adaptability of our foes in the evolving complexity of the overall threat against the world's nations and peoples. Contemporary terrorism has been decades in the making. It will take many more years to un-make it. There is much we still need to learn, especially about how to prevent individuals from choosing the path of violence, but I believe the United States now has the right framework for its policies and that we are increasingly taking into account the indispensable role that the UN plays. Ultimately, I am confident that this will lead to the decisions and the actions that will strengthen peace and security for the United States and for the world. Thank you very much for listening, and I look forward to your questions.

HOGGE: Thanks very much, Dan. I think you've already earned your lunch, but you can't have it quite yet because I'm sure there are some questions here. Please just raise your hand and wait for the microphone and identify yourself. I see a hand in the back here.

ELLIE HEARNE: Thank you. My name is Ellie Hearne, I work here at IPI. I'd like to thank you for a very interesting presentation. I think a lot of people here would agree that it's very refreshing to see a focus, a renewed focus on soft counterterrorism. My question relates to that. I'm curious about what role you see, if any, for deradicalization programs?

BENJAMIN: Well, it's a good question. Clearly, deradicalization needs to be a centerpiece in any global counterterrorism program. The UN is very well positioned to be a purveyor of best practices in this regard, and also an analyst that can determine which programs are so culturally specific that they aren't necessarily replicable elsewhere. I think that this is an area in which an awful lot of progress can be made. We're working on this. A lot of other countries are working on this, and it seems to me that, again, in part because of the UN's impartiality, it may have a leg up in terms of advancing programs in other countries that, for example, we or other nations might not be able to.

TARIQ ALI FARAJ H. AL-ANSARI: Hello, good afternoon, and thank you, sir, for the briefing and thanks to IPI for organizing this event. I am from the Mission of Qatar. We are, in Qatar, very encouraged by the promising position of the administration of President Obama in resolving many conflicts in the world and many scourges facing the international community, and I'm very encouraged by what you said about multilateralism and countering terrorism. And in this regard, I would like to know your advice on the draft convention on international terrorism in the United Nations, which did not reach agreement so far, and in particular, because of the differences on the definition. And second, can you tell us something about the efforts of the United States in dealing with the root causes of terrorism. Thank you very much.

BENJAMIN: Well, let me take the last question first. Root causes is a freighted term, and I think it might be better and more neutral to talk about the drivers of radicalization, and as I mentioned in my speech, we are looking at this in a number of different dimensions. We understand that there are times when socioeconomic conditions, the lack of provision of social services, state insufficiency of different kinds allows radicalism to flourish. And the President has said from the outset that we are interested, we are really dedicated to helping other countries strengthen their own institutions in ways so that they can provide those services, provide the fundamental structures of everyday life, and leave radicalism none of that space. That was why he's been committed to increasing foreign assistance on a very robust -- to a very robust level. It's why he has been committed to shared security partnerships, something that he talked about in his campaign. It's why we are involved in a range of capacity-building, from high-end police work, which my office is involved with, to some of the work that USAID is involved with.

And of course, we're also trying to motivate others to increase their contributions in these areas and to see a more effective global donor community -- engagement in that regard. We're interested in

trumping the narrative and making sure that more people recognize through our actions as well as our words that the United States is not the predatory power that it has been described as by bin Laden and his cohorts. And we are working actively in that regard. It seems to me that there are numerous different issues that need to be addressed. The drivers are different in different areas. We in the State Department, for example, are very cognizant that the things that may be motivating individuals in a relatively poor -- indeed, quite poor -- state such as Yemen may be quite different from those that are motivating some who have come from wealthy families and are living in cities in Western Europe and have adopted radical ideas there.

It's our determination not to take a cookie-cutter approach and to go at this all with blinders on, but also to recognize that radicalization is a phenomenon that has to be dealt with, and I think that that's one important area in which we differ from our predecessors who, I think took a different view of things. So, that's the story about the drivers of radicalization.

Now, as for the comprehensive convention, we would like to see the work on the convention finished. There are still differences that need to be worked out. We're looking forward to the discussions in the upcoming session. We are certainly open to and eager to find bridging language that will help us overcome some of the problems we have seen in the past. The definitional issues, as I mentioned in passing, have, I think, plagued discussion of terrorism for a long, long time, and frankly, while we do want to see a convention and will work hard to achieve one, it's very important that achieving a convention -- or the problems of achieving a convention -- do not stand in the way of the practical cooperation that is really the day-to-day essence of counterterrorism.

