Fighting the Ideological Battle

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

J. Scott Carpenter, Matthew Levitt,
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X

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Contents

Acknowledgments

Preface

IN MARCH 2009, The Washington Institute released the final report of the bipartisan Presidential Task Force on Confronting the Ideology of Radical Extremism. Titled *Rewriting the Narrative: An Integrated Strategy for Counterradicalization*, the report urged the Obama administration to adopt a multifaceted and integrated approach to confronting the animating ideology of violent extremism both domestically and abroad. The suggested approach was comprehensive and included strategic, functional, and structural recommendations spanning all aspects of American power.

Laudably, the administration has adopted a number of the functional and structural recommendations since that time. The administration is also reportedly nearing the end of a number of policy reviews, including the new Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review headed by the deputy secretary of state and U.S. Agency for International Development administrator, as well as Presidential Study Directive 7, led by the National Security Council's senior director for global development. These reviews may yet impact the administration's decision to implement further recommendations. According to a leaked draft of Directive 7, the administration's approach recognizes development as essential to U.S. security and places a premium on economic growth and democratic governance, both of which were key recommendations of The Washington Institute's task force for a long-term solution on mitigating violent extremism.

At the same time, the administration remains uncomfortable with the core strategic recommendation of the task force report: that it go beyond countering violent extremism (CVE) to prevent and deter the spread of the ideology that nurtures and supports said violent extremism—radical Islamist extremism. Members of the administration articulate a number of rationales for this approach, many of which merit attention

and discussion. In particular, administration officials have expressed concern about employing language that could be interpreted as an attack on Islam as a religion. However, unless government recognizes and articulates clearly the threat posed by the ideology of radical Islamist extremism, its broader whole-of-government efforts will lack strategic focus and will fail to address the varied root causes of domestic and foreign radicalization. It is indeed possible to do this without denigrating the Islamic religion in any way.

This new report recognizes the important steps the Obama administration has taken to address violent extremism and suggests ways to address remaining gaps in U.S. homeland security and foreign policy. The report has benefited from a series of interviews with administration officials at numerous cabinet-level agencies and the White House and has been shaped by the impressive experience and wisdom of two former intelligence and counterterrorism officials. It is the product of a small study group including two distinguished experts, Steve Simon and Juan Zarate, and ourselves.

This report was the collaborative effort of our four-member study group and reflects the broad consensus of its members. Members were asked to endorse the report's fundamental findings, not each and every one of its judgments and recommendations. 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.

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The Growing Challenge

THE CHALLENGE OF "waging a global campaign against al-Qaeda and its terrorist affiliates" remains the central objective of U.S. counterterrorism policy.[1] Keeping this central goal narrowly defined has its merits, focusing all elements of national power on a singular aim without subordinating other elements of our national security. Indeed, as the 2010 National Security Strategy made clear, "Terrorism is one of many threats that are more consequential in a global age."[2]

Integral to a comprehensive counterterrorism strategy, however, is a corresponding priority to counter the violent extremism underlying the terrorist threat we face today. And the scope of this effort extends beyond al-Qaeda and its immediate affiliates to include "conveyor belt" groups and other elements that purvey extremist ideologies and direct vulnerable youths down a path toward acts of terrorism and political violence. The internet has accelerated the potential for this ideology to reach beyond specific communities and enables the perception of a virtual community of like-minded radicals.

Since 9/11, U.S. efforts to counter extremist ideology have spanned a spectrum that has included a mix of engagement, counterradicalization, and tactical counterterrorism efforts. Today, significant programs and initiatives have been expanded at one end of the spectrum to advance global engagement and strategic communication objectives abroad and community engagement and town hall meetings with immigrant communities at home. At the other end of the spectrum, counterterrorism officials have concentrated their attention not only on preventing the plots being hatched today, but also on developing and deepening fissures within and among al-Qaeda, its affiliated terrorist groups, and their supporters.

These efforts have borne fruit and are to be praised. But on their own, they fall short. Engagement and counterterrorism are key elements of this comprehensive strategy, but the wide space between them must be addressed. Missing are the policies and programs that should suffuse the space between these two poles on the counterradicalization spectrum, including efforts to contest the extremist narrative of radicalizers, empower and network mainstream voices countering extremism, promote diversity of ideas and means of expression, and challenge extremist voices and ideas in the public domain. Contesting the radical Islamist narrative does not mean arresting or banning despicable but protected speech; rather, it means openly contesting extremist views by offering alternatives and fostering deeper ideological debate. The objective in either case is to strengthen the moderate center against the extremist pole and help Muslim communities become more resilient in confronting the challenge.

