

Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS)

The Roles of Women in Terrorism and Counterterrorism – Keynote Speeches

Introduction:

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JOHANNA NESSETH TUTTLE: I'm Johanna Nesseth; I'm vice president for strategic planning at CSIS. I'm going to stand in for Jolynn this morning for our next session.

We're really, really delighted to have two phenomenal people with us this morning: Ambassador Dan Benjamin, who is the ambassador-at-large for counterterrorism at the State Department, and Ambassador Melanne Vermeer, who's ambassador-at-large for global women's issues. We're especially pleased to have Dan because Dan worked with us here for six years, so we've known him for a long time. So it's great to have you back. And Ambassador Vermeer, you're such a role model, I think, for so many women in the audience, in the group that it's really delightful to have you both.

I'm not going to give any detail on these folks' bios because I think you've got them in front of you. I'd like to actually turn very quickly to the program. We're going to have each of the ambassadors make some remarks. Ambassador Benjamin's going to talk about the government's integration of gender into counterterrorism. We'll have him go first. And then we're going to ask Ambassador Vermeer to talk about implementation of the National Action Plan.

So thank you both for being here. I will mention we're tweeting at csis.org. The hashtag is women in – #WomenAndCT, if you'd like to tweet.

So Ambassador Benjamin, welcome. (Applause.)

DAN BENJAMIN: Thank you very much, Johanna. If we declare this as classified, can we stop the tweet? (Laughter.) Anyway, it is really great to be back at CSIS, which as Johanna mentioned was my home for six years. And I think I shocked Dr. Hamre the last time I was here when I described it as the most productive six years of my life, because I not only produced two books, I had two kids in that period. So it was really a fabulous period for me, and I certainly spent enough time in this particular room.

I'm especially pleased to have the opportunity to speak to Women in International Security, a group that never actually has invited me to join – (laughter) – but that I've watched grow and develop in a really wonderful way through friendships with Anne Witkowsky, who I understand was just up here speaking and who I don't see at the moment, and Michele Flournoy and Peggy Knudson – all of whom were friends before there was a Women in International Security. So I can't take any credit for it, but I'm delighted at how well the group has done, and it's really great to be here.

I'm told that this morning's subject matter expert panel was extremely informative, and helped highlight how women's roles in both terrorism and counterterrorism can range widely from serving as suicide bombers to leading public campaigns against violent extremism and just about everything in between. And I'm – and I also want to recognize of course that our policies in the U.S. government on this issue can profoundly affect the lives of women.

Before I discuss what the new Bureau of Counterterrorism is doing to integrate gender into our policies and programs, I want to provide a brief assessment of the terrorism landscape,

and then I'll talk a bit about the mission and scope of the bureau to give a frame to what we are doing in the realm of gender.

As you may know, the old Office of the Coordinator of Counterterrorism was elevated to full bureau status earlier this year in January as a result of the recommendations in the secretary's Quadrennial Defense – I'm sorry – Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review. So I would say that the impact of women on counterterrorism is also profound, certainly in my professional life.

Let me just begin by talking about the threat situation. Last year's death of Osama bin Laden, of course, represents a major milestone in our efforts to combat violent extremism. Numerous other key al-Qaida operatives have also departed the scene in the last 12 months, including Harun Fazul, who was the architect of the 1998 embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania; Ilyas Kashmiri, who was perhaps the most capable operative in South Asia; Anwar Awlaki, who was a chief of external operations for al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula and was a particularly notable character because of how he had opened up a whole new area of recruitment in the Anglophone world because of his ability to speak idiomatic, really American English.

The loss of these actors put al-Qaida and its network on a path of decline that we believe will be difficult to reverse. But nonetheless al-Qaida and its affiliates and adherents remain adaptable, resilient, and they retain the capability to conduct regional and transnational attacks. And that highlights the need for us to continue to refine and adapt our own policies and programs to be more comprehensive. That adaptation includes more consistently and comprehensively incorporating women and gender views into what it is we're doing.

In the last few years we have seen the rise of a number of al-Qaida-affiliated groups. And so while the AQ core, as we call it, in the federally administered tribal areas of Pakistan is really in the most dire condition it ever has been, we have still seen on the periphery many new groups grow up and achieve rather startling strength. These affiliates include al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula; al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb, otherwise known as AQIM; al-Shabab, which is based in Somalia; and al-Qaida in Iraq.