JEFF LAURENTI:

Jeff Laurenti with The Century Foundation. In your remarks, you noted that the new admini -- or the current administration, not so new, I guess -- places great importance on the human rights dimension in the struggle against terrorism, which could have two sides: one, in terms of making the impulse toward terrorism less, "less necessary" in the mind of those deeply dissatisfied, and on the other side limiting, restraining within legal norms and human rights norms, the behavior of states attempting to deal with it. And we didn't hear this very often in the not so distant past from Washington, and instead, we were told democracy, and its spread, would be a kind of silver bullet to some extent. I wonder if you could explore with us, for a bit, where you see the Obama Administration's views on human rights in terms of both discouraging resort to terrorism and limiting state abuses, and whether the democracy piece is now really not part of a counterterrorism strategy -- and in that regard, one notes that across the gulf from Qatar, a neighboring state insists that, allegedly, in the name of democracy, the United States Congress has been mandating funds to groups that claim -- that they claim -- are involved in terrorist action. That ain't so, is it?

BENJAMIN:

Before I came into office, I thought of him as a friend. It's good to see you, Jeff. A complicated set of questions, which we could talk about all day. Let me begin by declaring up front that the United States, in no way, shape, or form, supports any organizations that are carrying out terrorist attacks. Full stop. No matter what the

political nature of the country in question, that is something we don't do.

Number two, on the complex but vital relationship between human rights promotion and democracy policy, this administration has in no way dropped the -- taken down the flag, dropped the ball, or done any of those other metaphoric things on democracy policy, and we certainly do recognize that an increase in the growth of democracy is an essential part of dealing with the long-term problem of radicalization. Societies that are democratic are much better at containing dissent, give people an opportunity to express their grievances in a peaceful way, and to obviously work toward more equitable institutions.

What I think the Secretary has said, and rightly so, is that a public confrontation is not the way to advance these goals. You know, we view this as an essential part of our diplomacy and we're carrying it forward every day, and I think that the time to judge us will be somewhere when we are perhaps a little less new and a little further down the road. And -- but, let me just say emphatically that, you know, democratization is a core part of the policy. I think that we do also believe that democratization -- and this is perhaps indicated, at least indirectly, by our other priorities that I spoke about in terms of the provision of social services and the need for stronger institutions -- democracy is a lot of different things, not just elections. Was that all of your questions?

LAURENTI: Human rights [indiscernible] restraining to stay.

BENJAMIN: And --

LAURENTI: As far as being a new emphasis compared to [indiscernible].

BENJAMIN: Well, for example, I have -- I don't want to mention particular nations -- but with a number of different interlocutors, I have emphasized the need to move beyond the kind of preventive detention that some countries engage in and move them more towards a trial, which we think is absolutely, vitally important. There is, shall we say, a spirited debate going on about the utility of civilian trials for counterterrorism -- for counterterrorism purposes. Obviously, we have intelligence equities that need to be respected, and I believe they can, in the context of our legal system and other legal systems, but I do believe that criminal trials have a wonderful de-glamorizing effect on terrorists, and I think that this is an important thing, and it's frankly something that we encourage partners around the world to take into account as they deal with the threats they face.

HOGUE: I see a question in the back. Before that, I'd like to ask you a question of my own, Dan. You anticipated that somebody would ask you if the U.S. was still committed to closing Guantanamo. Nobody has, so let me go back to my old professional conduct, and ask you myself. I'm sure the U.S. is still committed to it. How you going to do it, and when are you going to do it?

BENJAMIN: You know, there should be a greater reward for, you know, emphasizing this point earlier on, but -- let me just say we are fully committed to it. It is not easy. We have quite a number of inmates of Guantanamo for whom we have not yet found an appropriate place where they can be kept with the necessary security

safeguards or the kind of attention that they require, or where, for example, they may have their own human rights observed and preserved.

