

NATIONAL STRATEGY  
for  
COUNTERTERRORISM  
of the United States of America

OCTOBER 2018







THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON, DC

My fellow Americans:

I made a solemn promise to the American people to spare no effort to preserve the safety and security of the United States. This National Strategy for Counterterrorism helps keep that promise. We must defeat the terrorists who threaten America's safety, prevent future attacks, and protect our national interests. This requires a new approach to combatting and preventing terrorism.

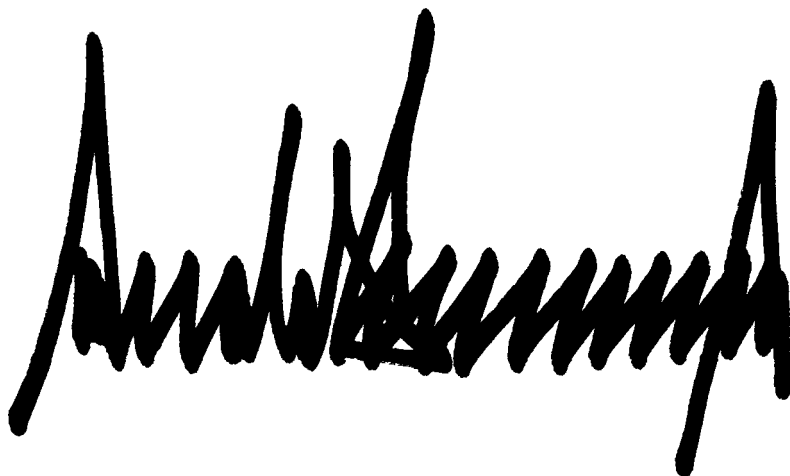
In fulfilling my promise to renew America's strength and security, I have revitalized our military, and we are now, through action and leadership, prevailing against the terrorists aiming to harm us and our interests. We are using all available tools at our disposal to combat terrorist groups, starve them of support, and prevent them from recruiting new followers. We are also disrupting terrorist threats within our own borders, from individuals mobilized to violence by a range of domestic and foreign terrorist ideologies and who threaten our safety.

This has not been easy. My Administration inherited a world in which the terrorist threat had become more complex and widespread than ever before. We, the people of the United States, face global terrorist networks and their affiliates. We face terrorist organizations backed by state sponsors. And we face homegrown threats inspired by terrorist propaganda.

The National Strategy for Counterterrorism recognizes the full range of terrorist threats that the United States confronts within and beyond our borders, and emphasizes the use of all elements of national power to combat terrorism and terrorist ideologies. It enhances our emphasis on targeting terrorist networks that threaten the United States and our allies and on disrupting and denying their ability to mobilize, finance, travel, communicate, and inspire new followers. We will deny terrorists the freedom to travel and communicate across international borders, and we will take action to limit their ability to recruit and radicalize online. We will combat the violent, extreme, and twisted ideologies that purport to justify the murder of innocent victims. We will also ensure that America's critical infrastructure is protected, in order to deter and prevent attacks, and is resilient so that we can quickly recover should it come under attack.

This National Strategy for Counterterrorism sets forth a new approach. We will protect our homeland, our interests overseas, and our allies and partners. We will defeat radical Islamist terrorists such as ISIS and al-Qa'ida, expand our agile counterterrorism toolkit to prevent future terrorist threats, deter emerging threats, roll back Iran's global terrorist network, and ensure our country's continued safety. Now, and in the future, we will secure our Nation and prevail against terrorism.

Sincerely,

A large, bold, black handwritten signature, characteristic of Donald Trump, consisting of several thick, sweeping strokes.

President Donald J. Trump

The White House

October 2018

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## We Remain a Nation at War

Today's terrorist landscape is more fluid and complex than ever. For this reason, counterterrorism remains a top priority for this Administration. Our principal terrorist enemies are radical Islamist terrorist groups that seek to conduct attacks globally, violate our borders, and radicalize and recruit potential extremists within the United States and abroad. We continue to face threats from Iran, the most prominent state sponsor of terrorism, through its global network of operatives and its ongoing support to an array of terrorist groups. Terrorists motivated by other forms of extremism also use violence to threaten the homeland and challenge United States interests. These terrorist threats are different in many ways, but they all seek to use violence to undermine the United States and disrupt the American way of life.

Since September 11, 2001, we have learned that winning the war on terrorism requires our country to aggressively pursue terrorists. We have also learned, however, that we must do more than merely kill or capture terrorists. We must dismantle terrorists' networks and sever the sources of strength and support that sustain them, that allow them to regenerate, and that permit them to adapt. To secure a lasting victory, we must also maintain sufficient

pressure on terrorist organizations to prevent them from reemerging.

This Administration has already taken significant steps to address the terrorist threat. Under the leadership of President Donald J. Trump, the United States has accelerated efforts to defeat those terrorists who pose a threat to the United States. For instance, working with coalition partners, we have

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- This strategy uses all available instruments of United States power to counter terrorism. We will defeat our enemies with the full force of America's strengths.
  - This strategy will protect the United States against all terrorists that threaten our country. We will not focus on a single organization but will counter all terrorists with the ability and the intent to harm the United States, our citizens, and our interests abroad.
  - This strategy places America First and emphasizes protection of the homeland—building strong borders, strengthening security at all ports of entry into the United States, protecting its critical infrastructure, and facilitating preparedness.
  - This strategy recognizes, however, that America First does not mean America alone. We will broaden our range of partners to combat radical Islamist terrorism, Iran-sponsored terrorism, and other forms of violent extremism; encourage capable partners to play a larger role in counterterrorism efforts; and assist other partners so that they can eventually address terrorist threats independently.

liberated nearly all of the territory once controlled by the self-declared Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) in Iraq and Syria. While we have made much progress, additional challenges remain. We must continually work to stay ahead of an adaptive enemy. This means that we must undertake additional efforts to prevent terrorists from acquiring or using weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and other advanced attack capabilities. We must prevent terrorists from exploiting new technologies in today's dynamic information environment, and we must counter terrorists' ability to recruit and radicalize online and through other means.

