

*Task Force on Confronting the  
Ideology of Radical Extremism*

# REWRITING *the* NARRATIVE

An Integrated Strategy for  
Counterradicalization



MARCH 2009





PRESIDENTIAL TASK FORCE

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Published in 2009 in the United States of America by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1828 L Street NW, Suite 1050, Washington, DC 20036.

Design by Daniel Kohan, Sensical Design and Communication

Front cover: Three young boys in a classroom are crammed into a desk designed for two at the Al-Thikafa al-Arabia (Arab Culture) elementary school in a poor neighborhood of Baghdad. The struggling school can't afford enough desks, textbooks, and other material for students. (AP Photo/Enric F. Marti)

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# PREFACE

EACH PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION year since 1988, The Washington Institute has convened a bipartisan Presidential Study Group of statesmen, diplomats, legislators, scholars, and experts to examine the state of the Middle East and to offer their collective advice on Mideast policymaking in a comprehensive report to the new administration.

This year, The Washington Institute convened three independent task forces focused on three critical and discrete issues high on the Middle East policy agenda facing the incoming administration. In June 2008, the Institute released the first of the three task force reports, *Strengthening the Partnership*, which focused on deepening U.S.-Israel cooperation in dealing with Iranian nuclear ambitions. This second report—a joint endeavor by two Institute programs, Project Fikra and the Stein Program on Counterterrorism and Intelligence—represents the findings and recommendations of the Institute’s Task Force on Confronting the Ideology of Radical Extremism. A third report, from the Task Force on Combating Nuclear Proliferation in the Middle East, is forthcoming.

The Task Force on Confronting the Ideology of Radical Extremism met a number of times at the Institute’s offices in Washington, D.C., where senior U.S. officials—representing the departments of Defense, State, and Homeland Security, as well as the National Counterterrorism Center—provided illuminating briefings that helped inform the task force’s deliberations and, ultimately, its recommendations. Thanks go to these agencies for their cooperation with both The Washington Institute and this task force.

Several task force members accompanied the convenors to Europe to study firsthand both the current terrorist threat there and the approach of various European governments to counterradicalization. This group visited London, Paris, Amsterdam, and The Hague, four of the cities most critical to the success or failure of the West’s global struggle with Islamist extremism. In each country, the group met with key policymakers, law enforcement and intelligence officials, academics, and Muslim

community leaders to discuss these important issues. In the months following the trip, task force members have enjoyed an invaluable dialogue with the United Kingdom’s Home Office.

In preparation for this report, the task force also held a small, two-day conference in Amman, Jordan, which convened regional activists and reformers with varying backgrounds, from women’s rights to journalism. Several of these Arab reformers also briefed the full task force at one of its meetings in Washington.

The task force would like to acknowledge the outstanding assistance provided by the entire staff of The Washington Institute in organizing its meetings and preparing this publication. Special thanks go to Larisa Baste, Becca Wasser, Jasmine el-Gamal, and Sana Mahmood for supporting the group’s work intellectually, organizationally, and administratively.

This task force was made possible by the support of the Stein Program on Counterterrorism and Intelligence, named in honor of Michael Stein, a founder of the Washington Institute; and by Project Fikra, a program that supports mainstream Muslims in the battle against extremism. Project Fikra owes its establishment to the vision, commitment, and generosity of Linda, Michael, and James Keston.

This report is the product of a months-long effort, including weeks of writing, drafting, editing, and critiquing; it reflects the broad, bipartisan consensus of the task force members. Not every signatory endorses every judgment or recommendation in the report: members have endorsed this report solely in their individual capacities, and their endorsements do not necessarily reflect those of the institutions with which they are affiliated. Finally, this report does not necessarily reflect the views of The Washington Institute, its Board of Trustees, or its Board of Advisors.

J. Scott Carpenter  
Michael Jacobson  
Matthew Levitt  
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# OVERVIEW

AS THE UNITED STATES continues to fight militarily on multiple fronts to disrupt the efforts of al-Qaeda and its affiliates, the U.S. government has come slowly to the realization that military force alone cannot defeat radical Islamist extremism (hereafter “radical extremism”).<sup>1</sup> Today, there is growing consensus that countering the ideology that drives this extremism is a critical element in the overall effort to prevent and defeat the violence that emerges from it. Despite this greater realization, a precise strategy to effectively counter this extremism and empower mainstream alternatives has proved challenging. This issue posed a difficult challenge to the Bush administration and remains a daunting and urgent task for the Obama administration.

For these reasons, the Washington Institute for Near East Policy established a Presidential Task Force on Confronting the Ideology of Radical Extremism. This task force is part of the Institute’s quadrennial effort to inject new ideas into the policymaking process at a critical moment of transition, when government is most open to new ideas. The task force is made up of a broad, bipartisan group, called together to assess our nation’s existing approaches toward key topics integral to combating the spread of radical extremism.

The focus of the task force included democracy promotion, reform in Arab countries, public diplomacy, and strategic communication, as well as an exploration of the specific counterradicalization programs being developed by governments throughout Europe and the Middle East. Pointedly, the task force did not limit itself to considering efforts to counter only violent extremism but rather decided on a broad agenda, related to a wide spectrum of ways to understand the ideology that undergirds the violence. The task force also evaluated

how effectively the U.S. government’s national security apparatus is organized to coordinate these efforts, all with an eye toward offering a set of recommendations to the new president on how to improve policy and its implementation in this critical area.

Some of the key questions the task force considered in developing its recommendations were:

- In the challenge against radical extremism, who are our allies? How do we identify, nurture, and support them? With whom should the Obama administration be willing to partner in this effort, both domestically and internationally?
- How can the U.S. government deepen and build upon organically emerging fissures within global jihadist movements, including but not limited to al-Qaeda?
- Is the U.S. government employing all available tools in order to confront radical extremism? If not, what needs to be done to incorporate these assets into our strategy?
- How could the Obama administration best amplify the voices of mainstream Muslims to provide a credible counternarrative to extremism?
- How should we stay abreast of the latest trends, patterns, and developments in radical Islamist extremism and its impact on U.S. interests? Where should our focus be: the Middle East, South Asia, East Asia, Africa, Europe, the home front?
- How can the United States be better prepared to prevent emergent domestic radicalization? Does the

1. For the purposes of this report, we define radical Islamist extremism to include the ideologies of *takfiri* jihadist groups like al-Qaeda, nationalist Islamist terrorist groups such as Hamas and Hizballah, and the so-called conveyor belt groups like Hizb al-Tahrir (HT). While groups like HT do not perpetrate acts of terrorism per se, they help lay the groundwork for al-Qaeda’s toxic message to take hold and for individuals to take action. We do not consider anti-United States or anti-West attitudes alone to constitute radicalism. The task force also distinguished between radicalization and religious piety/devotion to Islam. The extremist ideology at issue is a distortion of Islam, and in fact, many who have been radicalized remain surprisingly ignorant about the religion, particularly as the radicalization process has accelerated in recent years.



United States need to develop its own counterradicalization programs? Are there “best practices” to consider?

- How should the United States most effectively stimulate political pluralism and economic opportunity in Arab and Muslim societies? Clearly there is a long-term interest in seeing more resilient societies evolve in these countries, but what is the wisest route to promoting democracy?

- How explicitly connected should political and economic reform in Arab countries be in our own efforts to confront terror and radicalization? How should the Obama administration reconcile these often competing agendas?

- Is the U.S. government organized effectively to face the transnational challenges posed by radical extremism? If not, what legal, bureaucratic, or administrative changes should the new president consider to improve the U.S. capability to counter radical extremism?