And even beyond al-Qaida and its affiliates, al-Qaida-like ideology and rhetoric continues to spread in a number of parts of the world. And I'm sure you're all familiar with the news coming out of Nigeria about the loosely organized group Boko Haram, which has launched widespread attacks in that country and also shown its interest – at least parts of that group have shown its – their interest in taking on the sort of classic al-Qaida agenda of targeting international organizations, Western interests, by bombing the United Nations headquarters in Abuja.

We also remain concerned about threats to the homeland as individuals who appear to have been trained by al-Qaida and its affiliates have operated within U.S. borders. And there's a lot of different nomenclature: homegrown terrorists, self-starters. They do have direct ties – some of them do have direct ties to terrorist groups. And they pose a threat to the homeland that can be particularly difficult for law enforcement and intelligence to detect early enough.

And it's worth noting as well, if you follow the literature and you follow the things that are on the Web, there's a particular emphasis now – and this was one of Awlaki's innovations – to encourage consumers of extremist materials who may be reading online or otherwise plugged into the media to conduct their own individual attacks without being plugged into a larger group.

This appeal to the individual, in my view – and this is not, I would say, a validated assessment by the intelligence community – but I think that this is one area in which I think we may see more and more women who are – who are interested or who find the extremist message appealing – that is one way for – in which we may see them take a greater role in an area that, as I know Heidi Panetta discussed this morning – that has been dominated by male operatives and by lots of attitudes that have often but not always restricted the activities of women in terrorist attacks.

I should note as well that we also continue to face challenges from state sponsors of terrorism, and particularly – as everyone knows from the newspapers – Iran, the world's leading sponsor of terrorism, whose use of terrorism as an instrument of policy was exemplified by the attempt to assassinate the Saudi ambassador here in Washington, a conspiracy that the international community united to condemn through a U.N. General Assembly resolution last November.

It is of course also worth noting that even beyond those two sort of dominating facts of the threat landscape, the al-Qaida network and affiliates and Iran, there are still plenty of other groups out there that are worrisome and that embrace different kinds of violent extremism: among these, the Kurdistan Workers Party, the PKK, the anarchists in Greece, dissent republican groups in Northern Ireland, right-wing extremists, and of course Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad and other groups in the Middle East.

So while there has been very notable success in the last year, there are still plenty of dark clouds on the horizon. I would be remiss, though, if I didn't mention some important good news, and that is that the developments that we have seen play out in the Middle East in – and North Africa, in which women have played an integral role, have really greatly discredited the extremist argument that only violence can bring about change.

Should these movements in the Arab Awakening or the Arab Spring – however you like to refer to it – result, as we hope they will, in durable, democratically elected governments, then al-Qaida's single-minded focus on terrorism as an instrument of political change will be severely delegitimized. And that will create more space for moderates of all kinds, and particularly women, to operate more effectively. And this, in our view, would be a genuinely strategic blow against radical extremism and against terrorism.

The emergence of societies that give people an opportunity to voice their dissent freely, without having to feel like they have to back into violence instead; the emergence of societies in which people really feel invested in what's going on, it has, I think it is widely agreed, made – made a huge difference in terms of turning the tide against extremism. It is not a panacea; we've certainly seen plenty of terrorists come out of Western democracies. But it does make a big difference in terms of dealing with the grievances that often breed terrorism.

Now, inspiring as this moment may be, we're not blind to the attendant perils. And we know that civil strife creates the kind of environment that terrorists are drawn to. And undoubtedly some are tempted to exploit the situation to carry out plots that could cause significant disruptions for countries undergoing democratic transitions.

This was of course particularly, and remains, a concern in the Maghreb, when we saw so many loose munitions coming out of Libyan stocks, and the threat of terrorists obtaining man-portable air defense system – systems, the latter of which could pose a significant risk to regional security and to civilian aviation. And we're working very hard to prevent those weapons from crossing borders and to get them under control as fast as possible. The presence of extremist groups in these environments also poses a threat to the chances that women can continue to play an integral role in transition governments, as well as in civil society.