Likewise, experience has taught us that preparedness and prevention must be integral parts of our counterterrorism strategy. We must protect the homeland against the terrorist threat by building strong borders, securing United States infrastructure, and enhancing the preparedness of the American people.

Experience has also highlighted the importance of strong partnerships in sustaining our counterterrorism efforts. Whenever possible, the United States must develop more efficient approaches to achieve our security objectives, relying on our allies to degrade and maintain persistent pressure against terrorists.

This means collaborating so that foreign governments take the lead wherever possible, and working with others so that they can assume responsibility in the fight against terrorists. Domestically, we must empower our frontline defenders—our state and local law enforcement professionals—as well as many other government, civil society, and private sector partners to prevent and counter terrorism in the United States.

Building on the National Security Strategy and the Administration's progress to date, the National Strategy for Counterterrorism outlines how the United States will combat terrorism at home and abroad and keep America safe. Acting in accordance with this strategy, we will defeat our enemies, just as we have defeated the purveyors of oppression, fascism, and totalitarianism in previous wars. We will always remember September 11, 2001, and the sacrifices made by so many brave patriots in defense of our country against the evil scourge of terrorism. With that same spirit of service and self-sacrifice, we will safeguard the homeland, protect our way of life, and eliminate our enemy's ability to threaten our country. We are a nation at war—and it is a war that the United States will win.

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# INTRODUCTION

## The Path to Victory

The United States occupies a special role among nations as a vanguard of freedom, democracy, and constitutional governance. These luminous ideals must be assiduously defended in a world of increasing challenges and dangers from the forces that threaten America’s people, our vital interests, and the security and prosperity of our allies and partners.

Terrorists seek to undermine American ideals and the United States Government by using violence and propaganda to advance their depraved goals. After seventeen years of armed conflict and significant costs in American blood and treasure, our efforts to prevent and counter terrorism have met with mixed success. While we have succeeded in disrupting large-scale attacks in the homeland since 2001, we have not sufficiently mitigated the overall threat that terrorists pose.

Today’s terrorist threats have changed, and terrorist groups are now more geographically dispersed and their tactics more diversified. To address this evolving terrorist threat across the globe and within the homeland, our approach to counterterrorism must evolve. As President Donald J. Trump has

stated, “America is committed to adjusting our strategies to meet evolving threats and new facts. We will discard those strategies that have not worked—and will apply new approaches informed by experience and judgment.”

We must confront terrorists with the combined power of America’s strengths—our strong military, our law enforcement and intelligence communities, our civilian government institutions, our vibrant private sector, our civil society, our international partnerships, and the firm resolve of the American people. Harnessing our full potential, the spirit of innovation that has been key to our national greatness, and our tradition of working together toward our common goals, we will prevail and prevent terrorism from disrupting the American way of life.

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Through the National Strategy for Counterterrorism, we will achieve the following end states to safeguard our homeland, way of life, and shared interests:

- The terrorist threat to the United States is eliminated;
- Our borders and all ports of entry into the United States are secure against terrorist threats;
- Terrorism, radical Islamist ideologies, and other violent extremist ideologies do not undermine the American way of life; and
- Foreign partners address terrorist threats so that these threats do not jeopardize the collective interests of the United States and our partners.

To achieve these aims, this strategy adopts an America First approach to counterterrorism—one that is guided by United States interests; shaped by realistic assessments of both our challenges and our capabilities; and attuned to the important roles of our allies and partners, both foreign and domestic, in our shared counterterrorism efforts.

This strategy differs from previous strategies in that it adopts a more agile and expansive approach that addresses the full spectrum of terrorist threats to the United States, including our enemies overseas and the people they seek to influence and mobilize to violence in the United States. We will also confront the threat of terrorists in the United States who seek to further their political or social aims through unlawful acts of violence without foreign direction or inspiration. In this pursuit, we will continue to protect American freedoms, and we will be unwavering in our commitment to defeat all those who turn to violence in an attempt to destroy, disrupt, or impair our society.

Importantly, this America First approach will harness the full span of United States power and use every available tool to combat terrorism at home, abroad, and in cyberspace. This includes military and intelligence operations overseas, law enforcement actions at home and abroad, diplomatic engagement, and the use of financial tools. We will modernize and integrate existing counterterrorism tools so we can secure our borders through, among other things, more rigorous scrutiny of entry applications. We will also deploy new technologies precisely where they are needed and protect critical infrastructure in the United States from terrorist attacks. Finally, we will incorporate two of the most potent tools in the information environment: cyber operations and

strategic communications. These tools are an integral part of our counterterrorism activities, and we will continue to incorporate them when appropriate to maximize their effects.

In addition, this strategy prioritizes a broader range of non-military capabilities, such as our ability to prevent and intervene in terrorist recruitment, minimize the appeal of terrorist propaganda online, and build societal resilience to terrorism. This includes leveraging the skills and resources of civil society and non-traditional partners to diminish terrorists' efforts to radicalize and recruit people in the United States.

To defeat radical Islamist terrorism, we must also speak out forcefully against a hateful ideology that provides the breeding ground for violence and terrorism. We will expose the destructive, totalitarian nature of the ideology that fuels violent radical Islamist movements, such as ISIS and al-Qa'ida. We will reveal the way violent radical Islamist terrorists have killed, exploited, and betrayed Muslim communities, including women and children. Through our efforts, we will thwart terrorists' ability to exploit the Internet for directing, enabling, or inspiring attacks.