The United States faces diverse security challenges directly related to these core questions both at home and abroad. At home, incidents of domestic radicalization have increased dramatically. According to a recent RAND report, there have been forty-six reported cases of domestic radicalization and recruitment to what it calls "jihadist terrorism" since September 2001—30 percent of which occurred in 2009 alone.[3] The most recent cases include the November 2009 shooting at Fort Hood by U.S. Army major Nidal Malik Hasan; the June 2009 killing and wounding of military recruiters in Little Rock by a Muslim convert, Carlos Bledsoe, who had returned from Yemen; the October 2009 arrest of Colleen Renee LaRose, a.k.a. "Jihad Jane"; the March 2010 indictment of five northern Virginia men in Pakistan accused of attempting to join al-Qaeda, the Taliban, or both; and the May 2010 attempted car bombing in Times Square by a naturalized American citizen from Pakistan. According to Philip Mudd, former deputy director of the FBI's National Security Branch, "Most individuals connected to al-Qaeda-inspired activity in this country are converts or native-born Muslims.... The message of venom has spread."[4] Some of these individuals

were influenced by the teachings of Anwar al-Awlaki, a fugitive al-Qaeda cleric and U.S. citizen now living in Yemen. According to officials, al-Awlaki has "moved up the terrorist supply chain" by virtue of his success as a talent scout and radical ideologue.[5]

Although the United States has not encountered European levels of domestic radicalization, homegrown Islamic radicalism has accelerated recently. In some cases, extremists have recruited and radicalized young Muslim Americans on the streets of major U.S. cities. A number of people have been indicted for radicalizing Somali American youths in the Minneapolis

networks is increasingly bringing the front line of the struggle against terrorism to our shores. Ideology, in other words, is the common strand that binds these plots and individuals and is a driver for this global movement. To be at war with the network, therefore, requires both tactical efforts to thwart attacks and strategic efforts to counter the extremist radicalization that fuels its hatred and violence and undergirds its strategy and global appeal.

Whether in Baghdad or Berlin, Lahore or Lausanne, Minneapolis or Marrakesh, an ideological competition within Islam is deepening around the world that

> The threat to homeland security and spike in homegrown radicalization are coupled with an evolving threat abroad.

area and dispatching them to fight with the al-Qaeda-affiliated al-Shabab in Somalia. These recruiters produced the first American suicide bombers: two Somali Americans, including Shirwa Ahmed, radicalized and recruited in the United States, blew themselves up in an al-Shabab-related suicide attack in Somalia in October 2008. In other cases, extremists like al-Awlaki have radicalized and inspired new recruits through websites and chat rooms. As one analyst concluded, "These cases tell us that radicalization and recruitment to jihadist terrorism do happen here. They are clear indications of the terrorist intent. The threat is real."[6]

The threat to homeland security and spike in homegrown radicalization are coupled with an evolving threat abroad, where the United States faces myriad, complex security challenges inspired by various strands of Islamist extremist ideology. The latest National Security Strategy accurately described Afghanistan and Pakistan as "the frontline" of "a war against a far-reaching network of hatred and violence."[7] But the Detroit Christmas 2009 plotter Umar Farouq Abdulmutallab, New York subway plotter Najibullah Zazi, and Chicago-based Lashkar-e-Taiba operative David Headley provide recent examples of how the transnational threat posed by global terrorist

undermines U.S. national security. The competition is between a modern, predominantly pluralistic view of the world and an exclusionary, harsh, and equally modern ideology that appeals to a glorious past, places aspects of religious identity above all others, and relies on a distorted interpretation of Islam. Ironically, the ideology, as articulated by either Sunni or Shiite radicals, has little to do with traditional piety and is perceived as religiously unsound by the majority of Muslims, who have been its primary victims.

