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U.S. Commitment to the 3+1 Counterterrorism Dialogue

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Opening Remarks at 3 + 1 Group on Tri-Border Area Security

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[As prepared for delivery]

Most governments in our hemisphere understand the seriousness of the threat that terrorism poses, and that no society is immune from attack.

Some countries in our hemisphere have lived with terrorism for decades, while others, fortunately, have been largely free of terrorism. After 9/11 we learned that terrorism threatens everyone, and that the people who attacked us are willing to attack anyone, anywhere.

Our partners in the 3+1 know this. You understand that our nations are open societies that derive strength from cultures that respect individual rights, including the freedom to go and live wherever we please. Together we value the number and intensity of links among our people, businesses and institutions.

These liberties and intermingling of our societies are precious assets, but they are also susceptible to exploitation by those who seek to hurt us.

The United States is committed to work with friendly nations around the globe, and especially in our hemisphere, to ensure that terrorists cannot take advantage of our free societies and our vibrant interaction to attack us here.

In the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT), the 3+1 dialogue is among our highest priorities. This is not only because of the progress we have achieved in addressing security challenges in the region of the 3, but because of this mechanism's potential as a model for other regional cooperation efforts.

The US cannot win the GWOT alone. In our hemisphere, we need strong networks of cooperation. The 3+1 is an

important one. We are interested in building others in this region, and remain committed to strengthening the international entities that have arisen to address terrorism. These include CICTE, which was created at Argentina's initiative, and the UN Counterterrorism Committee, from which we shall hear more tomorrow.

Our policy is to engage with willing, capable and serious partners, and where appropriate, provide the material assistance needed to improve their counterterrorism capabilities. Over the next two days we will review some of the initiatives we have taken together in the last two years to strengthen our posture against terrorism. We may find that some initiatives have been successful, while others need more work, or re-thinking.

The United States remains committed to this dialogue, and we will seek to do everything we can to make available the resources, expertise and training we need to confront the menace of terrorism.

Looking ahead, one of greatest challenges we anticipate is that our success in preventing attacks, seizing terrorists' assets, and denying them access to our countries, may persuade us to believe the problem is "under control."

As we grapple with the problems that confront all our societies--ensuring economic growth, improving education, protecting our environment--we will be pressed and tempted to divert attention and resources from the war on terrorism. Politicians, media pundits, and even some of the public, are saying that we've done enough. Yielding to such pressures would be a grave mistake.

Any examination of the terrorist groups that threaten us today will show that they have demonstrated great patience. The 9/11 attack of 2001 was first conceived in 1996. AQ took over 3 years to plan the bombings of the US Embassies in Africa in 1998. And terrorist planners entertained for many years a plot to bomb airliners over the Pacific Ocean before discarding the idea.

Moreover, as Islamic extremist terrorists have lost their sanctuaries, had their networks disrupted, and leadership decimated, they have become more unpredictable--and therefore dangerous--especially as their operational decision-making is now decentralized. The attacks in Madrid and Saudi Arabia were perpetrated by AQ-affiliated groups acting, for the most part, independent of direction and resources provided by UBL or his lieutenants.

This means that we need to develop and strengthen our capacity to quickly identify and target autonomous, self sustaining groups. We can't depend on being tipped about imminent attacks by the terrorists' central planners.

At the same time, we must remain vigilant to the threat posed by groups directed and supported by States that sponsor terrorism. And we must tighten the noose on the narco-terrorists of Colombia, denying them not only their main source of income--drug trafficking--but also arms and travel documents.

Our intelligence capabilities and border control systems, working together, will be the keys to all these efforts.

As regards the current threat, we believe that there are no operational cells of known extremist Islamic terrorist groups in Latin America. I think we all agree that we want to keep it that way.

The best way to accomplish this, in our view, is to deny terrorists the use of our territory for any purpose whatsoever--

whether fund-raising, propaganda, recruitment, or even rest and recuperation.

We've all seen media reports about terrorist links with organized crime gangs. While we can discount these reports as the product of journalists' overactive imaginations, we must recognize that places with overburdened law enforcement, poor border controls, and limited intelligence capabilities could certainly attract the attention of terrorists. Terrorists need money to carry out their operations and to sustain themselves, and such environments make it easier for them to both generate income from illicit activities--such as pirating goods, extortion, or smuggling--and move freely between legal jurisdictions, and plan attacks in anonymity.

Most of the Hemisphere's governments, and especially yours, are taking serious steps to shut down havens of lawlessness. We strongly support such efforts, especially where the key to success lies in cross-border cooperation. Such cooperation made it possible, for example, to bring to justice the terrorist financiers Assad Barakat, Sobhi Fayad, and Ali Nizad.

Out of this dialogue there have arisen important joint activities, such as the visits by your officials to our borders with Canada and Mexico to observe our cooperation mechanisms with our neighbors. We want to assess the value of that exercise here later today.

Last May we also brought our financial intelligence units together in Buenos Aires to discuss ways to better deny to terrorists the use of our financial systems. We want to continue to cooperate where needed, and where we can, to improve our partners' capabilities. Last month, for example, the United States provided to financial crime specialists from all three of your countries an advanced course on international case processing and money laundering. And shortly we will provide to Argentine authorities a first responder awareness course for a weapons-of-mass-destruction incident.

Over the next day and a half we will exchange views on this and other initiatives spawned by the 3+1 Dialogue. Many important cooperative activities you have undertaken among yourselves, with little involvement of the United States. Whether it is strengthening terrorism legislation, or the establishment of new institutions--such as a regional intelligence fusion center--to foster cross-border cooperation, we are very interested to hear more about them.

As always, we stand again ready to hear your concerns, ideas and suggestions for maximizing our support for this very important dialogue.

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