We will not do this alone. This strategy recognizes that effective counterterrorism requires a wide range of public and private sector partners as well as foreign partnerships. As President Trump stated, "We must seek partners, not perfection—and to make allies of all who share our goals." Accordingly, from civil society and state, local, tribal, and territorial governments to private sector partners and foreign allies, the full range of our partnerships must be enhanced to effectively prevent and counter terrorist activity, particularly as tactics

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**“But above all, we must be united in pursuing the one goal that transcends every other consideration. That goal is to meet history’s great test—to conquer extremism and vanquish the forces of terrorism.”**

PRESIDENT  
DONALD J. TRUMP

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## INTRODUCTION

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Through this new approach, the United States will integrate our instruments of national power to achieve our end states through the following strategic objectives:

The capacity of terrorists to conduct **attacks** in the homeland and against vital United States interests overseas is **sharply diminished**;



The **sources** of strength and support upon which terrorists rely are **severed**;



Terrorists' ability to **radicalize, recruit, and mobilize** to violence in the homeland is **diminished**;



Americans are **prepared and protected** from terrorist attacks in the homeland, including through more exacting border security and law enforcement actions;



Terrorists are **unable** to acquire or use **WMDs, including chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear weapons**, and other advanced weaponry; and



Public sector partners, private sector partners, and foreign **partners take a greater role** in preventing and countering terrorism.



and actors can change quickly. We will expect more of our partners in this fight, but they will never doubt our resolute commitment to defending our shared interests.

All the while, we will be pragmatic in our approach and mindful of the need to use our resources carefully. This strategy, therefore, prioritizes United States counterterrorism efforts against those terrorists with the ability and intent to harm the United States and our vital national interests and limits United States efforts overseas to those that directly bolster our national security. Likewise, to maximize the effectiveness of our actions, we will continue to integrate United States Government counterterrorism efforts. Finally, we will continually review the efficacy of our approach through independent assessments

(informed by research, intelligence, and analysis) to ensure that we are making measurable progress toward our strategic objectives. By rigorously monitoring our progress and measuring the impact of our activities, we can make informed adjustments when needed to advance our counterterrorism efforts.






















Guided by this strategy, rooted in American principles, and harnessing our inherent strengths as a nation, we will eliminate terrorists' ability to threaten America, our interests, and our engagement in the world. The United States—forever the sentinel of democracy and freedom—will prevail over terrorism and preserve the American way of life. Through our triumph, we will demonstrate that American strength remains a lasting force for good in the world.



























## NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR COUNTERTERRORISM AT A GLANCE

The strategic objectives are critical to reaching the desired end states, and the lines of effort are the means for achieving them.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES	
 <p>The capacity of terrorists to conduct attacks in the homeland and against vital United States interests overseas is sharply diminished</p>	 <p>Americans are prepared and protected from terrorist attacks in the homeland, including through more exacting border security and law enforcement actions</p>
 <p>The sources of strength and support upon which terrorists rely are severed</p>	 <p>Terrorists are unable to acquire or use Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD), including chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear weapons, and other advanced weaponry</p>
 <p>Terrorists' ability to radicalize, recruit, and mobilize to violence in the homeland is diminished</p>	 <p>Public sector partners, private sector partners, and foreign partners take a greater role in preventing and countering terrorism</p>

END STATES	
The terrorist threat to the United States is eliminated	     
Our borders and all ports of entry into the United States are secure against terrorist threats	     
Terrorism, radical Islamist ideologies, and other violent extremist ideologies do not undermine the American way of life	   
Foreign partners address terrorist threats so that these threats do not jeopardize the collective interests of the United States and our partners.	    

LINES OF EFFORT	
Pursue terrorist threats to their source	  
Isolate terrorists from financial, material, and logistical sources of support	   
Modernize and integrate a broader set of United States tools and authorities to counter terrorism and protect the homeland	    
Protect United States infrastructure and enhance preparedness	    
Counter terrorist radicalization and recruitment	  
Strengthen the counterterrorism abilities of international partners	   



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# THE TERRORIST ADVERSARY

The United States and our allies face an increasingly complex terrorist landscape, populated by a diverse array of actors employing new technologies and tactics to advance their agendas. The terrorist threat to the United States is growing more dynamic and diffuse as an increasing number of groups, networks, and individuals exploit global trends, including the emergence of more secure modes of communications, the expansion of social and mass media, and persistent instability across several regions.

Radical Islamist terrorists remain the primary transnational terrorist threat to the United States and its vital national interests. Prominent terrorist organizations, particularly ISIS and al-Qa'ida, have repeatedly demonstrated the intent and capability to attack the homeland and United States interests and continue to plot new attacks and inspire susceptible people to commit acts of violence inside the United States.<sup>1</sup> These groups stoke and exploit weak governance, conflict, instability, and longstanding political and religious grievances to pursue their goal of eliminating Western influence in majority Muslim countries and remaking Islamic society.

Radical Islamist terrorist groups have developed and used methods that have challenged United States counterterrorism efforts, including establishing state-like governing institutions within their safe havens, deploying sophisticated explosive

devices to defeat aviation security measures, and using high-quality media products to recruit extremists in the West. Future radical Islamist terrorists and other terrorists will continually adapt these and other tactics to their circumstances and the technological advances of the age. It is, therefore, critical that the United States counterterrorism posture be agile enough to adapt as well.

Radical Islamist terrorists have a violent extremist ideology that serves to create a common identity and sense of purpose for those susceptible to its core message. This vile ideology is used to indoctrinate new recruits to accept terrorist groups' goals and directives without question, and also allows these groups to maintain cohesion, ensure conformity, and justify the use of violence to meet the ideology's goals. It avails terrorists of a worldview that helps unify their efforts by fomenting conflict and attempts to legitimize terrorism by elevating the social status of

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**“ISIS is on a campaign of genocide, committing atrocities across the world. Radical Islamic terrorists are determined to strike our homeland, as they did on 9/11, as they did from Boston to Orlando to San Bernardino and all across Europe.”**

PRESIDENT  
DONALD J. TRUMP

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<sup>1</sup> The intelligence and law enforcement communities refer to an individual in the United States radicalized and mobilized to violence by radical Islamist terrorist ideologies as a homegrown violent extremist (HVE).

group members and absolving individuals from culpability for their participation in violence. Because of this, we must ensure that our efforts will undermine the appeal of this ideology of hate. Its resilience, power, and appeal make it a grave danger to not just our own nation's security but also that of our allies across the globe. Without the appeal of this ideology, radical Islamist terrorism has no foundation.

