

Fighting the Ideological Battle

The Missing Link in U.S. Strategy to Counter Violent Extremism

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As nonaffiliate terrorist actors begin to take center stage and al-Qaeda's core strength diminishes, it has become clear that America is at war with a larger enemy: the extremist ideology that fuels and supports Islamist violence. Unfortunately, the United States is not well equipped to fight on this ideological battleground, and U.S. efforts to confront the ideology worldwide have not kept pace with more successful military targeting of high-level al-Qaeda leaders.

To successfully defeat Islamist terrorism at its most fundamental source, this new Washington Institute Strategic Report argues that, rather than avoid any mention of the religious motivation behind the terrorism of al-Qaeda and other similar organizations, the Obama administration should sharpen the distinction between the religion of Islam and the political ideology of radical Islamism.

This report follows on the 2009 bipartisan Presidential Task Force report *Rewriting the Narrative: An Integrated Strategy for Counterradicalization*. (<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC04.php?CID=311>) It is a joint

project of The Washington Institute's [Stein Program on Counterterrorism and Intelligence \(templateI02.php?SID=11\)](#) and [Project Fikra: Defeating Extremism through the Power of Ideas \(templateI02.php?SID=24\)](#).

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