Well, I mention the threat environment not to cast a shadow over this morning's panel but to highlight how regionally and ideologically diverse the threat is today, and to highlight how creative and gender-inclusive we must be in responding to these threats.

Let me turn now to what we're doing in the bureau to take that threat a little further. The threat is not the only thing, of course, that continues to evolve. And as I mentioned, our office has now become a bureau. And this – we are focusing on many different things, but one of the things at the core of what we're doing is better integrating gender into all aspects of foreign policy – again, pursuant to the QDDR. And that's at the heart of Secretary Clinton's effort to make the State Department more effective and more responsive to changing dynamics in the world.

The secretary is committed to smart diplomacy and to civilian power in which women are poised to participate. And she has said that leading through civilian power saves lives and money – and I'm quoting here – and with the right tools, training and leadership, our diplomats and development experts can diffuse crises before they explode, create new opportunities for economic growth. We can find new partners to share burdens and new solutions to problems that might otherwise require military action. And many of these new partners clearly should be women.

Our ability to oversee and implement CT programs, which cover everything from police training to countering the al-Qaida narrative, was strengthened by the creation of the bureau. The bureau leads the department and U.S. efforts to reduce radicalization and mobilization abroad while developing positive alternatives for populations that are vulnerable to recruitment. And in this – in this realm we work closely – and helped stand up, in fact – the recently established Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications, which counters, undermines and marginalizes the impact of the terrorist narrative in these at-risk populations.

Now in my view, this area of counter-radicalization, countering violent extremism, is where women are playing and must play – are playing a vital role and must play a larger one. The cultural role that women will play in turning back the tide of extremism could be – and I strongly believe will be – critical. As part of the stand-up of our – of our bureau, we're

reorganizing and taking steps to make the bureau effective across a wide range of policy and program activities. And that includes reviewing the way we're integrating gender into our policies.

Regarding our approach, the bureau is specifically working to integrate gender into programs and policies in four ways, many of which are reflected in the National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security. First, we're working to build the capacity of women in civil society in the security sector to counter the spread of extremism. And this includes building the capacity of local, national and multinational women's and peace groups committed to working against violent extremism, to more effectively conduct public outreach and provide train-the-trainer opportunities to sensitize women to the role they can play in countering violent extremism in their communities.

We're looking to conduct national security training for women in law enforcement, in the government and in civil society, so that they may play a more constructive role in shaping national security, specifically terrorism policies and programs. And in this capacity-building vein, we're also working to support women's participation in community policing.

And community policing, I want to underscore, is one of the absolutely key initiatives globally towards reducing radicalization, because that first contact with state power is often a decisive one in terms of radicalization. Women have a unique reach into society. And through this – through these activities they can detect when a terrorist organization may be operating with their communities.

You know, I would just want to expand on this a little bit. I just wanted to let you know I was in Yemen two weeks ago, and I saw lots of – lots of different officials in lots of rather exhausting meetings. But I think the highlight of my visit was an evening spent with half a dozen different people from civil society. And of them, I think four or five were women who were doing the most remarkable things under the most difficult circumstances imaginable.

I met one woman, a very young woman, who was involved in setting up a youth radio station that was carrying an anti-extremist message; a woman who was working for the – for a newspaper who was involved in a whole range of different activities; a woman who was involved in doing the kind of train-the-trainer activities that I describe – she was, I believe, being supported by USAID in her work, and who was very concerned about the vacuum that was existing in Yemeni society, especially outside Sanaa, and the lack of sort of positive messaging that was going on.

These people were just extraordinary. They were impassioned about what they were doing. They were clear-eyed; they knew the challenges. And they had just an enormous sense of motivation. I also met while I was there, I should mention, a non-Yemeni, an Englishwoman who was working for a large NGO that was bringing theater troupes to villages where they would essentially do theatrical works that would illustrate some of the problems the society was facing, including early marriage, brutality within families and the like. And I have to tell you, this is just remarkable stuff – and extraordinarily brave, given the security challenges throughout the countryside.

So I recount this just to underscore how often it's going to be unorthodox means or means that perhaps we don't see in the newspaper every day that are going to make a big difference in pushing back this very, very dangerous tide of extremist ideology. And I was deeply moved by what they're accomplishing out there. And it made me come back and look at our budget and see what more we can do to support them.