ISIS remains the foremost radical Islamist terrorist group and the primary transnational terrorist threat to the United States, despite ongoing United States and coalition civilian and military efforts that have diminished the group's footprint in Iraq and Syria, killed thousands of its members, and curtailed its global expansion. ISIS retains the financial and material resources and expertise to launch external attacks—including against United States interests—and its senior leaders continue to call for attacks against the United States. The group's global reach remains robust, with eight official branches and more than two dozen networks regularly conducting terrorist and insurgent operations across Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Middle East. Despite many setbacks, ISIS maintains a sophisticated and durable media and online presence that allows it to encourage and enable sympathizers worldwide to conduct dozens of attacks within target countries, including the United States. The increase in attacks by persons mobilized to violence in the United States underscores the ability of ISIS to inspire terrorist attacks.

ISIS has been innovative and determined in its pursuit of attacks in the West. The group has exploited weaknesses in European border security to great effect by capitalizing on the migrant crisis to seed attack operatives into the region. For instance, two of the perpetrators of the 2015 ISIS attacks in Paris, France, infiltrated the country by posing as migrants. Further, ISIS is continuing its efforts to circumvent European efforts to shore up border security by identifying

new routes. Europe's struggle to screen the people crossing its borders highlights the importance of ensuring strong United States borders so that terrorists cannot enter the United States.

In addition, the savagery of ISIS has caused a massive movement of millions of innocent refugees. Our battlefield successes, meanwhile, have given way to the flight of thousands of terrorists seeking to evade justice. As defeated fighters and their families disperse, the United States and our partners must remain vigilant to ensure that terrorists cannot evade our security measures to threaten our people and way of life.

Meanwhile, al-Qa'ida's global network remains resilient and poses an enduring threat to the homeland and United States interests around the world. Consistent United States-led counterterrorism pressure has removed many of its senior leaders and reduced the group's ability to operate in South Asia, but its affiliates continue to plan and carry out terrorist attacks against the United States and our allies, as well as raise funds from individual supporters through the international financial system. Affiliate resources are primarily focused on local and regional conflicts, but key operatives and elements within the network continue to seek out new opportunities to strike the homeland and United States interests and to inspire attacks inside the United States. Veteran al-Qa'ida leaders are working to consolidate and expand the group's presence in several regions, including in Syria, from which it aspires to launch new attacks against the United States and our allies.

Both ISIS and al-Qa'ida have inspired people susceptible to their malign influence to conduct terrorist attacks inside the United States. This will probably remain the most frequent form of radical Islamist terrorism in the United States for the next several years. Such attacks, motivated by a wide range of factors, will continue to be conducted primarily through the use of simple



tactics against predominantly soft targets. ISIS is likely to remain the main inspiration for such attacks, particularly if the group can retain its prominence and use social and mainstream media coverage to promote its violent message.

In addition to ISIS and al-Qa'ida, dozens of other radical Islamist terrorist groups are working to advance more locally focused insurgent or terrorist campaigns, while still posing a threat to United States persons and interests overseas. These groups, including Boko Haram, Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan, and Lashkar-e Tayyiba, employ a range of political and terrorist tactics to undermine local governments and conduct attacks. These organizations will probably prioritize regional goals over attacks against the homeland or United States interests because of resource constraints or political considerations. However, many of these groups are hostile to the United States, maintain networks of sympathizers around the world, and retain ties to ISIS or al-Qa'ida, underscoring their potential threat to United States interests.

Iran remains the most prominent state sponsor of terrorism, supporting militant and terrorist groups across the Middle East and cultivating a network of operatives that pose a threat in the United States and globally. These groups, most notably Lebanese Hizballah (Hizballah), use terrorism and other asymmetric means in partnership with Iran to expand their influence in Iraq, Lebanon, the Palestinian territories, Syria, and Yemen and to destabilize their rivals. Hizballah fields powerful military and intelligence elements, possesses large stocks of sophisticated arms, and maintains extensive networks of operatives and sympathizers overseas, including individuals in the homeland.

Through the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-Qods Force (IRGC-QF), Iran's primary terrorist support arm, the Government of Iran provides financial and material support, training, and guidance to Hizballah and other Shia militant groups operating in Bahrain, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen. It also supports HAMAS and other Palestinian terrorist groups. With operatives deployed around the world, the IRGC-QF has the capability to target United States interests and possibly the homeland.

There is also a broad range of revolutionary, nationalist, and separatist movements overseas whose use of violence and intent to destabilize societies often

puts American lives at risk. For example, the Nordic Resistance Movement is a prominent transnational, self-described nationalist-socialist organization with anti-Western views that has conducted violent attacks against Muslims, left-wing groups, and others. The group has demonstrated against United States Government actions it perceives are supportive of Israel and has the potential to extend its targeting to United States interests. Similarly, the neo-Nazi National Action Group, a terrorist organization that was banned by the United Kingdom in 2016

for its promotion of violence against politicians and minorities, operates mainly in the United Kingdom but has engaged with like-minded groups in the United States, Estonia, France, Germany, Latvia, and Poland—expanding the potential influence of its violent ideology. Likewise, Babbar Khalsa International seeks, through violent means, to establish its own independent state in India and is responsible for significant terrorist attacks in India and elsewhere that have claimed the lives of innocent civilians. Such groups may avoid or deprioritize targeting United States interests for now to avoid detracting from

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**“Iran and its proxies have bombed American embassies and military installations, murdered hundreds of American service members, and kidnapped, imprisoned, and tortured American citizens.”**

PRESIDENT  
DONALD J. TRUMP

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their core goals but frequently conduct assassinations and bombings against major economic, political, and social targets, heightening the risk to United States personnel and interests overseas.

Lastly, the United States has long faced a persistent security threat from domestic terrorists who are not motivated by a radical Islamist ideology but are instead motivated by other forms of violent extremism, such as racially motivated extremism, animal rights extremism, environmental extremism, sovereign citizen extremism, and militia extremism. Such

extremist groups attempt to advance their agendas through acts of force or violence. Notably, domestic terrorism in the United States is on the rise, with an increasing number of fatalities and violent nonlethal acts committed by domestic terrorists against people and property in the United States. The economic harm caused by domestic terrorists has also increased sharply as domestic terrorists have continued to destroy property, disrupt business, and perpetrate financial crimes that are designed to damage certain sectors of the United States economy.

