MICHAEL T. McCAUL, TEXAS
CHAIRMAN

BENNIE G. THOMPSON, MISSISSIPPI
RANKING MEMBER

One Hundred Thirteenth Congress
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20515

December 17, 2014

The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama:

Three years ago, your Administration released a national strategy for *Empowering Local Partners to Prevent Violent Extremism in the United States,* and corresponding implementation plan. Since that time, the threat posed by homegrown violent Islamist extremism has only intensified with the rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), the proliferation of al Qaeda affiliates around the globe, and the spread of jihadi propaganda.

Attorney General Eric Holder recently noted in a statement announcing the beginning of a series of new federal programs designed to counter violent extremism (CVE) that "few threats are more urgent" than this one. I agree, and I believe protecting the United States from the danger posed by jihadist networks and homegrown extremists will require a diverse set of departments, agencies and programs; willing partnerships with local communities; international partners; and an informed public.

To assist in these efforts, as Chairman of the House of Representatives Committee on Homeland Security, I initiated a review of the Administration's CVE policies and programs in order to identify strengths, weaknesses, and remaining gaps in our approach to combatting the extremist ideology espoused by al Qaeda, al Qaeda's affiliated networks around the globe, and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Sham (ISIS), and other violent Islamist groups. As I wrote to your Homeland Security and Counterterrorism Advisor Lisa Monaco in May 2014, this issue is vital to the national security of the Unites States and demands our mutual cooperation. Though I have not yet received a reply to this letter, I have been encouraged by the Administration's willingness to brief the Committee on these efforts. Programs such as those described by the Attorney General are, at first glance, steps in the right direction.

However, while the initial stages of my review have revealed progress made in federal CVE programs, there are continued areas of concern within the Administration's

approach to the threat of violent Islamist extremism and overall CVE efforts. I share these in the hopes of highlighting where more can be done to better protect our citizens from the growing threat of radicalization. These include:

1) The lack of a clearly defined, overall lead agency. The 2011 CVE strategy and corresponding implementation plan were intended to clarify guidance to the departments and agencies engaging in CVE efforts. Instead, the 2011 strategy and Strategic Implementation Plan (SIP) fail to clarify a specific lead agency for carrying out CVE policies. In particular, the SIP identifies "leads" responsible for "convening pertinent partners to identify, address, and report on steps that are being taken, or should be taken, to ensure activities are effectively executed." This is worthwhile but does not resolve the need for national-level management of all CVE activities by a single agency. In fact, CVE efforts are especially vulnerable to suffer from a lack of clear leadership particularly because a successful CVE program necessarily requires the involvement of a diverse set of actors in its execution. Further, the lack of a lead agency has a cascading effect that weakens CVE efforts.

2) The lack of an overall definition of CVE. Though the 2011 CVE SIP provides a definition of "violent extremist," such clarity is lacking when it comes to exactly how to define "CVE." In particular, officials appear to have conflicting understandings of exactly what sets CVE apart from broader counterterrorism or general community outreach. This confusion is only compounded by the fact that multiple agencies play a role in CVE efforts, leading to potential conflicts between federal entities, as well as redundancies and gaps.

3) The lack of budgeting for and accounting of CVE efforts and reliable personnel figures. In your May 23, 2013 speech at the National Defense University, you noted that a successful counterterrorism strategy "requires sustained engagement, but it will also require resources." This is just as true for our domestic CVE efforts as it is for our military operations and foreign assistance programs – and yet we have found the Administration unable to provide a precise figure detailing the total number of personnel and resources dedicated fully or partially to CVE. We have also noticed a conspicuous lack of a CVE line item in your Administration's annual budget request.[1] In many cases, those devoting their time to CVE programs carry out their work while simultaneously serving in other capacities, or while on temporary detail from other offices and agencies. This approach is unlikely to foster a sustainable professional environment. The absence of any baseline CVE budget is evidence that the resources devoted to CVE are likely anemic. To argue that CVE efforts are a priority for your Administration demands a good faith accounting of the resources expended and the resources required. Neither of these are so far available. Congress can be a better partner in this effort once we are provided with this basic information.

---

[1] On September 12, 2014 I wrote your Director of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), Mr. Shaun Donovan on this issue, and requested that OMB include an accounting of CVE programs in their upcoming FY2016 budget request and subsequent requests.

4) The lack of established metrics for success. The 2011 SIP promises the creation of "indicators of impact to supplement" performance measures to evaluate whether federal CVE "activities are having the intended effects." It also makes clear that departments and agencies will be responsible for evaluating their own CVE efforts. Thus far in our review, the Committee has not identified many examples of such metrics employed at the agency level to monitor progress toward identified CVE objectives. Ad hoc examples of metrics (such as the FBI's plan to institute a CVE outreach measure to the performance evaluations of Special Agents in Charge at FBI field offices) are encouraging but are not indicative of a coordinated effort to evaluate CVE performance across the board. Moreover, the Committee does not have confidence that these types of internal self-evaluations have much merit, and instead suggests finding ways to increase Congressional oversight, auditing, and external assessments of CVE programs.

5) Unclear coordination between domestic and foreign CVE efforts. As the SIP notes, "the delineation between domestic and international [violent extremism] is becoming less rigid" and therefore "departments and agencies must ensure coordination between our domestic and international CVE efforts." While all partners agree on the logic of this approach, the Committee was surprised to learn that State Department representatives do not attend "Group of Four" meetings, a regular forum for interagency collaboration on CVE including the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the Department of Justice (DOJ), the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC).