# EXTREMIST IDEOLOGY TODAY

## OBAMA ADMINISTRATION'S EARLY EFFORTS:

While President Obama's primary focus since taking office has been on economic issues, he has also engaged personally in high-profile public diplomacy efforts from the outset. During his inaugural address, he spoke about a new relationship between Washington and the "Muslim world," emphasizing a new framework based on commonality of interests. President Obama also granted an extended interview to al-Arabiya, the UAE-based television station. President Obama appears particularly interested in setting a new tone and style to America's engagement with Arab and Muslim peoples. Public diplomacy is only one part of the equation, of course, and exactly how these statements are translated into a more comprehensive policy will be the ultimate determinant of the success of President Obama's efforts in this critical area.

While the president's early efforts and personal attention to the task at hand are promising, he faces many tough challenges ahead, including a radicalization problem that has grown in complexity over the past seven years, making simple, overarching solutions difficult and unrealistic. Al-Qaeda remains the major threat to the United States, not only due to its ability to conduct large-scale terrorist attacks against the United States and its allies, but also because of al-Qaeda's demonstrated ability to spread its ideology and propaganda far and wide from the increasingly secure safe-haven in the tribal areas of Pakistan and Afghanistan. Like-minded terrorist groups located in Asia, Africa, Europe, and the Middle East, with varying degrees of ties to al-Qaeda, also play a key role in radicalizing Muslim youth and encouraging them to pursue a path of violence. Beyond the terrorist groups, the radicalization phenomenon is also stoked by so-called conveyor-belt groups, which don't explicitly endorse violence, but contribute to the underlying problems. And while Hamas and Hizballah don't subscribe to al-Qaeda's global jihadist vision, they have succeeded in dramatically increasing extremism among the populations in the Palestinian territories and Lebanon. Developing a

strategy to address all of these differing manifestations of the extremist ideology will be no easy feat.

## AL-QAEDA'S NARRATIVE AND SOME POSITIVE NEWS:

While al-Qaeda remains the most serious threat to the United States, over the past several months, its core has experienced growing difficulty disseminating its message. Its websites are compromised, and paranoia is growing within the organization as it struggles to adapt. More significantly, the organization has been compelled to respond defensively to a small but growing chorus of Muslims who are challenging its violent tactics, especially against fellow Muslims. Former al-Qaeda supporters and extremists are turning against their old organizations, expanding existing fissures. The most prominent of the latter group is former Egyptian Islamic Jihad head Sayyid Imam al-Sharif (also known as Dr. Fadl). Al-Qaeda often cited Dr. Fadl's previous treatises as ideological justification for its actions, but he has since firmly renounced Usama bin Laden and written a new book rejecting al-Qaeda's message and tactics. Shaikh Salman bin Fahd al-Awdah, an extremist cleric whose incarceration in the 1990s by the Saudis reportedly helped inspire bin Laden to action, went on television to decry al-Qaeda's actions, asking bin Laden, "How much blood has been spilt? How many innocent people, children, elderly, and women have been killed...in the name of al-Qaeda?"

Beyond the clerical establishment, other former extremists have stepped into the debate over the future of Islam, rejecting the fringe ideas advanced by extremist theoreticians. The UK-based Quilliam Foundation is the best known of the nongovernmental organizations challenging the extremist ideology, describing itself as the first "counter-extremism think tank." Led by two former members of Hizb al-Tahrir, the Quilliam Foundation aims to undermine the ideological foundation of radical extremism by refuting its premises. Quilliam argues that the ideology must be critiqued and refuted "wherever it is found," a process that includes developing an effective counternarrative to rebut the message



put forth by radical extremist organizations. Addressing local grievances is also critically important, in Quilliam's view, to ensure that the terrorists' and extremists' global narrative does not resonate in individuals' lives.

**EXTREMIST GLOBAL NARRATIVE STILL STRONG:** Despite these signs of progress, the underlying extremist narrative offered by al-Qaeda and its affiliates remains strong and compelling for many Muslims. Al-Qaeda charges that the United States and the West, more broadly, are at war with Islam and that the Muslim world must unify to defeat this threat and reestablish the caliphate. As evidence for their narrative, extremist groups point to the war in Iraq, Guantánamo, Abu Ghraib, U.S. support for Israel, and Washington's reluctance to compel changes in authoritarian regimes in the Middle East.

While radicalization would hardly be surprising among those personally affected, such as detainees at Abu Ghraib, al-Qaeda's recruitment extends to distant witnesses of these policies. Instrumental to this wider success is the group's ability to connect individuals' local grievances to the global narrative. In fact, there is strong evidence that al-Qaeda's efforts to spread its destructive ideology have encouraged terrorist groups previously focused on more local targets, such as al-Qaeda in the Islamic Mahgreb (formerly known as the Algerian Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat), to shift their ideological focus to the global struggle. By appropriating the al-Qaeda brand, other "homegrown terrorists" have become far more dangerous than they otherwise would have been. And terrorists inspired by, but with no direct ties to, al-Qaeda continue to perpetuate violence globally, justified by al-Qaeda's global narrative.

The reasons the extremist narrative finds fertile soil in so many societies around the world are as various as the societies themselves. Some young Muslims respond to a radicalizer's message because they feel excluded from their societies, trapped as they are in poverty or hopelessness within authoritarian regimes in the Middle East and beyond. Others, well-off and well-educated, live in Western democratic nations, but struggle with issues of belonging and identity and find that the

radical message resonates with their experience and circumstances. Even as military success against al-Qaeda grows, the ideological challenge, unless confronted, will continue to metastasize. Examples of how groups take advantage of the global narrative abound.

**CONVEYOR-BELT GROUPS:** Beyond al-Qaeda's terror network, there are also existing extremist groups that do not fit neatly into the terrorist category. These groups do not condone violence per se, but they do contribute to the radicalization process. This category includes groups, such as Hizb al-Tahrir (HT) and Tabligh Jamaat, that are often referred to as "gateway" or "conveyor belt" groups. Through these groups, as the State Department describes, individuals can turn "by stages, into sympathizers, supporters, and ultimately, members of terrorist networks."

HT, or the "Liberation Party," is an international Islamist group whose raison d'être has been to propagate an "Islamic" way of life by reestablishing the caliphate. HT plans to achieve its ambitious objectives by overthrowing Arab and Middle East regimes through military coups, unifying their disparate states into a caliphate under a single ruler, and then waging war from the caliphate on the rest of the world.

HT preaches a "clash of civilizations" ideology to its members, criticizing Western societies as immoral and destructive, which in turn intensifies the need to transform them. HT tries to connect individuals' vastly ranging local grievances, including perceived racial, religious, and socioeconomic discrimination, to the perceived global injustices faced by Muslims, such as the conflicts in Iraq and Bosnia. In essence, local problems are reinterpreted as links in the chain of global Muslim struggle.

Despite tactical differences over the short-term use of violence, HT's goals are quite similar to those of al-Qaeda, and the danger posed by groups like HT should not be underestimated. There are numerous examples of individuals radicalized by these groups' toxic message and ideology who have then left to join terrorist organizations, such as al-Qaeda, that more explicitly endorse violent activity. Perhaps most famously, Syrian-born militant Omar Bakri was formerly an HT



member in London until he left to form al-Muhajiroun, a jihadist organization that advocates the use of violence. Richard Reid, the British “shoe bomber” who attempted to blow up an American Airlines flight from Paris to Miami in 2002, belonged to the latter group. Several of the September 11 plotters, including Mohammed Atta, read HT’s German magazine, *Explizit*, and attended lectures by one of HT’s leaders in Germany.

In fact, HT has openly acknowledged its association with terrorist entities. In an interview with a Pakistani newspaper in 2005, HT spokesman Naveed Butt said, “After the Iranian Revolution, Hizb’s senior leaders went to see Imam Khomeini to discuss Islamization

ment protections. However, by limiting its efforts to confronting only the violent extremist ideology, the United States has taken these legitimate concerns too far and largely ignored other groups that contribute to the underlying problems.