So participation – (chuckles) – as the foregoing I think makes clear, is absolutely critical. And we're trying to encourage that and to get feedback from women in the development and the implementation of our CVE, countering violent extremism, programs; our counterterrorism finance programs; and our anti-terrorism assistance programs. And those are the ones in which we train security forces, usually high-end police units. And these are within law enforcement agencies.

The broad reach of our programs allows us a lot of different opportunities to promote gender equality. And these in turn will help us achieve one of our key objectives, which is to build self-sustaining counterterrorism capacity in partner nations around the world. It is an essential part of our policy that we do not want to be the face of all this work everywhere, both for obvious cost and resource reasons, but also because it's not sustainable. And frankly, a big American footprint is not always the best way to achieve your goals.

We are focused on protection, and that means that we'll consider – continue to consider how our policies and programs impact women. This includes working to ensure that women's rights are not used as a bargaining chip in settings related to counterterrorism goals. We're not going to seek to mitigate the use of counterterrorism – I'm sorry – we are seeking to mitigate the use of counterterrorism measures by foreign governments that are used as vehicles to restrict organizations that assist women. And we're ensuring that counterterrorism dialogues with partner governments include discussions on how to effectively protect civilians, including women and girls.

So let me just say in conclusion that as we as a nation look abroad, our interests are going to be challenged in the 20th (sic) century much the way that they have been in the past. But we will do a better job if we have both men and women fully involved. And counterterrorism policies and programs that include women in their formulation and consider their – the impact on women in their implementation will make for a much better, a much more comprehensive counterterrorism effort. And that is why we are so squarely behind the U.S. National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security that Ambassador Verveer will discuss in detail.

We want to ensure that women are properly integrated into our policies and programs. And we want to create new opportunities for women to play in countering terrorism. Integrating gender into policies and programs that have existed for decades doesn't happen overnight, but with the proper leadership, resolve, and buy-in at the working level, we can make a real difference. I want to thank you for the opportunity to speak today. I'll pass it over to Ambassador Verveer, and then I look forward to your questions. (Applause.)

MS. NESSETH TUTTLE: Thank you. Thank you, Ambassador Benjamin. I would note that you can be a member of WIIS – (laughter) – even if you’re a man, so keep that in mind.

And Ambassador Verveer, we’ll turn it to you.

MELANIE VERVEER: Thank you so much. And good morning, everybody. It’s a wonderful opportunity to be here. And I want to particularly thank WIIS. I think I was one of the early members of WIIS. And it was an organization that really was ahead of its time, because today we hear more and more, as in this discussion, of the linkage – linkages between women and security. And WIIS was there so many years ago really setting the stage for all of this. So I think it’s appropriate that you’re a big part of the discussion today.

And it’s a real pleasure for me to be here with my colleague, Ambassador Benjamin. He and I were colleagues in the Clinton White House. And I must say, he is truly one of the most energetic, creative and committed people I know and a heck of a nice guy to boot. So it’s – it really is wonderful to be here with him, and I want to echo what he said about the panel that preceded us. We heard a little bit about what was said, and it sounds like it was a terrifically rich exchange.

As he said, I want to talk a little bit about the U.S. National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security, which in many ways is critically important to the work that he and his bureau do in combatting the challenges of terrorism that he laid out that are as much a threat today as they have been. And we need to work together to find innovative ways to make sure that that threat doesn’t do the damage its capable of unleashing.

A decade ago, the U.N. Security Council linked women to peace and security when it adopted the resolution 1325. Now unfortunately women are still, after all of these years, shut out of negotiations that seek to end conflict and the decision-making processes that shape post-conflict reconstruction. For example, in the last 20 years, hundreds of peace treaties have been signed, but a sampling of those treaties shows that less than 8 percent of the negotiators were women. And at the same time, more than half of all the treaties failed within the first five years of enactment.

So clearly we have to find better ways to build peace and ensure that post-conflict situations do create better futures for the people in which they have taken place. This is why the president signed Executive Order 13595, in which he said the United States recognizes that promoting women’s participation in conflict prevention management and resolution, as well as in post-conflict recovery and relief advances peace, national security, economic, social development and international cooperation. And at the same time, accompanying the executive order was the first ever United States National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security, which lays out concrete steps by which the United States government will increase its commitment to supporting women as critical participants in preventing and resolving peace.