Despite these areas of concern, in recent months the Committee has been encouraged by some efforts of agencies responsible for CVE programs. These include:

1) Efforts to formalize communication and cooperation between partner agencies. The Committee recognizes an improvement in communication and cooperation regarding the CVE effort, specifically between DHS, DOJ, FBI, and NCTC. Representatives from each of the above listed agencies/departments meet regularly to discuss CVE efforts. Additionally, we acknowledge that despite the non-specified and non-allocated budget for CVE, the above listed agencies/departments have worked together to provide necessary manpower, resources, and funding to continue the CVE effort.

2) Improved community outreach efforts. There appears to have been some improvement in formalizing community outreach programs and developing Community Awareness Briefing (CAB) materials to educate communities on the threat of radicalization, as well as Community Resiliency Exercises (CREx), which are table-top simulations involving community leaders, state and local law enforcement, civic leaders, religious groups, and privacy advocates. These have been held in seven cities so far, and we hope to see them mature and expand further.

CAB briefing materials have also been utilized by U.S. Attorney's Offices in their community outreach or CVE efforts outside of the formal CAB process. Anecdotal evidence provided to the Committee suggests the "Group of Four" have received positive

feedback from local communities regarding the CAB and CREx. Committee staff have had the opportunity to observe one CREx and community engagement roundtable in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Secretary of Homeland Security Johnson attended this same exercise and underscored DHS's commitment to working with the community to build an effective CVE program. Cabinet-level leadership such as his is desperately needed, and I am supportive of his personal investment in this issue.

3) The creation of a specific CVE coordinator for the Department of Homeland Security, and the establishment of specific CVE points of contact at 26 FBI Field Offices. That various departments and agencies have made efforts to specify who is responsible for implementing CVE policies is a common-sense step forward. The Committee believes this demonstrates not only a step toward greater transparency, but also the growth of a CVE workforce specifically dedicated to meeting their agency's CVE objectives. The Committee hopes this will increase accountability on CVE programs.

These initial findings are based on our preliminary examination of CVE efforts – but the Committee will need to continue our scrutiny of these programs to ensure they are as effective as possible. Toward that end, I write to request answers to the following questions by January 30, 2015:

Community Engagement

1. In what ways has the "depth, breadth, and frequency of the federal government engagement with and among communities" on counterterrorism security measures been improved since the release of the 2011 SIP?
    a. How many DHS Civil Rights and Civil Liberties (CRCL) roundtables have been held?
2. Both the 2011 CVE strategy and corresponding SIP discuss the importance of engaging with "communities that are being targeted [for recruitment] by violent extremists." How have these communities been identified?
    a. What feedback has the interagency received from these communities in regard to this outreach?
3. What is the mechanism for feedback and follow-up after each CVE exercise?

Intervention with At-Risk Individuals

1. Did CRCL implement a "campus youth community engagement plan" to engage with young adults on the topic of violent extremism?
2. Has the U.S. government expanded analysis in "the role of the internet in radicalization to violence and how virtual space can be leveraged to counter violent extremism?"
3. Has DHS developed "practitioner friendly summaries of current research and literature reviews about the motivations and behaviors associated with single-actor terrorism and disengagement from violent extremism?"
4. Has the Administration "improved and increased" "communication to the American public about the threat posed by violent extremist groups, myths, and

misperceptions about violent extremist radicalization and what we are doing to counter the threat? If so, How?

5. After an at-risk individual is identified, what is the current procedure for determining if he/she is a threat? What is the current procedure to refer an at-risk individual to a support group and/or provide further assistance?

Identifying Programs to Assist Grassroots CVE Efforts

1. Did DHS oversee an online portal to support engagement by government officials and law enforcement with communities targeted by violent extremist radicalization?
2. Did the U.S. government build a digital engagement capacity in order to expand, deepen, and intensify our engagement efforts?
3. Has DHS developed an "integrated open source database to help inform CVE programs?"
4. Has DHS continued to host follow-up "National CVE Workshops" to bring together intelligence commanders from major metropolitan areas and fusion center directors to increase their understanding of CVE?
5. Have DHS, DOJ, and FBI reviewed information-sharing protocols to identify ways of increasing dissemination of products to State, local, and tribal authorities?
    a. What changes have been made since the release of the 2011 CVE SIP?
6. Has the Administration "increase(d) the capacity of communities to directly challenge violent extremist ideologies and narratives?"
7. Has the Administration drafted a strategy to address online violent extremist radicalization?

Leadership

1. How effective are U.S. Attorneys as the main Point of Contact for CVE efforts in each district? Considering their already taxed workload, how much of their time is allotted for CVE?
2. What are the future goals and objectives of the Administration's CVE effort and what is the strategy for achieving those objectives?
3. Are there plans to increase the budget and manpower allocated for CVE efforts?
4. What is the current chain of command for CVE related incidents and initiatives?

Evaluations and Transparency

1. How many "regular reports on community engagement" were disseminated by the National Task Force for community engagement, which is led by DOJ and DHS?
2. How many case studies were produced by DHS on preoperational indicators for State and local law enforcement since 2011?
3. How many case studies has DHS generated of known and suspected terrorists and assessments of radicalization to violence to share with local partners since 2011?
4. How have DHS and other participating agencies reviewed, evaluated, and incorporated the feedback provided by participants at the various community engagement roundtables, CREXs, and CABs?

While there have been positive developments on your administration's CVE efforts, there are still fundamental problems which will hinder your long term success mitigating the threat of violent Islamist extremism in the United States. I appreciate your attention to this matter and request your assistance in obtaining the information necessary to ensure our country develops robust and effective CVE programs and policies. If your staff needs further clarification about this review, please contact Mr. Alan Carroll on my staff at (202) 226-8417.

Sincerely,

MICHAEL T. McCAUL
Chairman