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## PRIORITIZATION AND RESOURCING

As President Trump has noted, “America is a sovereign nation and our first priority is always the safety and security of our citizens.” The United States must, therefore, relentlessly focus on countering terrorism that jeopardizes American citizens and interests. We will not dilute our counterterrorism efforts by attempting to be everywhere all the time, trying to eradicate all threats. We can and will, however, optimize and focus our resources to effectively prevent and counter those terrorists who pose a direct threat to the United States homeland and vital national interests.

To combat what has become a more complex and geographically dispersed terrorist threat, the United States will prioritize integrated actions and resources against those terrorists that have both the intent and capability to attack the United States and our interests abroad. As noted, radical Islamist terrorists present the most dangerous transnational terrorist threat to the United States and our vital national interests as defined in the National Security Strategy. At the same time, the United States also faces threats from Iran-backed terrorist groups and other transnational terrorist organizations. In the homeland, we will continue to confront the rising threat of attacks committed by persons inspired and mobilized to violence by both radical Islamist ideologies and domestic terrorist ideologies.

Terrorists and the threats they pose, however, are not monolithic. The dangers posed by different terrorists vary by group and by region. The National Strategy for Counterterrorism, therefore, will guide the tools and approaches used for counterterrorism efforts and will generally defer to regional, functional, and group-specific strategies to prioritize terrorist groups based upon the threat they pose to our homeland and vital national interests.

In addition, counterterrorism efforts must be properly balanced across all instruments of national power and include the efforts of traditional and non-traditional partners. While the United States must retain the ability to strike at terrorism around the globe, non-military tools—such as law enforcement, intelligence, diplomacy, financial measures, stabilization, development, prevention, and intervention and reintegration programs—are also required to prevent and counter terrorism. We must, therefore, increase our focus on developing domestic and foreign partners’

non-military counterterrorism capabilities so they can act independently against terrorists.

Finally, as we embark on this new approach, we must rigorously monitor and assess our effectiveness and adjust operations accordingly. Annual independent strategic assessments informed by research, intelligence, and analysis will ensure that we are making measurable progress toward our strategic objectives. These assessments will identify the impediments to our effectiveness and recommend adjustments to the strategy to outpace dynamic adversaries. They will also ensure that our progress is sustainable as we continue to address the full range of contemporary national security challenges.

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**“When it comes to terrorism, we will do whatever is necessary to protect our nation.”**

PRESIDENT  
DONALD J. TRUMP

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# PURSUE TERRORIST THREATS TO THEIR SOURCE



Terrorists are difficult to disrupt because they are highly adaptive and use any means to achieve their ends. Within the United States, they exploit our open and free society to target civilians. They take advantage of technology, such as the Internet and encrypted communications, to promote their malicious goals and spread their violent ideologies. Overseas, they thrive in countries with weak governments and where disenfranchised populations are vulnerable to terrorists' destructive and misinformed narratives, and they are adaptive in the face of pressure from countries with strong governments. Some are sheltered and supported by foreign governments or even do their bidding.

In the past, when the United States and our partners have disrupted terrorist plots, some terrorists remained in hiding, only to reemerge when pressure subsided. Therefore, the United States must do more than disrupt individual plots—we must pursue the entirety of the network involved in terrorist plotting to prevent the remaining terrorists from reviving their operations.

At home, law enforcement at all levels of government will continue to pursue known or suspected terrorists, integrating all sources of information available. Overseas, we will disrupt terrorist networks that pose a credible threat to United States interests by conducting military, intelligence, and law enforcement operations and employing financial measures against discrete targets—working by, with, and through partners where possible. We will also enhance intelligence-sharing arrangements, increasing the timeliness and quality of exchange to identify the entire network involved in terrorist

activity and maintain pressure on key terrorists and terrorist organizations.

## ***Priority Actions***

### **TARGET KEY TERRORISTS AND TERRORIST GROUPS:**

Using both military and non-military capabilities, we will target the terrorists and terrorist groups who pose the greatest threat to American citizens and interests. This will include terrorist leaders, operational planners, and individuals deploying their expertise in areas such as WMD, explosives, cyber operations, and propaganda. We will apply persistent pressure through sustained United States and partner intelligence, law enforcement, economic and financial measures, and military action to disrupt, degrade, and prevent the reconstitution of terrorist networks.

**ENHANCE REACH INTO DENIED AREAS OVERSEAS:** Where we cannot establish a physical presence to protect

our interests directly, we will develop innovative means and work with partners to expand our capability to identify and mitigate emerging threats before they can strike the United States and our national interests.

**EFFECTIVELY USE LAW OF ARMED CONFLICT (LOAC)**

**DETENTION AS A COUNTERTERRORISM TOOL:** The detention of enemies under the LOAC permits the United States to humanely remove dangerous terrorists from the battlefield and enhances our ability to collect intelligence from captured terrorists. This capability, in certain circumstances, also permits detention of terrorists pending their transfer to the United States for criminal prosecution. We will, therefore, retain LOAC detention as a counterterrorism tool, preserve our ability to detain terrorists at the detention facilities at United States Naval Station Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and explore ways to better integrate and maximize the utility of this capability where lawful and appropriate.

**FURTHER INTEGRATE FEDERAL, STATE, AND LOCAL COUNTERTERRORISM INFORMATION-SHARING:**

We will improve the ability to share timely and sensitive information on threats and the individuals perpetrating them, whether motivated by domestic or foreign terrorist ideologies, across all levels of government. We will continue to ensure that law enforcement agencies across all levels of government have the information that they need to identify and act swiftly against terrorist activity.