Instead, the government has left the task of countering these other extremist groups to organizations like Quilliam, which make the extremists the main target of their efforts. Although other groups challenge extremist ideology at the community level, Quilliam aims to operate globally and has a higher profile. On university campuses and in the public square, Quilliam openly challenges extremist groups and accuses them of having twisted Islam beyond all recognition. By fostering

“THE REASONS THE EXTREMIST NARRATIVE FINDS FERTILE SOIL IN SO MANY SOCIETIES AROUND THE WORLD ARE AS VARIOUS AS THE SOCIETIES THEMSELVES.”

with him and to ask him to declare Khilafa. Similarly, we went to Mulla Omar to enquire whether he had declared Khilafa the goal of the Taliban. We have given all these movements assistance in following the road back to the Khilafat.”

HT is also growing widely in popularity, attracting thousands of people to its rallies in Europe and Asia. HT has been especially adept at taking advantage of the internet, including YouTube, to promulgate its message. This avenue of dissemination is quite effective, particularly with the younger generations of Muslims in the West.

**U.S. STRUGGLES TO COUNTER CONVEYOR-BELT GROUPS:** Attempts by the United States to defeat al-Qaeda and the broader terrorist networks have been well documented. Developing a strategy to take on these types of conveyor-belt groups has proven more vexing. The United States has been understandably reluctant to use prosecution, designation, or other legal tools to target these groups for a variety of reasons, including concerns about abridging First Amend-

a “genuine British Islam ... free from the bitter politics of the Arab and Muslim world,” Quilliam believes extremist ideology can be defeated. Unfortunately, there are still far too few voices like Quilliam. Identifying and amplifying them throughout the world must be a key component of countering the broader ideology of all extremist groups, not limited to those perpetrating violence.

**HAMAS AND HIZBALLAH:** Islamist terrorist groups like Hamas and Hizballah have also gained power and momentum over the past eight years, both through the ballot box and through force. Hamas took the United States by surprise with its 2006 electoral victory in the Palestinian territories, and followed this win with an armed coup in Gaza in 2007. Hizballah, on the other hand, has been a political party in Lebanon for many years and is currently a major power center in the Lebanese government. The extent of Hizballah’s control of the government is best illustrated by its power to veto any governmental action that it opposes. Hizballah was able to achieve



this greater role in the wake of its armed takeover of Beirut in early 2008.

Hamas and Hizballah’s greater domestic legitimacy complicates the development of strategies to reduce their appeal. Such legitimacy has been gained not only through the ballot (an approach rejected by al-Qaeda) but also through their extensive social services networks, services that the local governments have proved unable to provide. The 2006 war between Hizballah and Israel offers a good example of this. After the thirty-four-day war, Hizballah immediately stepped in and took the lead in providing financial assistance to those whose properties had been damaged during the

we now have to ask what role the Middle East will play in Europe.” Europe has attracted huge numbers of Muslim political and economic refugees from Middle Eastern and South Asian countries in recent history. Some of these immigrants and their children are failing to or are not allowed to integrate into European societies, creating profound questions centering on identity. No longer identifying with their “home” country and feeling excluded from and resentful toward their adopted society, these individuals search for belonging or a cause. Some choose to accept an ideology of violence or define themselves by a radicalized form of Islam; though their numbers are small, their potential

“HAMAS AND HIZBALLAH’S GREATER DOMESTIC LEGITIMACY COMPLICATES THE DEVELOPMENT OF STRATEGIES TO REDUCE THEIR APPEAL.”

conflict. This was a task well beyond the capabilities of the Lebanese government.

Because military solutions against such groups are unlikely to succeed, a successful strategy will require the emergence of credible, domestic political alternatives with demonstrated ability to contend with each respective group. Such alternatives exist but are presently weak and fragmented; far too little has been done to support them, both politically and with resources.

**RADICALIZATION IN EUROPE:** While the public and media have often focused attention on radicalization and terrorism emanating from the Middle East, particularly Saudi Arabia, or from South Asia, extremism and the radicalization process have become key issues in a number of European countries as well. High on this list are some of the key U.S. allies in Europe, including Britain, France, Belgium, Spain, Germany, and the Netherlands.

Renowned historian Bernard Lewis recently noted that “in the past Europe played a prominent, even dominant role toward the Middle East ... today, instead of asking what role Europe will play in the Middle East,

impact is large. Radical preachers, such as UK-based Abu Qatada and Abu Hamza, have aggressively pushed the extremist ideology and for a number of years served as influential radicalizing forces in Britain and beyond. The terrorist cells in Britain have proven particularly dangerous because of their links to core al-Qaeda, which have often been established through connections between the Pakistani communities of Britain, Pakistan, and Kashmir.

While only a very small percentage of radicalized Muslims have turned to terrorism, those who do present a special, potential threat. Would-be terrorists from European countries face far fewer obstacles to entering and adapting to life in the United States than those from the Middle East. Therefore, the U.S. government must pay close attention to radicalization abroad. Aided by the technological advancements available via the internet, small cells of extremists in the United States can connect far more easily with like-minded terrorists overseas.

**RADICALIZATION ON THE HOME FRONT:** Muslim-American communities have had a positive



integration experience when compared to Muslims' experience in Europe. This difference is largely attributable to the United States' inclusive, immigrant-friendly environment, stringent and well-enforced antidiscrimination policies, and—most of all—the strong belief in an equal opportunity to climb the socioeconomic ladder and achieve financial prosperity.

The United States has also put in place a governmental, bureaucratic structure that seeks to protect the civil rights and civil liberties of all its citizens, including Muslims and those of Arab origin. It has long been doing so with little fanfare or publicity. As a beneficial by-product, these actions may help thwart radicalization. Some of the many, little-known examples include:

- Justice Department lawsuits against schools and employers prohibiting students and employees from wearing hijabs.
- Justice Department prosecutions of hate crimes against Muslims.
- The Department of Homeland Security's Office for Civil Liberties and Civil Rights, the focus of which has been on addressing and resolving complaints (including those of Muslims) associated with the no-fly lists, profiling, and naturalization backlogs.

Law enforcement and intelligence officials have identified prisons and the internet as two major areas of potential radicalization within the United States. A good example of the former phenomenon was the 2005 plot by the Jamiyyat Ul-Islam Is-Saheeh, in which Muslim converts who met in prison planned to attack Jewish and Israeli targets, particularly synagogues, in California. In 2007, exemplifying the latter area, a potential plot was disrupted in which Atlanta college students had surveilled possible targets in Washington, D.C. According to the FBI, these students were connected virtually to a global network run by British webmaster Younis Tsouli, who facilitated Internet communication

with prospective cells in Sweden, Bosnia, and Canada, among other locations.

Today, U.S. authorities are increasingly concerned about possible radicalization in the Somali-American communities. There have been a number of reports of young men disappearing from these communities in the United States and then surfacing in Somalia, where they have gone to fight with the Islamist forces in the battle for control over Mogadishu (and where one of these individuals committed a suicide attack). This phenomenon of increased radicalization in the Somali expatriate communities is not limited to the United States, with similar counterterrorism probes under way in Europe and Australia as well.

Beyond the global jihadist groups, authorities have also uncovered entities tied to Hizballah and Hamas here in the United States—though this has been less of a concern in recent years. For example, in November 2008, jurors convicted the leaders of a Texas-based charity, the Holy Land Foundation, for providing support to Hamas and serving as the group's representatives in the United States. Evidence presented at the trial revealed that the defendants "provided financial support to the families of Hamas martyrs, detainees, and activists knowing and intending that such assistance would support the Hamas terrorist organization." In July 2007, the United States added the Goodwill Charitable Office (GCO) in Dearborn, Michigan, to its terrorism blacklist for its ties to Hizballah, charging the nongovernmental organization (NGO) with instructing "Hizballah members in the United States to send their contributions to GCO and to contact the GCO for the purpose of contributing to the Martyrs Foundation." In addition to global jihadism, the activities of groups like Hamas and Hizballah in the United States remain a concern.