The conflict between these two visions constitutes a struggle for the hearts and minds of the majority of Muslims, who abhor violence, but who—out of sympathy, apathy, or fear—will not or cannot confront the extremists in their communities. Any strategy, therefore, that does not skillfully contest the claims and actions of radical extremism cannot succeed. This is not to suggest ideology is the sole or even the main driver of violent Islamic extremism. Research shows that the rationales individuals give for participating in violent acts are as diverse as the individuals themselves. Yet radical Islamist ideology provides a powerful justification for political violence. By framing local grievances in an extremist global narrative, it predisposes at-risk young people to radicalization. It cannot be ignored.

The U.S. Approach to Countering Violent Extremism

TRADITIONALLY, THE UNITED STATES has placed violent extremism at home or overseas primarily within law enforcement and diplomatic paradigms, ignoring ideology altogether. The logic of this approach has been straightforward: since what people think and say is not a crime, the state can only act if and when a violent act occurs.

Overseas, the principal approaches that have dominated the effort to confront violent extremism include public diplomacy, military counterinsurgency operations, and intelligence-driven counterterrorism efforts. Domestically, "engagement" with the Muslim community has been the key strategy, though it has been poorly defined and driven not by a mutual interest to confront extremist ideology, but by a desire to redress specific group or community grievances, both real and perceived.

possible, either through an array of exchange programs or through international broadcasting assets and new media tools. Together, these methods seek to expose foreigners to the United States in ways that foster a more positive image of America.

The Defense Department, meanwhile, continues to follow a second approach best summarized as the global counterinsurgency approach. Shaped largely by the U.S. military's experience in Iraq and Afghanistan, this approach finds nation-states worldwide under varying degrees of threat by militant extremists who seek to undermine them. It relies heavily on the allied host nation, particularly on its military, and tends to concentrate on increasing the efficiency, rather than the legitimacy, of existing government institutions within the host nation. The global counterinsurgency approach covers a range of activities. In Afghanistan,

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The first and most prominent has been the public diplomacy approach, whose primary bureaucratic home is the State Department. This approach suggests that if the United States can improve its image overseas, the resultant goodwill can serve as a bulwark against anti-American claims and create space for explicit alliances between the United States and other governments. The goodwill generated through the public diplomacy approach can also be used to urge acceptance of American-generated policy prescriptions and ideals.

This approach accentuates universal or shared values and seeks to explain American values in that context. It has also focused on promoting alternative, positive visions of political and social organization as a counter to violent extremist ideology. Programmatically, the approach tries to bring America to as many people as

for example, the U.S. military is active in all aspects of implementation. Yet in the Trans-Sahara region of North Africa, the primary goal is to "shape" the environment so that "ungoverned spaces" shrink rather than expand.

Due to its association with America's armed forces, this approach unintentionally casts a military aura around U.S. interactions with foreign publics and can, at times, undercut the State Department's public diplomacy approach. At the same time, the fact that it is a Defense Department approach ensures that it is well funded within the Combatant Commands. Its programs, however, have been relatively opaque.

The third approach has been the counterterrorism approach, which seeks to leverage all elements of national power to counter the threat of global terror-

ism. As a result, it seeks coordinated action to target root causes of violent extremism, strengthen states, undermine the terrorist narrative, and contest the underlying ideology. The counterterrorism approach emerged from the 9-11 Commission findings and led, among other things, to the creation of the National Counterterrorism Center. In the wake of the 9/11 attacks, and apart from the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, this approach largely defined national security priorities in the first half of the Bush administration, though as various national security documents make clear, the administration held an expansive view of what counterterrorism efforts comprised.[9]

These approaches have operated in tandem with one another for a decade, often complementing but sometimes conflicting with one another.

Obama Administration Approach

Since President Obama took office, the administration has broadly maintained a mix of the three approaches, marking a telling continuation of a core Bush administration policy. The major policy change has been to rhetorically narrow the definition of counterterrorism while pursuing an expansive public diplomacy effort to "restore America's image" in the world, primarily the so-called Muslim world.

The latest National Security Strategy reiterated a number of times in different contexts that the best way for the United States "to promote our values is to live them."[10] Aspects of this approach have included announcing the imminent closure of the prison facility at Guantanamo Bay, investing heavily in resolving global grievances such as the Palestinian and broader Arab-Israeli conflict, and banning from the government's lexicon language construed to be divisive, such as "jihadist," "Islamist," "Islamist extremism," or even, for a period, the word "terrorism." In addition, the administration has struggled to find a way to describe its commitment to democracy promotion as a goal of U.S. policy, excluding it from the "three Ds" of its national security objectives: diplomacy, development, and defense.