Now in implementing the executive order and the National Action Plan, the United States, through its diplomatic, military and development expertise, is engaged in efforts that will ensure that women’s perspectives and considerations of gender are woven into the DNA of how

we approach peace processes, the protection of civilians, humanitarian assistance, conflict prevention and including counterterrorism in the ways that Ambassador Benjamin laid out.

The National Action Plan is the result of a year-long intensive effort that was coordinated at the White House that included the Department of Defense, State, USAID, Homeland Security, Department of Justice and several other of our agencies. And we are latecomers to this process. Thirty other countries have preceded us in adopting their own national action plans, including NATO, which just celebrated its first anniversary on – in its enactment and continues to engage those principles in the work that it does.

We all know that enabling women's voices alongside those of men in international peace and security is the right thing to do. But even more, we know that including women and their perspectives in our conflict prevention efforts, including preventing the spread of violent extremism and our efforts to end wars and bring about just and sustainable peace and our efforts to protect civilian populations and hold accountable those that commit war crimes and other crimes against humanity, are all absolutely essential to international peace and stability and to our own national security.

So this is a simple and very powerful concept that our national security is more effective, that our efforts in peace-building are stronger around the world, that peace agreements will be far more lasting and more just when women – 50 percent of the world's population and even more in some areas of conflict – when they have a say in how societies promote nonviolence, rebuild peace and recover from conflict, including the scourge of terrorism.

Now this really isn't a new idea. It's just taken a long time to get traction. For the last 10 years, the United States has supported this principle from Republican administrations and Democratic administrations. We've been engaged in strengthening Security Council Resolution 1325. Two years ago, Secretary Clinton went to the Security Council to speak on behalf of a U.S.-sponsored resolution, Security Council Resolution 1888, to ensure that the United Nations would have a special representative and a team of experts dealing with sexual gender-based violence and the calamity that it represents and be able to, in advance of the worst happening, begin to take measures to address it.

Our military, diplomats and development experts have incorporated this framework into their efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan, promoting women's roles in reintegration and reconciliation processes in Afghanistan, for example. I know you heard a little bit this morning about the female engagement teams, the so-called FETs that have been operating in Afghanistan. Those special teams of female soldiers have been working in the PRTs to curb violence against women to be sure, but also to embrace a wider role. And I have spoken to many of them in Afghanistan and outside of Afghanistan about their experiences. And I think by any measure, they have played an extremely positive role.

And in fact, many other countries involved in Afghanistan have come to the FET teams and asked how they can do something comparable in their own operations and their contributions to the NATO force there. In Helmand province, a FET member was the only interlocutor accepted by male informant who shared life-saving information about the location of improvised

explosive devices and the identities of Taliban supporters. Moreover, by 2014, Afghanistan expects to field about 5,000 women as Afghan police officers and more women are present today in the military academies training for the Afghan forces.

So the National Action Plan will give us better tools to advance peace and security. It is an idea powerfully demonstrated by last year's Nobel Peace Prize laureates, women from very different contexts, coming out of Liberia and Yemen and the peace processes there and the ongoing efforts there, demonstrating the role that women can play in bringing about conditions for peace, democracy and stability.

And listening to Ambassador Benjamin talk about his recent experience in Yemen brought back memories of a recent conversation I had with one of the Nobel laureates, Tawakel Karman from Yemen. And she told me that with the activities that were taking place in Yemen, she said the women of the country woke up. And she said to me: And I can guarantee you they are not going back to sleep. And after hearing what he said, I know they're wide awake doing the work that they feel needs to be done in their country against the greatest odds.

So this is an idea that's also been proven by the work of women negotiators when they have been able to get into the peace process, as they were able to be elected into the process in Northern Ireland, where, as a result, they were able to secure important commitments in the Good Friday Agreement to involve young people and victims of the violence and terrorism in the ongoing reconciliation efforts that were so critical to the peace that has taken hold there and continues in that place.