The President has not set a date certain -- I'm not going to do that for him, and -- but I can tell you that this is something that we at the State Department, the Justice Department, are working on, you know -- the Department of Defense, of course, are working on very hard every day. I strongly encourage you to have my colleague Dan Fried, who is the special envoy for Guantanamo issues at the State Department, come and talk about this. He is on a plane seven days a week looking for partners to deal with. We're obviously very, very grateful to those, many of whom are represented in this room, that will take inmates and resettle them under appropriate circumstances, but, you know, we're not there yet. The large majority of people who have been incarcerated in Guantanamo are not there any longer, and I consider that a positive story, and we're working hard to get to the end of this process. The President remains acutely aware that Guantanamo is perhaps without parallel as a symbol that has had a radicalizing impact around the world, and that is a very good reason for pushing forward as fast as we can.

HOGGE: Good, thanks. I had a woman in the -- yes, right there with the pencil.

NAMIRA NEGM: I am Namira Negm from the Mission of Egypt. I just have a comment, because if I don't say it now, I will shoot myself when I go. You mentioned, as a comment to the [indiscernible] that drivers of radicalization is the more neutral. We had a huge fight in the outcome document to change that, and we don't have a mention of radicalization, but we use the measure [indiscernible] the spread of terrorism in the United Nations. So, because of this -- that was my comment -- otherwise, I would shoot myself.

My question is relating to your comment, sir, relating to the more engagement by the United Nations with the bodies of the United Nations that are working in the counterterrorism with the NGOs. What do you foresee from that? Can you elaborate more on this? Thanks.

BENJAMIN: On the engagement with civil society -- obviously, this can take any number of different forms. Whether it is with NGOs that deal with education, poverty reduction, provision of health services, and the like, encouraging NGOs to target some of their efforts in areas in which radicalization flourishes, I think, is a very worthy goal. More broadly, by engaging with NGOs and, you know, concerned groups in civil society that aren't necessarily delivering services anywhere, we strengthen international resolve against terror, and the more that the people of the world are actually thinking of this on a frequent basis, and the more that they are outraged by terrorism, I think the more we find that those neighborhoods in which terrorists may be operating become unsafe for them -- that they are more likely to pick up the phone and call the authorities, and say, "There's someone doing something in the next house that is dangerous and inappropriate."

So, I think it's really a top-to-bottom issue, and that, in the end, it's not just going to be governments that deal with this problem. It's really going to be public resolve and, you know, I think that's why,

as I said before, it's so important that we build on those issues that, you know, we share as common concerns rather than spend all of our time fighting about the issues that separate us, because this is a matter that affects ordinary people in the most devastating possible way. And so, the engagement with civil society is really essential.

HOGGE: Ambassador Benmehidi of Algeria.

MOURAD BENMEHIDI: Thank you. Thank you all. Good to see you again, Ambassador. Welcome. I would like to start in expressing my appreciation to you for having, in your presentation, presented the counterterrorism before you are conducted as an ongoing effort. This presentation could have been made, actually, at the last time you were due to come at the IPI without falling under the emotional atmosphere that followed the 25th of December event in the plane in Detroit. This is the way we understand the efforts -- conducted within the United Nations -- to garner the widest possible support in the struggle against terrorism.

I have a question. I would like to know your real appreciation, whether the international community is serious about countering terrorism. You have mentioned the Sahel and the Horn of Africa in your presentation. One: how do you assess the reluctance of the international community to address the situation in Somalia, postponing the establishment of a peacekeeping mission in order to try the -- another source of instability?

Second, when it comes to the Sahel, and to al-Qaida, you know that al-Qaida is now behaving in a very relaxed way in the Sahel. It is blackmailing democratic governments and the neighbors with the practice of hostages taken. Thanks to the efforts of the African Union, the Security Council passed a resolution in December, Resolution 1904, which we knew as 1267 Resolution [indiscernible]. And it did address the issue of ransom payments as a form of financing terrorism.

Two months later, al-Qaida is challenging democratic government in the region with hostage-taking. How do you see the right answer on this and on freeing terrorists that were under the custody of governments, against freeing the hostages, which happened one week ago in Mali, when, at the request of the government of France, two or more -- actually, four terrorists affiliated with al-Qaida have been released and are supposed to continue their terrorist activities. I stop here. Thank you.

BENJAMIN: Mr. Ambassador, it's good to see you again. And let me extend to you condolences on the loss of your national police chief, a very tragic event. As you know from when we met not too long ago, at the time of the General Assembly, and as I've repeated to your foreign minister and your ambassador in Washington many times, we believe strongly that there needs to be a no-concessions policy that is adopted by all countries in the face of hostage taking of the kind that -- all hostage taking, but especially acute in the case of al-Qaida in the Maghreb.