The overall theme of the administration's approach to countering extremism emanates from the president's inaugural address, in which he emphasized "mutual interests and mutual respect" with the peoples of the "Muslim world" and "an extended hand" to governments with which the United States has had limited or no diplomatic relations, particularly Syria and Iran.[11] Both his June 2009 Cairo speech and the recently released National Security Strategy have accentuated and extended these themes.

A year and a half into the administration, the public diplomacy approach has made significant headway regarding one core objective: in many parts of the world, anti-Americanism is down to pre-2003 levels. President Obama's personal story clearly captured the imaginations of millions worldwide, and his election is a testament to the resilience, dynamism, and reality of the American experiment. The Cairo speech, delivered on June 4, 2009, in the "heart of the Muslim world," clearly had deep resonance with many Middle Easterners as well as for Muslims in other parts of the world. According to the latest BBC World Survey Poll, views of U.S. influence in the world are positive for the first time since 2005, and negative responses in twenty of the twenty-eight countries polled dropped nine percentage points.[12] Furthermore, the June 17, 2010, Pew Global Attitudes Survey reported a 20 percent increase in favorable views of the United States from 2007 to 2010.[13] As the research director for the BBC poll commented, "After a year, it appears the 'Obama effect' is real. Its influence on people's views worldwide, though, is to soften the negative aspects of the United States' image, while positive aspects are not yet coming into strong focus."[14]

In March 2010, Undersecretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs Judith McHale introduced a "new global strategic framework for public diplomacy" in an effort "to more closely align [America's public diplomacy] activities with the nation's foreign policy objectives."[15] The framework as outlined included "combating violent extremism" as one of its five strategic objectives and created a deputy assistant secretary of state for public diplomacy in each of the regional bureaus. Despite such laudable efforts, however, the exact methods for integrating public diplomacy priorities at the regional level remain unclear.

Complementing the administration's public diplomacy approach has been a rhetorical narrowing of counterterrorism objectives. The administration has sought to make clear that our principal enemy is al-Qaeda and its affiliates. Counterterrorism efforts, therefore, have focused on capturing and killing its leadership, principally in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) of Pakistan. There, the president has ordered an unprecedented number of drone strikes against senior leaders of the Afghani and Pakistani

egy to identify, isolate, and address pockets of violent extremism around the world. Emphasis across the government, therefore, has been placed on collecting data on violent extremist activities, both domestically and abroad, so that hotspots of violence can be mapped globally. In theory, once hotspots are identified, further research can determine the specific factors that prompt violence, and resources can be directed to address those causes in an effort to mitigate the violence. The National Counterterrorism Center, for example,

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Taliban as well as al-Qaeda. The strikes have resulted in confirmed killings of dozens of lower-ranking militants and at least ten mid- and upper-level leaders within al-Qaeda or the Taliban, including longstanding al-Qaeda leader, financier, and Usama bin Laden confidant Mustafa Abu Yazid (a.k.a. Said al-Masri or just "Sheikh Said").

According to intelligence officials, improved offensive counterterrorism efforts have taken the fight to al-Qaeda along the Afghan-Pakistani border and reduced its capabilities and those of its affiliates to carry out spectacular attacks in the West. At the same time, counterterrorism efforts to undermine extremist ideology have been limited to undermining al-Qaeda's message, leaving the challenge of countering broader extremist ideology largely unaddressed. A member of the Pakistani parliament recently captured the heart of the problem by pointing out that there are more than 2 million unemployed men between ages twenty and forty in the FATA: "If only 2 percent of that 2 million are coerced into militancy, this would mean 40,000 new militants" with "disastrous effects."[16]

Although the Obama administration continues many of the practices of the previous administration, including indefinite detentions and defensive screening measures, it has rejected the Bush administration's "global war on terror." Instead, it has conceived a strat-

includes a "global engagement group" that is responsible for informing, enabling, and supporting government efforts to counter radicalization. This office is planning a pilot program over the next year in a number of Muslim-majority countries where hotspots have been identified to confirm that the strategy will work.