In many conflict areas, while women are denied access to traditional power structures, they manage to create extensive community networks. And again, Ambassador Benjamin reflected some of this in his remarks. In refugee camps, for example, these networks are a kind of grassroots intelligence-gathering organization, and their role is critically important to both providing intelligence that can bring with it even worse situations, but also in ameliorating the kinds of conditions they've been enduring. In Darfur, when male negotiators were deadlocked over control of a particular river during the seventh round of the peace negotiations in 2006, it was the local women who pointed out to them that the river had long ago dried up, and they were still arguing who will control the water. So you know, this is a great story, but unfortunately it reflects poorly on situations that continue to keep women out of the processes.

This is also an idea that is coming through life more and more through various organizations on the ground like Sisters Against Violent Extremism, whose members are working tirelessly to promote nonviolent conflict resolution, again, in tough places like Yemen, like Pakistan, even in Indonesia. So a lot of work is necessary, and the president has made it clear we need to do a better job.

So the Nation Action Plan builds on the national security strategy and it lays out specific areas in which we will redouble our efforts. First, we will partner with women in vulnerable areas to prevent conflicts from breaking out in the first place. You know, women are like the canaries in the mines. Look at the condition of women in a country, and as it begin to deteriorate and grow more dangerous, you know that place is in deep trouble. It is oftentimes the first

reflection of worse to come. And in looking at these conditions, we need to be a lot smarter about responding to them so the worst does not come and those early efforts against women are dealt with. Studies suggest that women's physical security and higher levels of gender equality correlate with security and peacefulness of entire countries.

A second focus of the National Action Plan is strengthening protection for women and girls during and after conflict. We will be working with our partners on the ground, as we have been, to crack down on rape as a tool of war and to hold perpetrators of violence against women accountable, as well as to support survivors of sexual- and gender-based violent (sic; violence).

I just came back from Colombia yesterday. And our U.S. embassy there has been engaged across the board in incorporating the National Action Plan into the work that is going on through the government and other efforts in Colombia to really address that decades-long internal conflict that they have had to work through.

And one of the critical issues that still is a very significant challenge is the insecurity of women and violence against women. And I met with members of the Ministry of Defense in Colombia, and they told me that ministry has control over the police and the military and how critical it was for them to take steps to ensure that the security forces were not engaged in any way in this violence.

And there were still occasional manifestations of that and certainly fear in some parts by – of the country by women that that was the case. And so they are making concerted efforts to address it. And one of the things they said to me is we want to work more closely with your military to ensure that our police and military forces get the proper training so that they are never implicated again in these kinds of incidents.

Now, ultimately the best way to protect citizens is to end the conflict itself, and that is the third focus of the National Action Plan – expanding women's roles in peace processes and decision-making institutions before, during and after conflicts. They bring – women bring a perspective, they bring concerns to the peace table that may never bubble up to the negotiations where a friend of mine often says the negotiations are all about the guys giving amnesty to themselves for all of the crimes that have been perpetrated. But there are a lot of issues that need to be addressed if that conflict is truly to end. And women's lives are on the ground where these efforts and these issues need to be brought to bear on the discussions that are taking place so more durable agreements can indeed be the outcome.

In Afghanistan, we are working to ensure that Afghan women are engaged in the processes around the eventual reintegration and reconciliation efforts that are taking place and ramping up in the weeks and months ahead, certainly that is the goal. And whether it has been the Peace Jirga the Bonn Conference the High Peace Council – all of the stages, all of the efforts, all of the discussions – throughout all of that there has been a real effort on the part of the United States working with the Afghan government and with our other partners to ensure women's place in those efforts.

You know, one night when I was in Kabul meeting with a group of women, one of them said something to me I've mentioned in the past because it has stayed with me. She said: Stop looking at us as victims. Look at us as the leaders that we are. There has been much progress despite all of the challenges in Afghanistan – much progress that women have made. They do not want to go back. They are critical to the outcome in that country.

And as the secretary has said, you know, if we really have the prospect, all of us together, to see a potential for peace in Afghanistan – a peace that is sustainable, stability and future economic opportunity for the people there – if that is to occur, women's voices cannot be silenced and marginalized. They have a critical role they need to be playing. And yesterday when the secretary was in meetings – NATO meetings in Brussels, she noted that Afghanistan, as it goes through this transition, as the military effort, the NATO effort winds down, that it needs to protect the hard-fought political and economic and human rights progress that's been made.