The vast majority of the Muslim and Arab American population is well integrated and rejects this violent ideology. Unfortunately, the U.S. government has not always empowered these communities effectively to provide an alternative to the extremist narrative.

# EFFORTS TO ADDRESS EXTREMIST IDEOLOGY

**ENHANCING COUNTERRADICALIZATION PROGRAMS:** As countries in the Middle East and Europe have begun to better understand the radicalization process and what feeds it, many countries have begun to create programs to combat it. These programs are designed specifically to intervene early in the radicalization process to prevent it from taking place or to reverse radicalization in cases where it has already occurred. European countries are developing independent approaches to preventing radicalization, though some coordination is beginning to take place. The French strategy, for example, differs greatly from the British and Dutch approach in that France sees radicalization as a problem of social integration rather than a religious issue. As such, it maintains a strong police and intelligence presence, rather than cooperating with local imams to create a connection between them and the local community. While France is confident that this approach is highly effective, there is more widespread support for the Dutch and British method. This approach involves greater community engagement and the use of tools—imams, teachers, and social workers—already existing within the community network.

In Holland, the city of Amsterdam has developed a particularly innovative approach to countering radicalization at the local level. Amsterdam created an “information house,” which has developed networks in the local communities, and to whom people can turn regarding concerns about specific individuals. This information house is designed to resolve and address concerns about radicalization versus merely increased religiosity, for example. The information house works closely with law enforcement, which is only involved if a given person is deemed to pose an immediate danger. Otherwise, the information house itself will try to intervene and defuse the situation.

The British have also tried to broaden their “PREVENT,” or counterradicalization, strategy beyond the law enforcement and intelligence agencies, since other agencies’ actions can also have alternatively positive or negative effects on community relations and perhaps

on radicalization itself. The British have even taken steps to ensure that their diplomatic corps is following through in implementing the “PREVENT” strategy. Ambassadors in posts where potential threats to Britain emanate, such as Pakistan, are rated on how effectively they have carried out their responsibilities in this area. Regardless of the approach, the fact of the matter is that many European countries perceive radicalization to be serious enough to develop programs to address it.

Ironically, the best-known government counterradicalization program in the Middle East exists in Saudi Arabia, where the threat originated and from which the funds to sustain it often emanate. The program focuses on radicalized individuals who have not yet taken violent action and attempts to reintegrate them into Saudi society. The rehabilitators help these individuals find jobs, housing, and a spouse. Saudi clerics use the Quran and other religious teachings to “reeducate” them, explaining how they were previously on the wrong path. While U.S. officials and others have been highly complementary of the Saudi program, citing its low recidivism rates, this is a model that would not be easily replicated in the West, in part because the Saudis put tremendous pressure on the individuals’ families, threatening to hold them accountable if the individual rejoins the terrorist cause.

**COUNTERING EXTREMISM THROUGH DEMOCRATIC AND ECONOMIC REFORM:** Political and economic reform in the Middle East remains the best strategic response for overcoming the region’s deep structural challenges and reducing the pool of potential recruits to radical extremism.

Deeper economic reform is urgently needed. The region as a whole currently faces a youth bulge that requires 100 million new jobs be created by 2010, according to the World Bank. Finding ways to absorb such huge numbers of young people presents a daunting challenge, especially given current unemployment rates of 25 percent or higher.



From Morocco to the Persian Gulf, governmental experiments to revitalize or retool economies are taking place. Due to a surge in oil prices over the past few years, spectacular cash holdings have spurred the governments of the United Arab Emirates and Qatar, among others, to invest directly in mega-projects within their countries and across the region. Saudi Arabia is establishing entirely new cities and making renewed efforts to diversify its economy. Egypt has established an independent central bank, reformed its financial sector, and begun to privatize some state-owned industries, contributing to a steadily improving growth averaging 5 percent or better in the past few years. Now, with the global slowdown touched off by the U.S. subprime mortgage crisis, finding a way to cushion these economies will be extremely difficult, especially those of poor and overpopulated states like Egypt, perhaps fueling political instability and further radicalization.

Despite governments' efforts to stimulate their respective economies, little has been done to improve democratic governance. In fact, according to Freedom House, 61 percent of the countries in the region are "not free" as of 2009, with the past three years seeing incremental and uneven progress in the political rights and civil liberties indices. The absence of democratic oversight and accountability restrains economic growth and inhibits human development, as the 2002 and subsequent UN Development Programme Arab Human Development reports made clear. Parliaments in the region remain weak. Judiciaries lack independence. Political parties do not fulfill their function. Independent media, where it exists at all, is small and harassed. Without such institutions, creating the necessary transparency to provide oversight to the executive branch becomes impossible, fueling frustration and resentment, occasionally driving individuals harboring these sentiments underground. If economic reform is to be advanced and sustained, democratic development must also take place.

Results of U.S. efforts to address these challenges have been mixed. Governments in the region have yet to establish the legal frameworks necessary for thriving economies and functioning democracies, and the political will to implement them has been fundamen-

tally lacking. Outside actors like the United States have limited leverage over these governments but can still exercise influence. The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the Middle East Partnership Initiative, as well as the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) have separately made inroads in stimulating reform, but they are severely underresourced relative to the task at hand: yearly spending on democracy programming for the whole of the broader Middle East remains less than 1 percent of the Pentagon's annual expenditures in Iraq alone.

With the collapse of oil prices and the contraction of the global economy, pressures on the region's economies create both opportunities and challenges for the United States and its partners in the region. In the short term, helping the region's governments to stabilize their economies is clearly in the U.S. interest but only if such assistance is linked to serious commitments to political reform and anticorruption measures. Otherwise, any "stability" achieved will be short-lived and subject to populist reaction, leading to potentially greater dislocation later.

**PARTNERING WITH ARAB GOVERNMENTS:** In part because of the region's "democracy deficit," the question arises as to whether its governments in the region can be real partners with the United States in countering extremism. The Bush administration determined that altering the relationship with America's allies in Middle East was essential to creating a more lasting stability in the region, choosing to put public pressure on its "friends" to open up both their political processes and their economies. The public aspect of the "Freedom Agenda" contributed to significant friction with the governments, but reluctantly, in order to get the United States off their backs, many governments began to make both real and cosmetic changes after 2002. As the situation in postwar Iraq deteriorated, however, U.S. pressure was turned against the administration as a propaganda tool. These governments argued that the United States was trying to impose its political system on the region and claimed Iraq was proof that democracy only brings instability and insecurity.



As the administration was publicly advocating the Freedom Agenda, after the September 11 attacks it came to rely on these same governments to quietly share intelligence and partner with U.S. military and intelligence agencies to aggressively combat terrorism inside their countries and out. This logical cooperation between governments with a shared interest was not given adequate context by the United States, resulting in a schizophrenic message to the governments and publics of the region and opening the administration up to charges of hypocrisy, double-standards, and inconsistency. With the election of Hamas in the West Bank and Gaza in 2006 and the electoral gains of the Muslim Brothers in Egypt, the administration was seen to shelve its reformist push altogether, further undermining its credibility in the region among Arab

Over the past few years, Mubarak, now eighty, has permitted the government to undertake a series of economic reforms. These reforms have contributed to a growing Egyptian economy but have not been accompanied by concomitant political reforms. As the economic reforms have begun to trigger political unrest, in fact, the regime has increasingly come to rely on its security forces and the defense establishment to maintain stability. The reluctance to increase political space for political liberals, leftists, nationalists, bloggers, Facebook activists, and journalists has contributed to a strengthening of the only opposition with access to resources and the mosque, the banned but tolerated Muslim Brotherhood. This combination of events potentially risks Egypt’s stability and with it the stability of the region as a whole.