Partly as a result of insufficient bureaucratic overlap, and partly as a result of not having a single point of coordination at the White House, efforts at countering violent extremism abroad are slipping between the cracks. It remains unclear which agency or department has overall responsibility for combating violent extremism. As one analyst recently put it, "Who in fact is responsible in the U.S. government to identify radicalization when it is occurring and then interdict attempts at recruitment?"[17] Within the State Department alone, these efforts are loosely shared by the ambassador-at-large for counterterrorism, the Office of the Special Representative to Muslim Communities, and, to a more limited extent, individuals within the secretary of state's Policy Planning Staff, which is not typically an operational office. Yet despite relatively successful efforts on the new media front,[18] efforts to counter violent extremism remain ad hoc and focused primarily on countering specific violent extremists as opposed to the underlying ideology that nurtures and supports violence.

An Assessment

ALTHOUGH THE OBAMA administration's National Security Strategy recognizes the threat of homegrown extremism, it remains focused on "efforts to prevent and deter attacks [at home] by identifying and interdicting threats, denying hostile actors the ability to operate within our borders, protecting the nation's critical infrastructure and key resources, and securing cyberspace."[19] Lacking is a full-throated recognition of the degree to which ideology fuels violent extremism, especially as international borders become less relevant due to the internet and other technologies. Eradicating specific outbreaks of violent extremism will not prevent its virulent spread unless the underlying challenge of extremist ideology is addressed. The reality is that although al-Qaeda's leadership is increasingly degraded and its global reach attenuated, the ideology that fuels it continues to spread and gain traction among vulnerable populations. Some argue rather convincingly that al-Qaeda has done more to harm itself than any Western action, by killing more Muslims than non-Muslims, targeting mosques, and offering no realistic alternative to the Western models of governance it rejects. Regardless, the ideological tenets of al-Qaeda thrive, and other, arguably smarter, adversaries continue to exploit its "ideological package," a phenomenon amplified by a ballooning youth bulge in Muslim-majority countries. In Pakistan, for example, 44 percent of the population in 2008 was under eighteen years of age, creating a large reservoir of potential jihadists.[20]

Radicalization through the internet is becoming an increasingly prevalent phenomenon, as seen in the domestic plots mentioned in the first chapter. The internet provides a channel for clerics such as American-born Anwar al-Awlaki to traverse borders with radical rhetoric and reach well-educated demographics.[21] Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Garry Reid, in a March 2010 hearing, asserted that "extremists have optimized the use of Internet chat rooms, Web sites, and email chains to spread their virulent messages and reach a global audience of potential recruits."[22]

Umar Farouq Abdulmutallab, the attempted Christmas 2009 airline bomber, was allegedly "identified, contacted, recruited, and trained all within six weeks" via the internet.[23] Radicalization over the internet also makes it acutely more difficult to track who is being radicalized, and over what distances.[24] The potential of internet radicalization is chilling; indeed, a May 2010 Department of Homeland Security memo warned that al-Awlaki's support for violence against U.S. targets may "inspire terrorist groups or individuals to conduct attacks in the United States."[25]

Today's global engagement and public diplomacy approach may be effective in significant ways, but it has done demonstrably little to impact the spread and appeal of radical Islamist extremism. Recent Washington Institute research exploring Arab behavior at government and public levels generally corroborates the 2010 BBC World Survey Poll and Pew Global Attitudes Survey mentioned in the second chapter, whose findings pointed to improvements in regional views of the United States. Yet the data also makes clear that Arab attitudes have never profoundly constrained Washington's ability to act in the region.[26] Moreover, the more sanguine feelings toward the United States have not translated in any real way into empowering mainstream voices at the forefront of the struggle with radical extremism. The decision to prioritize global grievances such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, rather than working with Arab governments on accelerating political and economic reform that contributes to local grievance resolution, has helped to erode the confidence of potential U.S. partners in the region. The de-emphasis on reform has convinced democracy activists in the region that the Obama administration is not serious about advancing human rights and democracy in their countries.

In sum, a narrowly defined, if aggressively implemented, counterterrorism approach, when coupled with a broad "engagement" policy, can only achieve so much. This approach inevitably creates gaps in U.S.

efforts to intervene early enough in the radicalization process, either domestically or abroad, to prevent individuals or subcommunities from becoming violent. After a person crosses the line into violence, law enforcement intervention or military action becomes the only alternative. This policy combination, moreover, does little to empower those in the trenches seeking to defend their communities from extremist subversion by making them more resilient.

