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State-Sponsored Terrorism Unacceptable, Townsend Says
Homeland security adviser led U.S. delegation to Riyadh conference

State sponsorship of terrorism is unacceptable, undermines the struggle of free nations fighting terrorism and must be eradicated, says the head of the U.S. delegation to a counterterrorism conference in Saudi Arabia.

Frances Fragos Townsend, President Bush's homeland security adviser and deputy national security adviser for combating terrorism, told Counter Terrorism International Conference attendees in Riyadh on February 5 that the U.S. message has been clear and consistent: "[A]ny person, organization, or government that protects or harbors terrorists is complicit in the murder of the innocent and will be held accountable."

Townsend said the challenge facing nations fighting terrorism is to use the tools they have or can develop to deny terrorists the ability to operate, to diminish their support, and to eliminate the idea that violent extremism and fear are better than freedom.

"This struggle will last generations, but that does not excuse us from taking immediate, concrete, determined steps to improve every aspect of the fight against terrorism," Townsend said.

She urged conference delegates from more than 60 nations and international organizations to condemn state sponsorship and demand its end.

"Defeating terrorism demands strong leadership, shared responsibility and accountability, and a commitment to change," the speaker said.

Following is the text of Townsend's remarks:

(begin text)

Remarks by Frances Fragos Townsend
Assistant to the President for Homeland Security and
Deputy National Security Advisor for Combating Terrorism

Counterterrorism International Conference Riyadh 2005
Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

February 5, 2005

On behalf of the President, I want to extend our warm and heartfelt appreciation to the Saudi Arabian government for hosting this event. So recently after hosting pilgrims from around the world making their hajj and so close to historic municipal elections, the leadership and commitment the Saudis have shown towards finding practical and effective ways to fight terrorism are commendable. And I must say, the courage and bravery of all Saudi counterterrorism forces, most especially Mabahith, is laudable and no doubt a source of enormous pride for all citizens of the Kingdom. Here in Saudi Arabia, many lives have been lost and more have been wounded in the fight against evil. To the injured and to the families of the killed, I say 'thank you' – as a result of your sacrifice, the world is safer.

I should also note that eight days from today, February 14, 2005, marks the 60th anniversary of the historic meeting between Saudi Arabia's King Abd al-Aziz and then U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt aboard the cruiser U.S.S. Quincy at Great Bitter Lake in Egypt. These two visionary leaders forged an enduring relationship that has weathered many challenges from the Cold War to the terrorism we face today. And it is an honor to be invited here representing my country during this special anniversary of what can only be described as a critically important strategic

partnership.

In working closely with the Saudi leadership over the past few years, together we have developed some key lessons about combating terrorism. I would like to share some thoughts on the critical elements we have identified to fight and win the fight against terror from our close cooperation with Saudi Arabia.

Leadership, intelligence gathering and sharing, crisis management, international cooperation, operational skill and capacity, basic police work, financial acumen, forensic capacity, cultural and religious understanding, and media and information strategies are all part of the long list that each country must cultivate and tailor to meet its own needs.

The most important of these, as we have learned in recent years and across our 60-year relationship, is leadership and the shared vision between leaders on how to fight against the scourge of terrorism.

In this context, even before the horrific attacks in Riyadh on May 13, 2003, the U.S. and Saudi Arabia had been increasing counterterrorism cooperation in the wake of 9/11. The events of May 13 provided added impetus to that cooperation and we have witnessed first-hand the comprehensive Saudi approach to the war on terror. Shortly after May 13, Saudi Arabia's King, Crown Prince and other senior leaders declared that terrorism would not deter efforts toward reform and development, and that all of Saudi society had a role in countering extremists and their espousal of hate and their indiscriminate use of violence.

Saudi Arabia's leaders understand that the Saudi people expect law enforcement and security forces to find and capture violent extremists. Safety and security for the entire society come before attempting to change the hearts and minds of those planning or carrying-out terrorist acts. There can be neither negotiation nor accommodation with those who advocate capturing, maiming and killing innocents.

The world cannot succeed in defeating global terrorism without Saudi Arabia's victory over terrorism and extremism on its own soil. We stand with the Saudis in that fight and this conference is a testament to their commitment – to their dedication to combating terrorism.