**“EGYPT REMAINS THE BELLWETHER FOR U.S. POLICY...AND...PRESENTS A CRUCIAL CASE FOR APPLYING THIS BALANCING FORMULA.”**

publics and signaling to Arab governments that the U.S. support for greater freedom within their societies was over.

A key test for the Obama administration will be to determine the precise formula of cajoling and cooperating with friendly governments for the long-term efforts to support political and economic reform while confronting radical extremism.

**EGYPT REMAINS THE BELLWETHER FOR U.S. POLICY:** As the most populous Arab state and the largest recipient of U.S. economic and military aid in the Middle East, Egypt presents a crucial case for applying this balancing formula. Under the leadership of President Hosni Mubarak, Egypt has been a strategic partner of the United States for nearly thirty years but soon faces an inevitable transition. The Obama administration must have a clear view of how it wants to shape that transition and, if it so chooses, how it wants to redefine the partnership.

Despite concerns over Egypt’s worrying political circumstances, the United States will continue to cooperate with Egypt on a full range of foreign policy priorities including efforts to make peace between Israel and Arab states, efforts to maintain security in the eastern Mediterranean and Red Sea, as well as efforts to confront radical extremism. However, as the administration sets priorities for continued partnership with Cairo, it should formulate new ways to secure long-term objectives while meeting short-term goals. In exchange for continued partnership in strategic, military, and economic relations, for example, it should at the same time seek Egypt’s commitment to an agenda of constructive regional responsibility, structural eradication of corruption, and an expansion of civil and political space. Prioritizing its engagement with Cairo among these various objectives requires deft and nimble diplomacy, but how well Washington succeeds in its larger regional policy will be judged in large measure by how well or poorly that policy works for Egypt.



**WEAK PUBLIC DIPLOMACY EFFORTS:** The Bush administration tried a variety of public diplomacy efforts, some of which were more successful than others. Overall, however, it did not meet the challenges elaborated in the previous passages. In pursuing new missions, defining new strategies, and coordinating the available tools, the Obama administration should retain those elements of existing policies that have proven successful while garnering greater financial and human resources to develop a fresh approach to public diplomacy.

During the past eight years, for instance, satellite television has demonstrated a dramatic impact on the region. Al-Jazeera Arabic, with its emphasis on sensationalism frequently tinged with anti-Americanism, has carved out a substantial market share. If, in earlier years, former Egyptian leader Gamal Abdel Nasser's myth of an Arab world was just that, today al-Jazeera may successfully forge such a consciousness, for better or, more likely, worse. During that same time, the U.S. tools to create alternatives proved insufficiently responsive to policy priorities and were slow to revamp for this new challenge. Caught up in highly partisan infighting, the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG) and Congress have lacked a sense of mission and imagination and failed to provide Voice of America (VOA), Radio Farda, and al-Hurra with consistent priorities, resources, and oversight.

As a result, these potentially powerful tools have instead remained on the periphery of policy discussion and have not lived up to their potential in terms of providing the alternative sources of news, opinion, and cross-cultural content for which they were designed. The result has been lost time, missed opportunities, and, for some, falling listener/viewership. Not until Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice took independent action in the 2006 supplemental appropriations request was Congress forced to effectively double the BBG budget for Iran, for instance. Nearly nine years after September 11 and despite these additional resources, VOA today continues to broadcast Larry King and other CNN "filler" content into Iran for lack of original programming. Moreover, the broadcasters remain targets of frequent criticism

from across the political spectrum for their failure to make dramatic progress in reaching more of their intended audience.

**PUBLIC DIPLOMACY VS. BATTLE OF IDEAS:** Part of the reason for the insufficient attention to the government's mass media, potentially one of its most important tools for engaging with foreign publics, has been a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature public diplomacy. For the balance of President Bush's two terms, a succession of undersecretaries at the State Department perceived the primary challenge in public diplomacy as getting citizens around the world to have a more positive view of the United States. Initiatives centered on advertising campaigns, listening tours, "goodwill" ambassadors such as Cal Ripken Jr., and the like. Most of these efforts, though well-meaning, have been wholly ineffective in empowering mainstream voices at the forefront of the struggle with radical extremism. The traditional tools of public diplomacy—exchanges, scholarships, etc.—are extremely important in exposing individuals to the best of American political culture but are extremely limited in scale and scope. Empowering those who have something at stake in their communities is far more important, even if the actors themselves have ambivalent views of the United States and its policies.

Late in its second term, the Bush administration began to grapple with the difference between improving foreigners' perception of the United States (conventional public diplomacy) and supporting mainstream Muslim voices. In 2007, for instance, the State Department, cognizant of the need to understand the radicalization problem in Europe, established a senior-level position within the Bureau of European Affairs to work with and advise the assistant secretary of state for Europe. The State Department also initiated an array of programs to begin to identify and support mainstream Muslim voices, but many of these are so new that they have yet to embed themselves within the bureaucracy.

**GROWING MILITARY ROLE IN STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS:** The Pentagon, in the mean-



time, has increased its capacity in this area, as it has in so many others since September 11, from humanitarian assistance to intelligence. In 2007 it established a deputy assistant secretary for the support of public diplomacy to fill a perceived gap in the direction of the war of ideas. The U.S. Combatant Commands, particularly Central Command, have seen the necessity to engage in “shaping” operations across its area of responsibility, in order to better position the U.S. military should it be forced to engage in those countries.

In conflict zones, it is clear that the U.S. military should have the lead in developing and implementing integrated political-military strategies to ensure force protection and broader security and stability within their areas of responsibility. Increasingly, however, the Pentagon is developing capacities that are the proper purview of civilian agencies that unfortunately lack the capacity of the U.S. Department of Defense.

When it comes to efforts fostering alternatives to extremism, resources are currently hopelessly skewed between military and civilian agencies. As noted earlier, annual U.S. government spending on democracy promotion and public diplomacy in the entire broader Middle East is less than 1 percent of the Pentagon’s annual expenditures in Iraq. By the end of this decade, the Pentagon will have three times as many Special Operations Forces (60,000) than the State Department has employees (18,000-plus in 2006). Secretary of Defense Robert Gates has recognized this problem and called for more resources for the State Department and USAID, but the Obama administration will have to do the heavy lifting necessary to make the case for greater resources to a reluctant Congress.

In addition, the effort is plagued by a lack of coordination. While the undersecretary of state for public diplomacy is the White House designee in charge of the government’s strategic communication efforts, this position has no authority over budgets and has been relegated to a weak coordinating function. The undersecretary, for instance, has no clear view of how the Combatant Commands are disposing of their extraor-

dinary resources and is powerless to direct them. A strong interagency process that gave the State Department greater say in these areas would ensure enhanced coordination of effort for greater effect. Recently, the government took a step forward by establishing an informal “small group” including the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC), the Central Intelligence Agency, and the Defense and State departments to share operational details of both overt and covert activities in this arena. Given the challenges outlined here, clearly an informal sharing exercise is insufficient. Along these lines, the deputy national security advisor for combating terrorism is fully occupied with the military, law enforcement, and intelligence aspects of counterterrorism, leaving insufficient time to focus on the ideological radicalization process.

**THE BOTTOM LINE:** A British government official, speaking about individuals’ connections to extremist ideology, put it best. “There is no single path that leads people to violent extremism,” he said. “Social, foreign policy, economic, and personal factors all lead people to throw their lot in with extremists.”