The -- it is quite clear that hostage taking has become the number one source of revenue for this group and therefore, paying hostage -- paying ransoms is keeping the group alive and to go on and kidnap another day. And this is obviously counterproductive. I would

add that when we talk about al-Qaida in the Maghreb, the group has not exactly been flourishing entirely, in large measure because of the excellent counterterrorism efforts of your own government, which have made its traditional area of operations along the Mediterranean littoral less appealing and less successful, and as a result, it has tried to find an outlet to the south and is financing itself through these hostage takings.

I think that we absolutely need to build political will behind a no-concessions policy that makes these hostage takings much less frequent. And I think it is also demonstrably true that those countries that have embraced such a policy have seen that the terrorists are less willing, or less eager, to kidnap their nationals. So, we're not there yet, but we need to work together to make this an accepted policy. Obviously, we understand the enormous emotional concern that hostage taking causes for families, for communities, for nations, and it is a very difficult thing to encourage countries not to make concessions, but at the same time, the hostages of the future, I think, will be a lot better off if we don't pay those ransoms, and the terrorist groups will really be on the ropes and in trouble if we maintain our resolve.

HOGGE: Yvonne Terlingen of Amnesty International in the back.

YVONNE TERLINGEN: Thank you very much. I was delighted to hear you say talk about the non-glamorousness of criminal trials, to try terrorists, because that is music to our ears, as you can imagine. We very much agree with you that that's the best way to go about those trials, rather than resorting to military commissions. I'm also delighted to hear about the emphasis that you are paying to engaging with the United Nations, and a new emphasis on human rights in the struggle against terrorism.

And, in particular, I want to commend the United States on the leading role that they have played in the passing of Resolution 1904. Now, it's, I suppose, quite well known that there were many states increasingly reluctant to cooperate with the targeted sanctions regime and the listing of terrorist suspects, and I presume that one of the reasons for that was that the rule of law was notably absent from the regime, and 1904 is an important step to start addressing that. However, as you know, the ombudsman that has been created does not appear to have the power to make recommendations. I'd very much like to hear from you what sort of person you would like to see appointed as an ombudsperson to review the listing and de-listing, because the qualifications in 1904 list a whole range of qualifications that go from security councils and sanctions regime to human rights and justice and rule of law.

And secondly, in terms of the fact that the ombudsman can analyze, but not make, recommendations, how would you like his office, or her office, to see development? Thank you.

BENJAMIN: I confess that we were so happy to achieve agreement on the ombudsman that I'm not sure I've gone much further in my thinking on that. Obviously, we want someone of character and integrity who is prepared to carry out, in an appropriate way, the strictures, the mission of the Security Council resolution. I think that it's -- one of my concerns is that we get someone quickly, because that is a very high priority. I think, beyond that, I'm going to allow the diplomats to work their magic and come up with the right person and not put

down anything on paper that will make their lives any more difficult, because I think that they have a good idea of what kind of person is needed, and I would say that from past practice -- and I'm thinking here of someone like Richard Barrett and some of the other people who are involved in the UN bodies right now -- we'll come up with someone very good.

HOGGE: In the front row, here.

BRYAN GROVES: Thank you. I'm Bryan Groves with the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point. My question, Mr. Ambassador, is in regards to the narrative that you mentioned, that the administration wants to have to counter the terrorist narrative of various terrorist groups, particularly al-Qaida and its associated movements like Lashkar-e-Taiba. I think that those movements have had some success in their narrative. Recently, you've mentioned a number of things that seem to be related to the administration's attempt to counter that in terms of -- through its words and through its actions -- demonstrating that the U.S. is not a predatory power. I think perhaps the good governance, human rights, rule of law, and other things are perhaps, at least tangentially, related to this as well, but I'm interested in other concrete, specific steps that the administration is pursuing in this counter-narrative.

BENJAMIN: Well, let me mention one very big one. We're drawing down in Iraq. I don't think that there are any, that there are many other things you could point to that are as much at odds with the al-Qaida narratives than the demonstration that the United States does not seek to have an enduring presence, permanent bases, or to in any way control the sovereign nation of Iraq. I think it's just an absolute refutation of the narrative.