She said, and I quote, "Incidents like the one we heard yesterday when 150 Afghan girls became sick after the water in their school was poisoned, reminds us that there are people who would destroy Afghanistan's long-term future in order to restrict the rights of women and girls. Human right protections for religious and ethnic minorities are still very fragile. Universal human rights are critical to Afghanistan's security and prosperity, and we will continue to make them a priority."

So this National Action Plan is one that is in process. It will require great concentration and a coordinated effort. And the goal is merely that we are able to ensure greater effectiveness and results in all of our efforts and policies in peace and security operations. The president's executive order directs the key departments and agencies to develop comprehensive strategies to implement the National Action Plan by June of this year. And we are all taking concrete steps to incorporate that plan into our efforts, whether we sit in the Pentagon or at the State Department, to ensure that we can do a better job in carrying out what is the goal of the plan.

President Obama's issuance of the order and the – and the plan, as well as the work that we are all doing now to implement it, represents an important step forward in our efforts to integrate women into all aspects of peace and security. However, as my colleague said, proper implementation requires senior-level commitment, broad government buy-in and ultimately time to really get the job done well. And that's what we are about. And we are both very pleased to have had this opportunity to describe those efforts to you.

Thank you very much. (Applause.)

MS. NESSETH TUTTLE: Thank you so much to both of you. It's reminder of why it's so important to talk about these issues in a very substantive, serious way so that they don't just get relegated to sort of side issues, but that the long-term security and impact that the U.S. is going to have in Afghanistan, Yemen and other places is really going to depend on engaging the entire society.

We are over time. I don't know if you have time for a round of questions or if you need to run? Jane (sp) will you – you're the keeper, you tell us if we have for – OK. We're going to take one round of a couple questions. Please quick – be very brief, if you would.

OK, right here in the back. We'll get a microphone. Please state your name and affiliation.

Q: Hi. I am a detective with the Los Angeles Police Department under Deputy Chief Mike Downing. And no question – I would just like to offer us, however you can employ us or use us in this mission. We do have an excellent – you know, we're working with the community very closely in our outreach and source development. But talking to Claire earlier and I'm going to meet with her and I'd like to do whatever we can with our agency.

MS. NESSETH TUTTLE: Great. Thank you very much. One more? OK, right in the –

MR. BENJAMIN: That one won't count – let's –

MS. NESSETH TUTTLE: That one is actually – we can do two more, Dan says. OK, right here in the front. Hurry, hurry with the microphone. I don't want to make anybody late for lunch. (Laughter.)

Q: Hi. Good afternoon. It's my pleasure to hear Ms. Verveer and Ambassador Benjamin today. Obviously my question is related to Afghan women because I am from Afghanistan – I am a producer for Afghan TV. I am Ajila (sp). Ms. Verveer, since the Chicago summit is closing, and I'm sure you are following up what's going on – and the role of women is very limited. So when you say this women participation is critical to the outcome, so how do you see the outcome of Chicago summit and how it will affect women in Afghanistan? Thank you.

MS. NESSETH TUTTLE: OK, one more quick question and then we'll let both of them respond. One more? All right, going, going – all right, that'll be our last question.

MS. VERVEER: Well, the summit that's taking place in Chicago in June is the NATO summit and it will deal with a range of NATO issues. One of the session will be devoted to Afghanistan. The secretary and other leaders have been at NATO headquarters yesterday and are finishing up those meetings today. There has been much discussion of Afghanistan. I know in terms of the country representatives, since this is a representation of the NATO members in a meeting, there will be significant discussions about the role, as I quoted from the secretary, that women must continue to play in ensuring a – the kind of outcome – peaceful outcome everyone wants to see in Afghanistan.

There are discussions about women's participation as part of the Afghan delegation. And it is not clear what the outcome of those discussions are, as well as participation in discussions that will take – be taking place in the same area as the NATO discussions the day before. That will be under non-NATO sponsorship. That will include discussions on Afghanistan and the role of women.

So there is a real effort going on to incorporate this topic in a very serious way, recognizing how important it is, not just in the NATO discussions in Chicago, but in the upcoming meetings that will be taking place in July in Tokyo as well, the donors meeting, and again, significant participation from Afghan civil society, including the women.

MS. NESSETH TUTTLE: Well, join me in thanking our wonderful speakers. Thanks.
(Applause.)

(END)