**AMPLIFY THE IMPACT OF COUNTERTERRORISM OPERATIONS WITH STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS:**

We will integrate our strategic communications capability across our efforts to send a clear message: those who threaten the United States will pay a serious price, and America stands in solidarity with the populations upon which terrorists prey. This message will aim to discredit terrorist narratives, dissuade potential terrorist supporters, and demonstrate that the effects of our counterterrorism operations are not limited solely to direct action.

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# ISOLATE TERRORISTS FROM FINANCIAL, MATERIAL, AND LOGISTICAL SOURCES OF SUPPORT

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The technological advances of the past century have created an interconnected world in which it is easier than ever to quickly move people, funding, material, and information across the globe. The backbone of this interconnected system is information technology—largely created and facilitated by the United States Government and private industry—that is increasingly enabling faster transactions of all kinds across the world. Terrorists use these same publicly available technologies to command and control their organizations and to plot attacks, travel, and abuse the global financial system to raise funds and procure weapons, materiel, and basic necessities.

Terrorists cannot sustain their operations without these resources. The United States and our partners abroad and in the private sector must, therefore, prevent terrorists from using them while safeguarding these resources for legitimate use. To accomplish this, we will increase information-sharing with the private sector and will tear down existing barriers to information-sharing. Around the globe, we will promote effective enforcement of legislation and policies aimed at protecting the commerce, transportation, and communication industries. We will also identify policies that must change as terrorists adapt.

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**“As we deny terrorist organizations control of territory and populations, we must also strip them of their access to funds. We must cut off the financial channels that let ISIS sell oil, let extremists pay their fighters, and help terrorists smuggle their reinforcements.”**

PRESIDENT  
DONALD J. TRUMP

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## ***Priority Actions***

### **ENHANCE DETECTION AND DISRUPTION OF TERRORIST TRAVEL:**

We will continue to collect and share relevant information on terrorist travel and identities, with a focus on providing information that the public and private sector can use to identify and disrupt the movement of terrorists. We will also continue to work closely with our partners to enhance travel security and border protection to prevent terrorists fleeing conflict zones from infiltrating civilian populations. By sharing identity information

and exploiting publicly available information, such as social media, we will identify these terrorists

and enable law enforcement action against them in their home countries. In these efforts, we will take appropriate steps to protect privacy, civil rights, and civil liberties.

**COUNTER EXISTING AND EMERGING TERRORIST FUNDING**

**METHODS:** We will collaborate across the public and private sectors to enhance information-sharing regarding terrorists' financial data, transactions, and activities. We will use this information and our economic authorities, including financial sanctions and other financial measures, as well as law enforcement action, to deny terrorists the ability to raise funds, including by disrupting terrorist financing and dismantling terrorist support networks, to prevent terrorists from abusing the United States and global financial systems, and to dissuade people from providing funds or materiel to terrorists. We will also share this information and collaborate with foreign partners to support their own targeted actions against terrorist financing networks and promote the effective implementation of international standards to counter terrorist financing worldwide.

**PREVENT DEVELOPMENT AND ACQUISITION OF ATTACK**

**CAPABILITIES:** We will prevent terrorists from developing or acquiring knowledge and material that enables the development of WMD and other advanced weapons, including the capability to perform large-scale cyber attacks. We will work with partner nations, international organizations, and commercial entities to improve their capacity to secure dangerous materials and ensure that terrorists cannot exploit the scientific and academic communities to acquire new capabilities.

**EXPOSE AND COUNTER STATE SUPPORT TO TERRORISM:**

While some countries, such as Iran, continue to use terrorism as an overt tool of their foreign policy, most countries that provide support for terrorists do so clandestinely, exploiting legitimate commercial networks to conceal their support activity. The United States will continue to acquire evidence of these states' deceptive practices and work with allies and partners to identify and punish states that support terrorism.



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# MODERNIZE AND INTEGRATE A BROADER SET OF UNITED STATES TOOLS AND AUTHORITIES TO COUNTER TERRORISM AND PROTECT THE HOMELAND



Terrorists are typically clandestine actors, banding in small groups or acting alone and hiding in plain sight. We must stay ahead of terrorist attacks by advancing our detection capabilities and capacity to share early indicators with those who can piece together plot information and take action.

We will, therefore, move toward seamless integration and analysis of all information available to the United States and our partners and develop technology to enable lawful and appropriate responses that rapidly identify and stop terrorist threats. As we continue to protect information appropriately, we will deny terrorists the ability to take advantage of our open society, and we will stop them before they can attack.

## *Priority Actions*

### **SECURE OUR BORDERS FROM**

**TERRORIST THREATS:** We will integrate capabilities and authorities from across the United States Government and coordinate with our partners abroad to prevent terrorists from entering the homeland. Our efforts will begin overseas, where we will ensure that our partners share and use information, such as watchlists, biometric information, and travel data, to prevent terrorists and fleeing foreign

fighters from traveling to the United States. We will also share technology that allows partners to screen cargo and baggage for threats, including WMD materials and precursors. At our borders, we will modernize our screening and identity intelligence capabilities to track terrorist travelers and prevent the entry of those who support terrorist ideologies and violence.

### **DEPLOY THE INTEGRATED FEDERAL COUNTERTERRORISM COMMUNITY AT LOCAL LEVELS:**

We will continue to appropriately staff and support joint terrorism task forces and interagency fusion centers with leaders and team members detailed from a variety of departments and agencies. This will ensure that the federal government is able to deploy our full range of expertise and authorities where it will most effectively support state and local law enforcement partners.

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**“While we will always welcome new citizens who share our values and love our people, our borders will always be closed to terrorism and extremism of any kind.”**

PRESIDENT  
DONALD J. TRUMP

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**ADOPT TECHNOLOGIES TO PROCESS DATA:** We will harness technologies that allow our counterterrorism efforts to keep pace with a dynamic environment and build holistic identities of terrorists. The technologies we develop will be usable and accessible across the agencies of the United States Government to ensure sharing and integration. We will also seek to enhance our ability to access terrorist communications, including by using technical tools and by law enforcement working with private industry to confront challenges posed by technological barriers.

