

# Why the Words We Use About Terrorism Matter

by [Jacob Olidort \(/experts/jacob-olidort\)](/experts/jacob-olidort)

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



[Jacob Olidort \(/experts/jacob-olidort\)](/experts/jacob-olidort)

Jacob Olidort, a 2016-2017 Soref fellow at The Washington Institute, focuses on the history and ideology of Salafi movements and Islamist groups in the Middle East.



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**Jihadists have become uniquely sensitized to the doctrinal and political stakes in their own names, so the United States should think carefully about the labels it applies to groups like the Islamic State.**

**D**uring his first address to Congress last month, President Trump said that his administration "is taking steps to protect our nation from radical Islamic terrorism." The president's national security adviser, H.R. McMaster, warned that the expression could alienate allies within the Muslim community, while the deputy assistant to the president, Sebastian Gorka, tweeted that the words "radical Islamic terrorism" are "key to Victory against Global Jihadism." Where all three agree and are correct is that words have meaning and consequences for both policy decisions and audiences. This issue is typically approached in U.S. policy debates in terms of the language and concepts which Americans use to describe jihadists. What is less commonly considered are the internal debates on the same topic among both jihadists and Muslim scholars involved in discrediting them. Identifying [how jihadists exploit Islamic traditions \(http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/inside-the-caliphates-classroom\)](http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/inside-the-caliphates-classroom) brings us to a clearer understanding of these groups' appeal and vulnerabilities, to smarter policies of defeating them and to closer relationships with our Muslim allies on the front lines of these efforts...

**[Read the full article on the Washington Post website. \(https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/03/30/why-terminology-around-terrorism-matters/\)](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/03/30/why-terminology-around-terrorism-matters/)** ❖

*Washington Post*

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