Broadly speaking, in order to break this disturbing cycle of radicalization, the United States and its allies must stimulate competition for the would-be “radicalizer,” loosely defined to include al-Qaeda and like-minded groups that engage in global propaganda efforts, influential extremist clerics, and local-level recruiters. While supporting as many challengers as possible, the United States must simultaneously work with governments on greater systemic reform. Choice is a critical concept in dissuading would-be extremists from becoming violent. The more alternatives available to young people, the greater their freedom, and the more credible the voices exposing them to alternative arguments, the less vulnerable they are to extremist ideas. However, the United States should also deepen its efforts to counter the extremist narrative, both by better using its existing mechanisms and by increasingly relying on and partnering with the private sector and NGOs.

# TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS

**TO CONFRONT THIS IDEOLOGY** of radical extremism, there are a variety of steps that the Obama administration should take. These will include a number of key strategic, functional, and organizational changes from the previous administration's approach in this area.

## 1. STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

**1.1. EXPAND FOCUS FROM VIOLENT TO NONVIOLENT EXTREMISM.** The Obama administration needs to view the spread of an ideology of radical extremism with urgency and seriousness comparable to its view of the spread of violent groups animated by that ideology. Obviously, the first priority for the government is to prevent and deter radical extremist groups from using violence to achieve their goals. But in addition, the government needs to elevate in bureaucratic priority and public consciousness the need to prevent and deter the spread of radical extremist ideology. At the same time, the United States will need to make very clear that it does not consider Islam itself a danger, but only the distorted version of Islam perpetrated by radical extremists.

**1.2. EMPOWER MAINSTREAM MUSLIM VOICES.** The ultimate objective of our public diplomacy, democracy promotion, and counterradicalization efforts should be to encourage and support mainstream Muslims who are competing with extremists and their vision for society.

**1.3. ADDRESS LOCAL GRIEVANCES, NOT ONLY GLOBAL ONES.** International attention has been largely and for many good reasons focused on the global grievances cited by al-Qaeda, such as Iraq, Guantánamo, Kashmir, and above all, the Arab-Israeli conflict. Resolving these various issues would be important developments, not only in furthering counterradicalization efforts, but also in terms of increasing other countries' willingness to cooperate publicly

with the United States on counterterrorism matters. However, these developments alone would not end the radicalization process. The Obama administration should also focus on ensuring that the radical extremists' global narrative does not resonate with individuals' day-to-day lives.

## 2. FUNCTIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

**2.1. REJUVENATE EFFORTS TO PROMOTE PROSPERITY, REFORM, AND DEMOCRACY IN ARAB COUNTRIES.** As a strategic response to extremism, the United States and its allies must offer a viable and attractive political alternative to the dark vision offered by radical extremist groups. Prosperous democratic societies that respect the rights of their citizens are more resilient and less susceptible to political instability and radicalization. If grievances can be expressed peacefully and mediated through democratic institutions, citizens are less apt to turn to more extreme options. Efforts to promote prosperity, democracy, and respect for human rights should, therefore, remain key aspects of this administration's foreign policy agenda, even if the rhetoric describing it changes. The key is to do it better.

**2.1.1. DELINK DEMOCRACY PROMOTION FROM COUNTERTERRORISM POLICY.** In recent years, U.S. public diplomacy rhetoric has made democracy promotion an explicit aspect of counterterrorism policy. It is even included as one of the Intelligence Community's missions in the U.S. National Intelligence Strategy. This has the unintended implication of hurting the ability of both U.S. government and nongovernmental organizations to play an effective role on the ground in supporting democracy and reform efforts, as it raises suspicion that the real purpose of the efforts is regime change. It may be true, as argued here, that advancing freedom and opportunity around the world enhances U.S. national security, but it is



not merely a counterterrorism tactic. It should be delinked by this administration.

**2.1.2. MAKE ECONOMIC REFORM A HIGHER PRIORITY WHILE PRESSING FOR POLITICAL REFORM, INCLUDING HUMAN RIGHTS.**

The U.S. government needs to define country-specific strategies throughout the Middle East that lay out an integrated agenda for political, economic, administrative, and judicial reform. The U.S. government's diplomatic and development efforts in this area should emphasize economic reforms that weaken state control of economic life, expanding the sphere for private activity. In countries where this is already under way, the U.S. government should partner with the private sector to advocate increased trade and investment.

**2.1.3. LINK U.S. ASSISTANCE TO ENDING CORRUPTION IN THE REGION.**

Persistent corruption is the number-one frustration among Arab publics, a factor radical extremists exploit to challenge governmental legitimacy. By standing with these publics in challenging their governments to become more transparent, the United States builds bridges to a suspicious public and robs al-Qaeda of a rhetorical jab. Moreover, since many governments have signed on to international agreements like the United Nations Convention against Corruption, these legal commitments could provide the benchmarks for conditioning assistance, eliminating the argument that the United States is dictating the governments' form of government. In this regard, maintaining and even expanding support for the MCC makes excellent policy sense, since creating carrots to reward good policy is at least as important as developing possible sticks.

**2.1.4. CHALLENGE THE SOCIAL-SERVICE, GRASSROOTS RECRUITMENT TACTIC.**

Where terrorist groups provide social support and aid to their communities, such as Hamas, Hizballah, and the Muslim Brotherhood, the United States must work to empower alternatives to compete with

them. In some cases, this will require helping governments to decentralize, relying on USAID, the World Bank, and other sources of expertise to do so. When the United States investigates charities associated with these groups, it should develop robust mechanisms to provide "charitable backfill" so that legitimate humanitarian work is not disrupted by U.S. actions. Such mechanisms should include more robust support to nonsectarian, nongovernmental organizations that wish to compete with Hamas and Hizballah in providing such services. While these actions may not help in "selling the United States" to these skeptical publics, they may at least prevent groups like Hamas and Hizballah from becoming more popular. More generally, the U.S. government in failed or weak states should look to compete with extremist groups by supporting flexible, targeted development programs designed to stimulate job creation.

**2.1.5. BOOST DEMOCRACY ASSISTANCE TO LEVEL THE PLAYING FIELD.**

The Obama administration should double the level of resources available to both the National Endowment for Democracy and the Middle East Partnership Initiative to continue their support of human rights, democracy, and other activists in the Middle East. Support through both organizations and their sister institutes should be directed to institutions and organizations that have a demonstrated track record in standing up to and competing with both violent and nonviolent extremists.

**2.1.6. CONCENTRATE ON STIMULATING THE DEVELOPMENT OF FREE MEDIA.**

The sine qua non for more open, transparent societies is a free and independent press that can educate and inform as well as shine a spotlight on government malfeasance. To this end, the administration should encourage organizations like the National Endowment for Democracy to make media expansion a pillar of their programming and develop private-public partnerships to stimulate privately developed, independent media. Through credit guaran-



tees, by providing matching seed capital, or through other means, the U.S. government could help new satellite-, terrestrial- and/or internet-based media get off the ground.

**2.2. REORIENT PUBLIC DIPLOMACY TO SUPPORT OUR ALLIES' EFFORTS.** The core mission of public diplomacy must be to identify, nurture, and support mainstream Muslims in the ideological and political contest against radical Islamism and to win backing for such efforts from nations and peoples in non-Muslim societies around the world. Everything that is new and special about America's public diplomacy effort should be targeted toward that goal, rec-

the local level. The State Department should instruct embassies to actively pursue this critical task overseas. Only after we know who and where these credible voices are can we find ways to empower and network them with U.S. NGOs in the business and nonprofit sectors that can take the lead to make it happen.

**2.3.2. HIGHLIGHT DIVERSE VOICES, FROM SECULAR TO RELIGIOUS.** The new administration should make clear that it understands that religious piety is not synonymous with radicalization. Part of effectively countering radical extremist ideology is for the United States to stress that it is not at war with Islam, nor should the United States

**“THE NEW ADMINISTRATION SHOULD MAKE CLEAR THAT IT UNDERSTANDS THAT RELIGIOUS PIETY IS NOT SYNONYMOUS WITH RADICALIZATION.”**

ognizing that more traditional public diplomacy programs, such as educational exchanges, will continue. International broadcasting, in particular, should reflect this core mission.