**BUILD A HOLISTIC PICTURE OF TERRORISTS' IDENTITIES:** We will enhance the collection, discovery, and exploitation of identity information supporting the counterterrorism mission, particularly biometric data. We will also identify and use other categories of identity information, including publicly available information, financial intelligence, and captured enemy material. We will improve the interoperability among United States Government systems to enable more efficient sharing of this information, bolstering our analysis and screening capabilities.

**INVESTIGATE AND INTEGRATE THREAT INFORMATION RELATING TO DOMESTIC TERRORISTS AND THEIR OVERSEAS COUNTERPARTS:** Where lawful and appropriate, departments and agencies will investigate ties between domestic terrorists not motivated by radical Islamist ideologies and their overseas counterparts to more fully understand them. This investigation will include identifying indicators of mobilization to violence. Where applicable, we will better integrate domestic terrorism information into our analysis of homeland threats and continue information-sharing among our federal, state, local, and tribal law enforcement partners.

**UPDATE COUNTERTERRORISM POLICIES:** We will fully empower the national security and law enforcement communities to pursue terrorist threats to their source and prevent terrorist attacks while respecting Americans' rights. We will focus on policies that have not kept up with the evolving threat picture and technology environment. For example, we will allow agencies to more easily share identity intelligence about terrorists and use publicly available information to preempt emerging threats.

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# PROTECT UNITED STATES INFRASTRUCTURE AND ENHANCE PREPAREDNESS



The critical infrastructure of the United States—much of which is privately owned—provides the essential goods and services that drive American prosperity. Coordinated efforts are, therefore, necessary to strengthen and maintain secure and resilient critical infrastructure and to prepare Americans to respond appropriately should an attack occur. By integrating and improving preparedness across all levels of government as well as the private and public sectors, we will stop terrorists from undermining our security and prosperity.

Critical infrastructure has long been subject to physical threats and is now increasingly exposed to the risk of attacks in cyberspace. Our infrastructure is also interconnected, meaning that damage or disruption of one infrastructure element can cause cascading effects impacting other forms of infrastructure. We will stop terrorists' attempts to break through our defenses by building strong partnerships and by implementing innovative methods for protecting our infrastructure from attack and disruption.

In addition, working with a range of stakeholders, including those from the private sector and civil society, we will enhance preparedness and increase public awareness about national efforts and successes in confronting terrorism to increase public trust and confidence in America's strength.

## ***Priority Actions***

### **ENHANCE DEFENSIVE MEASURES FOR INFRASTRUCTURE**

**AND SOFT TARGETS:** As terrorists seek new ways to attack our infrastructure and soft targets—both at home and abroad—we will improve and innovate our layered defenses. We will ensure redundancy of our systems, including systems in cyberspace, and develop measures for rapid recovery for systems if an attack should occur, facilitating their quick return to normal operations.

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**“As we rebuild America’s strength and confidence at home, we are also restoring our strength and standing abroad.”**

PRESIDENT  
DONALD J. TRUMP

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### **BROADEN AWARENESS OF THE TERRORIST THREAT TO**

**UNITED STATES CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE:** We will ensure that key private sector and foreign partners are informed of the potential terrorist threat to their facilities. We will incorporate state and local law

enforcement and emergency services personnel as well as critical infrastructure participants into national exercises featuring realistic terrorism scenarios.

**ENHANCE PREPAREDNESS AND PROMOTE READINESS:**

Partnering with an expanded network of organizations, individuals, and all levels of government, we will ensure that our society is prepared to withstand and quickly recover from a terrorist attack, including the possibility of a WMD attack. We will do this by conducting public information campaigns, training emergency response personnel, and ensuring the viability of our emergency

notification systems. Recognizing that past terrorist attacks often targeted the private sector and civilians, we will welcome their partnership in sharing best practices in stopping and recovering from terrorist attacks and related incidents.

**DEVELOP A PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY:**

Through a coordinated counterterrorism communications plan, we will educate the public on how to prepare for, respond during, and quickly recover after an attack. We will also train federal, state, and local interlocutors on interactions with the public that foster a culture of preparedness and resilience.

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# COUNTER TERRORIST RADICALIZATION AND RECRUITMENT

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Over the past seventeen years, we have built a robust counterterrorism architecture to stop attacks and eliminate terrorists, but we have not developed a prevention architecture to thwart terrorist radicalization and recruitment. Unless we counter terrorist radicalization and recruitment, we will be fighting a never-ending battle against terrorism in the homeland, overseas, and online. Our strategy, therefore, will champion and institutionalize prevention and create a global prevention architecture with the help of civil society, private partners, and the technology industry.

## ***Priority Actions***

**INSTITUTIONALIZE A PREVENTION ARCHITECTURE TO THWART TERRORISM:** We will support local solutions and empower stakeholders, providing them with the knowledge and resources they need to address terrorist threats. Early warning systems, including bystander reporting, will be a critical component of this architecture. We will also work closely with foreign partners, the technology sector, religious leaders, local stakeholders, and international fora to identify and share best practices. We will also seek to promote voices of pluralism and tolerance. Through these efforts, we will prevent radicalization and mobilization to violence across all violent extremist ideologies.

**COMBAT VIOLENT EXTREMIST IDEOLOGIES:** We will undermine the ability of terrorist ideologies, particularly radical Islamist terrorist ideologies, to create a common identity and sense of purpose among potential recruits. We must combat the resilience of terrorist narratives by acknowledging that their ide-

ologies contain elements that have enduring appeal among their audiences. To undercut terrorist recruiting, we will demonstrate that their claims are false and do not offer effective solutions. We will exploit doubts among potential recruits to reduce terrorists' ability to incite violence and recruit. We will also communicate alternatives and promote off ramps from violence to prevent individuals from becoming more committed to these ideologies and their violent means. Throughout this cycle of recruitment and mobilization, we will take advantage of our operational, diplomatic, and development successes to demonstrate the futility of terrorist violence.