Similarly, the President's emphatic remarks about -- that we are not staying in Afghanistan forever. That we are there to do a mission, that this mission is ultimately about the Afghan people, too, and the kind of work that has gone on on the ground in Afghanistan, I think, ought to demonstrate that now. You know, the al-Qaida narrative has a certain amazing circularity, so that virtually everything can be reinterpreted in a way that is seen to support that narrative, and I don't think we're deluding ourselves into thinking that we are going to persuade those who have already been seduced by it.

But our goal, certainly, is to continue to make that narrative more implausible to those who are not already -- who have not already bought into it. And, I think all these things, you know, the end of secret detention sites, the end of enhanced interrogations, all these things play a role in that regard. The very intense activity going on in terms of peacemaking in the region -- I think these all play an important role.

And I would just add, in closing, that we often have the habit of seeing our enemies as being ten feet tall, and with regard to the narrative, let's not forget, the most important development over the last few years is that they failed to mobilize large numbers of people. They are still not facing the kind of recruitment shortage that we would like to see, but the kinds of fevered nightmares that we had in the immediate post-9/11 period have not come to pass, and I think that that is an indication that this is not a narrative -- that is to say, the al-Qaida narrative -- is not one that is congenial to most of their target audience, and I think over time it's becoming

even less appealing, particularly when they themselves undermine it by engaging in brutality, as they did, for example, in Iraq and as they continue to in Afghanistan.

STEFAN BARRIGA: Thank you very much. I am Stefan Barriga from the Permanent Mission of Liechtenstein. Ambassador, I have a question regarding the issue of international humanitarian law. Can you tell us what the current administration's thinking is as to whether you're interested in any changes to the standards of international humanitarian law as they relate to the phenomena of terrorism. There were some, I think, thoughts on this in the previous administration. I wonder where the current administration stands on that.

Connected to that, I think, is actually the question of the comprehensive convention, where a major outstanding issue is how to deal with the definition of terrorism in a situation of conflict, so I think there is an important correlation here. And just a very brief addition to that: you mention the United States is open to bridges to this gap on the comprehensive convention. Wouldn't it be in the U.S. interest to actually be proactively pushing for a conclusion of the comprehensive convention, in particular as such a success would strongly reinvigorate the multilateral commitment at the UN to fighting terrorism? Thank you.

BENJAMIN: As I said before, we'd very much like to see a positive conclusion to the talks. This is diplomacy, and we'll push hard and talk to all the appropriate people and have the consultations and the meetings, and it's been going on for a long time, and, you know, we -- it's very important to us to get it right in the end.

As for the issue on humanitarian law that you raise, I'm -- counterterrorism gives you a pretty broad remit, but I am going to leave to my colleague Harold Coe any discussions of what we do and do not support in the realm of international law and crimes of terrorism. Harold was the Dean of Yale Law School and I would be foolhardy to trod upon his turf. So, I am sorry to give you that unsatisfying answer, but there it is.

ISMAIL CHEKKORI: Thank you, Ambassador, for -- I am introducing myself. I am Ismail Chekkori from the Permanent Mission of Morocco. So, I thank you very much for this focused and comprehensive presentations, and we're all happy and encouraged to hear, once again, that the engagement of the new administration is based more on consensus [indiscernible], cooperation, and also capacity building. Actually, I would like to come back to what has been mentioned by the Ambassador of Algeria, and I would like to thank him for that. And, actually, Morocco is sharing the same concerns about the activism of al-Qaida in this region.

Of course, with what happened recently about hostage taking, our concerns are also about other source of finances, of terrorist acts, and I'm thinking about all form of trafficking. Human trafficking, small arms trafficking, and drug traffickings, with the connections with other sub-regions. West African, we heard many times that they have concerns about decreasing activities, but -- and connections between terrorists and also traffickers.

So, and we think that's the responsibility of fighting terrorism in this region is primarily the responsibility of the states of the region with the help, of course, of international community, and it's our

responsibility to create an atmosphere favorable to build more effective cooperation at all levels to try to fight against this threat, this threat in our sub-region, so thank you very much, Ambassador, for the presentation.