**2.3. GO BEYOND THE AMERICAN BRAND.** U.S. public diplomacy efforts must be mainly about empowering mainstream Muslims to compete with radical extremists and not about employing our best researchers, pollsters, and marketers to improve the American brand.

**2.3.1. IDENTIFY AND NETWORK OPINION LEADERS AS ALLIES.** The United States must more effectively identify Muslim activists, entrepreneurs, writers, businesspeople, media personalities, students, and others who lead opinion within their domestic communities and abroad, particularly at

be seen to endorse any particular form of Muslim religious observance. U.S. policy should be to recognize that religious diversity and education can be a bulwark against extremism. In its engagement with Muslims, here and abroad, the administration should reach out to a broad spectrum of groups and individuals, from the pious to the secular.

**2.3.3. PRIORITIZE POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT.**<sup>1</sup> While interacting with a diverse range of Muslims and Arabs, the U.S. government should prioritize its political engagement with parties and groups that share our long-term objectives and have a demonstrated track record in standing up to and competing with both violent and non-violent extremists. Such parties and groups deserve first claim on the attention of our diplomats and policymakers.

1. We define Islamist groups as those that endorse the reestablishment of a caliphate, which would be governed by *sharia* (Islamic law), including those who support achieving this end state through the political process. We explicitly do not put all religious and practicing Muslims in this category, as most do not sign on to this broader vision and do not believe political systems and governments need to be run according to these principles.



U.S. engagement will naturally vary with different strands of Islamist groups. We endorse such engagement when its objectives are concrete and clearly articulated to advance U.S. interests. Whereas local actors and the nongovernmental sector may have a different approach, in the Middle East it is widely understood that official engagement (i.e., political-level dialogue) is a political act that has important and wide-ranging implications. While taking steps to ensure that it has lines of communication and intelligence throughout local societies, the U.S. government needs to avoid a situation in which its pursuit of “dialogue” with certain Islamists has the unintended consequence of dispiriting or even

ries of the mothers, sons, and daughters who have lost their husbands, fathers, and mothers due to al-Qaeda’s carnage.

**2.3.5. IDENTIFY CREDIBLE VOICES TO EXPLOIT FISSURES.** The United States should continue to exploit and amplify existing ideological fissures and further drive wedges between radical extremists and their followers and prospective followers. The United States should amplify the voices critical of al-Qaeda, particularly former jihadists and extremists like Dr. Fadl, even though we may still take issue with many of their views. As demonstrated by Ayman al-Zawahiri’s defensiveness in his

**“THE UNITED STATES SHOULD AMPLIFY THE VOICES CRITICAL OF AL-QAEDA...EVEN THOUGH WE MAY STILL TAKE ISSUE WITH MANY OF THEIR VIEWS.”**

undermining other groups and parties with whom we share closer interests. At the same time, the U.S. government should step back to allow local actors and the nongovernmental sector to operate more freely of official policy.

**2.3.4. PORTRAY THE AL-QAEDA THREAT REALISTICALLY AND EMPHASIZE THE GROUP’S BANKRUPT IDEOLOGY.** Al-Qaeda is trying to portray itself not as a terrorist organization but as a global movement that can successfully defeat the West. Rather than portraying al-Qaeda as a strong, coherent force, U.S. rhetoric should instead make better use of satire and humor to ridicule and humiliate the al-Qaeda leadership or, when appropriate, even ignore it. Official rhetoric should also highlight how little al-Qaeda’s ideology offers, with no viable vision for the future or redress for everyday problems, and emphasize that victims and targets of al-Qaeda’s terrorist attacks are primarily Muslims and mosques, respectively. It should humanize the victims of al-Qaeda, by showing the personal sto-

lengthy question-and-answer session over the internet in the summer of 2008, these voices appear to be the ones al-Qaeda itself fears most.

**2.4. EMPLOY NUANCED, NONCOMBATIVE RHETORIC.** Focusing on the specific terrorist threats in each country, and moving away from the “war on terror” rhetoric, would short-circuit the extremist narrative that the “Muslim world” is involved in a global conflict with the West and reduce other countries’ ability to take inappropriate action toward their own citizens under the guise of counterterrorism. Indeed, even referencing a singular “Muslim world” inadvertently echoes al-Qaeda’s narratives while downplaying the rich diversity that exists within the Muslim community globally and among various countries.

Recent policy frameworks that envision the United States as involved in a “global counterinsurgency” are particularly unhelpful. Such sweeping generalizations encourage the viewing of any existing government as a target of insurgency, no matter how unpopular that government. The United States has pushed many countries



to take aggressive counterterrorism actions, at times allowing them to take action against dissidents under the rubric of fighting terrorism. This policy has often left the United States as the “bad guy” supporting oppressive governments and standing by as they abuse their people.

**2.5. CHALLENGE EXTREMISTS IN CYBERSPACE.**

The United States should devote far more resources to countering radical extremist messages on the internet, where the self-radicalization process is spreading and accelerating. Recently, the State Department has developed a variety of creative initiatives in this area, including the team of bloggers in the Counterterrorism Communication Team, but this effort must be expanded dramatically to other agencies and include nongovernmental actors.

2.5.1. The United States should focus its efforts on the extremist chat rooms, since these types of two-way interactions are far more dangerous as recruiting tools than websites, where propaganda can merely be downloaded.

**2.6. COORDINATE COUNTERRADICALIZATION PROGRAMS.**

The United States should pay close attention to the counterradicalization programs springing up in Europe, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia, as radicalization in these distant locations can often have a direct impact on U.S. national security.

**2.6.1. CREATE A COUNTERRADICALIZATION FORUM.**

The United States should establish a “Counterradicalization Forum,” where the policymakers and practitioners from the countries engaged in these efforts can compare notes and “best practices.” This organization could also perform independent assessments of each country’s success and press for needed improvements. The organization could further encourage the development of these types of programs in at-risk countries that don’t currently have them (Belgium is an obvious candidate). The organization should have a pool of funding available to dole out for designing, implementing, and improving countries’ programs.

The United States should recognize that not all countries view the counterradicalization problem the same way. For example, the British are willing to work with some groups and individuals whose views the United States might find distasteful, in an effort to try to prevent an attack in the immediate future. Given the grave and imminent threat that exists in Britain, this approach may make sense, as long as the British recognize that it may have negative long-term consequences and that it should be adjusted once conditions improve.

A special focus of this forum should be Saudi Arabia. While the Saudis should be applauded for their domestic counterradicalization efforts, they continue to provide the key supports of extremist ideology, exporting educational material, mosques, and imams. Under the umbrella of this forum, the United States should press Saudi Arabia to cease this activity that endangers us all, including the kingdom itself.

Better understanding the radicalization and deradicalization process is critical to developing effective policies in this area. The United States should press the Counterradicalization Forum to conduct comprehensive assessments on all aspects of the radicalization cycle, including why people join terrorist organizations and why some choose to leave; how the radicalization and deradicalization process differs in the United States versus overseas; how radicalization is changing as the terrorist threat evolves; and what the realistic limits are in the deradicalization process.

**2.7. IMPROVE DOMESTIC COUNTERRADICALIZATION EFFORTS.**

The United States benefits from a broadly positive integration experience among its Muslim-American communities. There are steps the government can take to ensure that this trend continues.

**2.7.1. UTILIZE BEST PRACTICES FROM ABROAD.**

The United States should closely study other countries’ counterradicalization programs to see whether there are any lessons to apply at home.



Several of the European countries' innovations appear to have particular domestic applicability, for example:

The United States should take a page from the British and ensure that all relevant government agencies are engaged on these issues and fully understand the U.S. strategy. At the very least, it should focus on ensuring that agencies avoid mistakes that will poison community relations and possibly contribute to radicalization.