**INCREASE CIVIL SOCIETY'S ROLE IN TERRORISM PREVENTION:** Through engagement, public communications, and diplomacy, we will strengthen and connect our partners in civil society who are eager to expand their limited terrorism prevention efforts. We will raise awareness of radicalization and recruitment dynamics, highlight successful prevention and intervention approaches domestically and overseas, and empower local partners through

outreach, training, and international exchanges. We will also promote grassroots efforts to identify and address radicalization to insulate civilian populations from terrorist influence.

**SUPPORT INTERVENTION, REINTEGRATION, AND COUNTER-RECIDIVISM EFFORTS:** We will identify signs of violent radicalization and mobilization to focus real-world and online intervention efforts to prevent terrorist attacks. We will work to limit prison radicalization by training prison staff and supporting rehabilitation. We will also work with foreign partners to address the challenge of reintegrating returning foreign terrorist fighters, their families, and children into their communities.

**COMBAT TERRORISTS' INFLUENCE ONLINE:** We will combat terrorist use of cyberspace as a global stage to showcase their violent ideologies, to fundraise, and to radicalize, recruit, and mobilize individuals

to violence. In concert with our partners, we will expand relationships with technology sector entities to empower them to combat violent extremism online and terrorists' abuse of their platforms. We will continue to expose and counter the flood of terrorist ideology online.

**COUNTER RADICALIZATION THROUGH STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS:** Within the United States Government, we will create a common operating picture of terrorists' propaganda activities to detect and combat terrorists' narratives and better understand the audiences that they try to influence. With coalition members and our partners in civil society and international media, we will explain our counterterrorism efforts, highlight examples of non-violent means to address grievances, amplify success stories of development and recovery, and promote positive narratives.

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# STRENGTHEN THE COUNTERTERRORISM ABILITIES OF INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS

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While the United States will continue to lead and provide support to partners in the fight against terrorism, our country need not sustain the primary responsibility for counterterrorism activities around the world. To address this issue, we will work to increase our partners' awareness of terrorist threats and strengthen their capacity and willingness to address them.

Central to this approach is the adoption of proactive diplomatic engagement, development assistance, and security assistance to help our partners act independently and, ultimately, invest more of their own capital in bolstering counterterrorism efforts.

We will call on our capable and well-resourced partners to increase their support to countries lacking resources and capabilities. Some partners have better access, expertise, resources, and relationships in particular geographic and thematic areas, and we will encourage them to employ and refine such tools to more effectively internationalize counterterrorism efforts while reducing reliance on United States assistance. We will also continue to work with our less resourced, non-traditional, or novel partners who may make unique contributions to help advance our shared counterterrorism efforts. Over time, this will result in a more balanced, equitable, and effective global approach to counterterrorism.

## ***Priority Actions***

### **ESTABLISH A BROADER RANGE OF COUNTERTERRORISM PARTNERSHIPS:**

Our increasingly interconnected world demands that we prioritize the partnerships that will lead to both actions and enduring efforts that diminish terrorism. The United States will, therefore, partner with governments and organizations, including allied nations, the technology sector, financial institutions, and civil society. We will use diplomatic engagement with partner governments and further mobi-

lize existing coalitions and multilateral and international fora to increase the will of capable partners to act against threats while encouraging the implementation of international counterterrorism standards and the coordination of international burden-sharing efforts.

### **SUPPORT COUNTERTERRORISM CAPABILITIES OF KEY FOREIGN PARTNERS:**

We will continue to augment the capabilities of key foreign partners to conduct critical counterterrorism activities. We will help

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**“We must seek partners,  
not perfection—and  
to make allies of all  
who share our goals.”**

PRESIDENT  
DONALD J. TRUMP

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to professionalize the military, law enforcement, judicial, intelligence, and security services, as well as financial authorities, of key partners so that they are able to conduct counterterrorism operations effectively and justly. We will also work to ensure that partners meet their responsibilities in holding their citizens accountable for any acts of terrorism committed abroad. In addition, we will enhance the capabilities of key foreign partners to investigate and prosecute terrorism across borders through law enforcement cooperation, mutual legal assistance, and extradition.

**EXPAND PARTNER INFORMATION-SHARING:** To stay ahead of emerging terrorist trends and methods, we will prioritize the sharing of information, such as biometric and geolocational data and information

about new threats, including terrorists' initial research into new attack capabilities. Building on solid partnerships and processes for sharing information, we will continue to improve the capacity for information-sharing and work with partners to allow them to more effectively act on shared information.

**SUPPORT LOCALLY-DRIVEN TERRORISM PREVENTION:** We will work with local stakeholders and civil society to mitigate the grievances that terrorists exploit. Internationally, where United States interests are at stake, we will seek and encourage locally driven solutions that target specific causes of terrorist radicalization and mobilization to violence. We will work with partners to encourage positive narratives that promote tolerance and security.



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# CONCLUSION

## Projecting American Strength

This National Strategy for Counterterrorism marks a shift in America's approach to countering and preventing terrorism. We will lead with our principles and a clear-eyed understanding of a constantly changing operating environment. While this strategy was necessarily formulated against a backdrop of the threats we face today, it provides flexible guidance to enable an effective approach against an agile and adaptive terrorist threat.

This new approach to counterterrorism does not rest on the idealistic hope of an easy and unthreatening world. Terrorism will persist as a tactic of those who view our democracy as a threat to their tyrannical aspirations, but the United States will remain secure through our strength, innovation, and independence of action. We will stay ahead of our terrorist adversaries by ensuring that we have the infrastructure, tools, authorities, practices, people, and the political will to apply the full range of our strengths against their vulnerabilities. As fascists and communists did before them, terrorists

seek to use our openness, tolerance, and freedoms against us. They will fail.

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**“Our friends will never question our support, and our enemies will never doubt our determination.”**

PRESIDENT  
DONALD J. TRUMP

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We will relentlessly pursue those terrorists that seek to harm our country and remain vigilant and vigorous in our prevention of attacks. We will not yield to adversaries who attack us with bombs, bullets, or propaganda. We will rise to every challenge, face the enemy on every front, and ensure a future of peace, security, and prosperity for our country and the world. We will protect the American dream.