While the media has focused on terrorist acts and the violent confrontations, we have noted that much more is happening in Saudi Arabia. The Saudi government and media have begun to educate Saudis about the dangers of extremism. Parents, educators, and government and religious leaderships are playing an increasing role in speaking out against extremism. Greater efforts are necessary, however, if we are to succeed in eradicating terrorism from the Kingdom and the world.

In a broader context, I believe that Saudi Arabia's efforts to improve the economy, commerce, education and political participation will in time provide other, constructive outlets for young Saudi citizens. That effort will be the foundation stone to the Kingdom's long-term strategy in defeating terrorism and reinforcing a sense of optimism and hope.

Defeating terrorism demands strong leadership, shared responsibility and accountability, and a commitment to change. We recently witnessed successful, democratic elections in Iraq. These follow closely on free and fair elections in Afghanistan and the West Bank and Gaza. These events – if allowed to resonate – are a measure of dramatic change. We are also seeing an historic change in the Israeli/Palestinian situation, one that can lead to the fulfillment of President Bush's vision of two states living side by side in peace and security.

But more needs to be done. Incredibly, there are still governments who sponsor and harbor terrorists – such behavior is unacceptable and seeks to undermine the struggles of all free nations to fight against terrorism. But as we succeed in this fight against evil, their number has declined.

President Bush's vision and message for the world has been crystal clear: any person, organization, or government that protects or harbors terrorists is complicit in the murder of the innocent and will be held accountable. "We will starve terrorists of funding, turn them one against another, drive them from place to place, until there is no refuge or no rest. And we will pursue nations that provide aid or safe haven to terrorism. Every nation in every region now has a decision to make – either you are with us or you are with the terrorists. From this day forward any nation that continues to harbor or support terrorism will be regarded by the United States as a hostile regime." (September 20, 2001).

State sponsors of terrorism are with the terrorists and therefore against all of us. They are the cowards who hide behind the hateful and murderous surrogates whom they arm, finance, and harbor. They seek influence through fear and intimidation. President Bush said this week, "Iran remains the world's primary state sponsor of terror." We must be unanimous in our strong condemnation of such state sponsorship of terrorism and demand its end.

Much larger than the pool of state sponsors is the group of allies who condemn terror and part of our effort to carry out President Bush's vision is to work with many countries to improve their capabilities and legal frameworks for combating terrorism. We have relied on the support of our partners to ensure that al-Qaida and other terrorist organizations are constantly scrambling for a secure base of operations. The partnership of Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and others has been, and will continue to be, essential to ensuring that al-Qaida is never able to reestablish comfortable sanctuary anywhere in the world. In the fight against terrorism, nothing could be more clear – if you write a check or provide a safe house, if you allow your laws to remain weak and if you fail to pass critical information to your neighbors about terrorists who threaten the region, if you knowingly allow terrorists to move freely through your country, you have sided with extremism, and against the free world.

The challenge to all of us is to use the tools we have and can develop, to deny terrorists the ability to operate, diminish their support until they are without money and without home, and crush the idea that violent extremism and fear is better than freedom. We do not have the luxury of time. As Mohammed bin Rashid of Dubai said last November at the Arab Forum, "To substitute decisive action by turning around in vicious circles, disagreement about the tiger's skin before hunting it, looking for a conspiracy or a wicked plan behind every new thing is all to consecrate the current situation, resist reform and postpone change." Do not allow yourselves to turn around in vicious circles at this conference, or to walk away without knowing how to better hunt the tiger of terrorism. This struggle will last generations, but that does not excuse us from taking immediate, concrete, determined steps to improve every aspect of the fight against terrorism.

We come from more than 60 countries and international organizations. We are the product of different cultures, different religions, different educations, different forms of government and many different experiences. But today I invite you to put differences aside and seek common ground. Each of us here is a son or daughter, husband or wife, father or mother. And so like you, I am here to learn how I might make the world safer for my children and someday for their children. We must work today that our children may inherit a world of freedom with the moral clarity to recognize evil and the courage to fight against it.

(end text)

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