In the U.S. system, the only place for a local citizen to turn to with concerns about potential radicalization would be the FBI. In local communities, this option increases the perception that the U.S. government views Muslim and Arab Americans as a threat. This perception may increase now with the newly released Attorney General Guidelines, which gives the FBI more latitude and authority to conduct broad-ranging assessments of the domestic threat. This authority will allow the bureau to move beyond solely investigating specific cases with sufficient legal predicate to, more broadly, "chasing the threat."

In light of this change, the government should work with communities to develop alternative non-law enforcement mechanisms at the local level, both governmental and nongovernmental, to deal with radicalization in these communities. The city of Amsterdam's "Information House" is a good model.

**2.7.2. BROADEN MUSLIM OUTREACH.** The United States should work closely with its Arab-origin and Muslim communities to ensure open channels of communication. The U.S. law enforcement agencies, including the U.S. Attorneys' offices, the FBI, and the Department of Homeland Security, have had extensive engagement with the domestic Muslim and Arab communities. While this contact is important, Muslim communities must see the government as consisting of more than its law enforcement arms. It is therefore critical that engagement is broadened to include service-providing entities, such as the Health and Human Services Department, the Centers for Disease Control and Pre-

vention, and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

**2.7.3. DIVERSITY IS ESSENTIAL.** The United States should ensure that its outreach is as broad as possible and not allow one group or organization to monopolize representation of these tremendously diverse communities.

**2.7.4. HIGHLIGHT U.S. ACTIONS DOMESTICALLY.** The government should better publicize its extensive, but little-known, efforts to protect the civil liberties of its Arab-origin and Muslim citizens. These actions will help to reassure domestic Muslim-American communities, alert them to outlets for resolving their grievances, encourage greater cooperation with law enforcement and other government agencies, and reduce the resonance of the radical extremist global narrative.

### 3. STRUCTURAL RECOMMENDATIONS

**3.1. FIX THE EXISTING BUREAUCRACY.** While there are worthwhile debates about whether new agencies are needed to meet the substantial challenges outlined here, the administration should begin by fixing the existing bureaucracy. This effort will require the right leadership and some important adjustments to the machinery of public diplomacy, democracy promotion, and counterradicalization.

**3.2. DESIGNATE A SINGLE ADDRESS FOR THE COORDINATION OF U.S. PUBLIC DIPLOMACY, STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION, AND COUNTERRADICALIZATION STRATEGY.** Despite the undesirability of a drastic reorganization, it is critical that strategic coordination in combating extremist ideology be provided by a senior administration official at the White House. Only by having someone close to the president in charge of the overall effort can there be any hope of maintaining strategic focus over the longer term. The ideal solution would be for the deputy national security advisor (DNSA) for combating terrorism to focus on the military,



law enforcement, and intelligence aspects of pressuring and defeating violent extremists, with a second DNSA, perhaps the DNSA for strategic communication, a position that already exists, available to devote his or her full time and attention to the ideological parts of this struggle.

Splitting these responsibilities along these lines, instead of creating a new DNSA position, also makes sense given current fiscal realities and difficult adjustments still under way from other recent government restructuring. However, ensuring a specific address for

work in both combat areas, where one expects the military to lead, and in non-combat zones. Part of the problem is a dangerously imbalanced allocation of resources between military and civilian agencies and an underfunding for State Department public diplomacy and strategic communications efforts. Redirecting this imbalance needs to be a top priority for the administration.

**3.3.2. EXPAND THE UNDERSECRETARY’S ROLE.** The undersecretary for public diplomacy

**“THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD BETTER PUBLICIZE ITS EXTENSIVE, BUT LITTLE-KNOWN, EFFORTS TO PROTECT THE CIVIL LIBERTIES OF ITS ARAB-ORIGIN AND MUSLIM CITIZENS.”**

the policy coordination effort is crucial, whatever the specific structural nature of the assignment.

The official in this position should coordinate the public diplomacy and counterradicalization functions. An important aspect of the DNSA’s portfolio should be the construction of a formalized interagency group, including the State and Defense departments, the CIA, and the NCTC. This group should track and assess progress and challenges in the implementation of both the overt and covert components of the overall strategy to confront radical ideology. This contact will help foster jointedness among the key agencies and awareness of each other’s activities, which was not always the case in the previous administration.

**3.3. STRENGTHEN THE ROLE AND CAPACITY OF THE STATE DEPARTMENT.** At the same time the White House position is created, the administration should seek to bolster the capacity of the State Department to operationalize strategic communications and public diplomacy.

**3.3.1. BALANCE CIVIL AND MILITARY RESOURCES.** The military is increasingly stepping in to do public diplomacy and counterradicalization

should spearhead the ideological contest against radical extremism and should have the powers and resources to carry out this task. This position should be viewed as critical to national security, not as a public relations job. The undersecretary should be given far greater control over his own agency’s public diplomacy personnel and planning around the world. The U.S. embassies’ missions should include an emphasis on implementing efforts to counter radical ideology specifically.

**3.3.3. CREATE AN ASSISTANT SECRETARY POSITION.** To assist in executing these expanded responsibilities, the administration should work with Congress to create a new assistant secretary within the Office of the Undersecretary for Public Diplomacy. The official in this role would:

**3.3.3.1.** Oversee and direct all International Information Programs (IIP) conducted by the bureau.

**3.3.3.2.** Work with embassies and regional bureaus to develop strategies to empower and



amplify mainstream Muslim voices around the world and be resourced to implement them.

**3.3.4. CREATE NEW DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY POSITIONS IN REGIONAL BUREAUS.** Currently within the State Department's Bureau of European Affairs, a senior advisor to the assistant secretary of European affairs works bilaterally with embassies in Europe as well as many groups and individuals across the continent as part of the U.S. public diplomacy, strategic communication, and counterradicalization strategy. This role should be institutionalized as a deputy assistant secretary (DAS) for each regional bureau. Each regional DAS would maintain a dotted-line relationship with the new assistant secretary to create an effective counterradicalization forum within the State Department.

**3.3.5. RATE AMBASSADORS ON COUNTER-RADICALIZATION.** To ensure that U.S. embassies in key posts are appropriately focused on countering extremist ideology, this responsibility should be explicitly included in the White House's letter of commission for all ambassadors. Ambassadors should also be rated on their efforts in this area, an approach the British have used effectively in specific countries of concern. Both the DNSA and the assis-

tant secretary responsible for these efforts would have input into these ratings.

**3.4. REORIENT THE BBG FOR STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION.** International broadcasting is an essential element of U.S. efforts, already consuming more than half of the public diplomacy budget. It is essential that BBG members commit their media outlets to this goal. Therefore, policy considerations, emphasizing a commitment to and appreciation of counterradicalization, should drive the decision making in filling vacancies in the BBG. With so many vacancies, there is an opportunity to create a BBG of outstanding Americans committed to the spread of enlightened values. At the height of the Cold War, for example, Ronald Reagan infused international broadcasting with a sense of national purpose and strategic mission. Today, President Obama and Secretary of State Clinton should seek to endow the board with a comparable stature. The result will be U.S. international broadcasting to Arab and Muslim societies that reaches over governments to give voice to the peoples of this region and to build—through satellites and radio waves—a network of human connections between them and their American partners in the effort against radical extremism. With proper leadership, mission, oversight, resources, and personnel, America's broadcasting outlets to Arab and Muslim societies can be a powerful tool in this undertaking.

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“THERE IS GROWING CONSENSUS that countering the ideology that drives extremism is a critical element in the overall effort to prevent and defeat the violence that emerges from it. Despite this greater realization, a precise strategy to counter extremism and empower mainstream alternatives... remains a daunting and urgent task for the Obama Administration.”

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