BENJAMIN: Let me just say that we strongly agree with the notion that the problems of the Maghreb and the Sahel are first and foremost to be resolved by the states of the region, and we have been very supportive of the efforts to convene a leaders' summit in Bamako, and I testified on this issue not too long ago in Congress with my colleague Johnnie Carson, the Assistant Secretary of State for Africa, and he has coined the very good phrase, I think, that we are most helpful when we lead from the side on this sort of issue, so we're eager to help with capacity building, with political support with anything we can do, but it is very much a problem for those in the region to deal with in the first instance, and we're quite happy that they are moving in that direction.

HOGUE: Dan, we have a question from a real live newsman, John Heilprin of the Associated Press.

JOHN HEILPRIN: Hi, thank you. My question is, how much of a concern or hindrance to your efforts do you view the fact that during the past year, the United Nations' ability and willingness to investigate major fraud and corruption within its ranks has greatly diminished? There was an anti-corruption unit that was disbanded at the end of 2008 that had done investigations into international and U.S. funding in places like Afghanistan and Iraq that obviously is very much connected to the type of work you're talking about.

BENJAMIN: I'm going to take refuge in the excuse that I work in Washington and leave to my colleagues at USUN, at the mission here, any remarks on any investigations. There are so many things that land on my desk every day that have nothing to do with any investigations, corruption fraud, or what have you, that I'm happy to off-load this one to others. All I can tell you is that we are very much encouraged by what the UN bodies dealing with terrorism, or counterterrorism, more appropriately, have been doing. Several of them are here. I've met with them all on multiple occasions. Several of their leaders are here. We think their direction is on balance, right, and we're very much encouraged and certainly in the organizations that I've been dealing with, those have not been -- there've been no allegations of any kind raised and I'm delighted about that. They're good partners and I look forward to deepening the cooperation.

ANN PHILLIPS: My name is Ann Phillips. I'm on the board of IPI. Thank you very much for joining us today. Forgive my hoarse voice, I'm getting over laryngitis. I'm not sure in which decade it occurred in -- I believe it was in the seventies -- there was a significant amount of violence in Europe. There were terrorist groups such as the Baader-Meinhoff, the Brigidine Standardly, and other groups that really, really fomented terror among the citizens, and their profile of the people that they attracted was similar, in some ways, to the group from Saudi Arabia that were involved in 9/11 and so forth. Anyhow, eventually, it just sort of petered out. They spent themselves, if you will. And I wonder if you conceive of this possibly happening with these groups. You point to the fact that the recruiting has dwindled, that -- I mean, there are still obviously acts of violence -- but that there's been no act of terrorism comparable to 9/11 and so forth, that you're optimistic about that. Can it be that this ultimately will

burn itself out or peter out in the way that these terrorist groups in Europe did in that decade?

BENJAMIN: Well, it's a very interesting question. Academics talk about the lifespan of terrorist movements, or terrorist waves, as being generational. It takes thirty or so years for a terrorist movement to go its course. That may be true. In my former life as an academic researcher, I would be interested in that as an analytic question. I have to say that when we're dealing with groups that believe deeply in mass casualty attacks, unlike Baader-Meinhoff, which believed in very targeted violence focusing on symbolic individuals, we really have no luxury to speculate about the eventual burnout of some of these groups. And it's also important to remember that their burning out is large -- is to an important extent, a function of their failure to succeed at the violence that they seek to carry out. The German authorities, for example, got very good at hunting down Baader-Meinhoff operatives, at drying up the sources of support for the group. It took a number of years, but they were very effective at that, and I view our counterterrorism efforts, both nationally and internationally, as being analogous to that, and, you know, there's the famous -- there's the famous statement that terrorism is about deeds and about having to demonstrate to a larger audience, through symbolism, its effectiveness. I'm forgetting right now -- Prince Kropotkin's particular remark. If anyone here can remind me, I'll be very pleased, but the point is if they are frustrated by social resolve, by broad-based societal rejection of their violence, then they find it very hard to get new followers, and that's what we're all about.

HOGGE: If there are no more questions, I just want to wrap it up by saying, Dan, a number of the questioners have begun their questions by saying how much they welcome the kind of attitude you as an American diplomat bring to this community. If I can speak, as we say at the UN, in my national capacity, I, as your fellow American, also welcome it. It's very different from the kinds of sounds that the Americans were making here some years ago and I particularly am grateful to you for coming to IPI and delivering this talk today.

BENJAMIN: My pleasure.

HOGGE: Thanks.

BENJAMIN: My pleasure. Good questions.