Going forward, the primary challenge for the administration is complementing the latest National Security Strategy with an approach that focuses on the threat posed by the ideology of radical extremism and articulates a systemic, whole-of-government approach to dealing with it. Government agencies currently involved in various aspects of the countering vio-

radicalization, and there are no cookie-cutter explanations or shared underlying conditions that explain all cases of radicalization. But it is clear that better integration of immigrant communities and a greater sense of social cohesion are certainly essential to redress local grievances and can lower the susceptibility of these communities to radicalization. At the same time, challenging and defeating the extremist ideology being peddled by the radicalizers is necessary as well.

Fallout from the nearly successful Christmas 2009 bombing attempt of Delta Flight 253 has focused almost exclusively on the wrong questions. To position ourselves so that we can be more confident of preventing future attacks, we need to ask not only how the bomb got on the plane and how government agencies failed to watch-list the bomber, but why a young,

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lent extremism mission do not complain of a systemic failure, but rather the lack of a system. Absent clear directives instructing them how to distribute and coordinate aspects of the mission, individual officials and their offices simply improvise programs and actions. In doing so, they practically guarantee an episodic and haphazard approach to dealing with the underlying force driving today's terrorist threat.

To give but one example, the National Security Strategy appropriately highlights the need to empower communities to counter radicalization, stating, "Our best defenses against this threat are well informed and equipped families, local communities, and institutions." It commits intelligence resources to better understand this threat and promises to "expand community engagement and development programs to empower local communities." But as a broad policy document, it does not define in detail these actions or indicate who precisely is to carry them out, and how, and with whom.

As mentioned previously, there are many paths to

wealthy, Western-educated Nigerian was radicalized and made the decision to become a terrorist. The son of a prominent banker, Abdulmutallab lived in a posh London neighborhood while studying mechanical engineering at the prestigious University College London. But instead of pursuing a career after graduation, he moved to Egypt, and then to Dubai, dropped out of an MBA program there, and left to pursue Arabic-language and Islamic studies in Yemen.

Fortifying our defenses at home and pursuing our adversaries abroad is simply not enough. Our ultimate adversary is not the individual bomber, but the radical ideology that propels him to carry out an act of terrorism. Why did Abdulmutallab abandon wealth, education, and opportunity for violent global jihad? What prompted Maj. Nidal Malik Hasan, an Army doctor, to reach out to known extremists and ultimately shoot his fellow soldiers at Fort Hood?

The reasons the extremist narrative finds fertile soil in diverse Muslim communities across the globe are as varied as the societies themselves. Some young Mus-

lims respond to a radicalizer's message because they feel excluded from their societies, trapped in poverty or hopelessness by authoritarian regimes. Others, well-off and well-educated, live in Western democratic nations but struggle with issues of belonging and identity and find the message that resonates with their experience and circumstances. Radicalizers enjoy great success by connecting a recruit's local grievance to a radical global narrative that combines Islamist extremism with "clash of civilizations" rhetoric, pitting the West against the Muslim world. In nearly all cases, radicalizers suggest that many aspects of a person's identity can be—indeed must be—reduced to being "Muslim," to the exclusion of other identities. And what it means to be Muslim is defined, of course, by the radicalizer. This has profound policy and programmatic implications, given that emphasizing other aspects of identity and con-

extremist ideology directly. To date, however, official policy as articulated in the National Security Strategy limits U.S. efforts to "combating violent extremism"—which, although necessary, is not sufficient for creating an acceptable end-state in which both the violence and the ideology that fuels it are taboo within Muslim-majority nations around the world, and are no longer animating the global terrorist threat of most concern to the United States. Once individuals cross over into violence their radicalization is complete; the last step in a process has been reached. Even as law enforcement, military, and intelligence successes against al-Qaeda grow, the ideological challenge, unless actively confronted, will continue to metastasize.

The National Security Strategy states that America is "fighting a war against a far-reaching network of hatred and violence," going on to refer exclusively to

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structing alternative narratives are key elements in an effort to short-circuit the radicalization process.

Unfortunately, despite the sharp rise in terrorist plots and cases of homegrown radicalization, specific policies and programs aimed squarely at countering the radical narrative remain few and far between. The Obama administration's efforts to close the Guantanamo Bay prison, eliminate certain interrogation techniques, and change the tone of U.S. engagement with Muslim communities worldwide have met with a generally positive response abroad. According to the June 2010 Pew survey, confidence in the U.S. president increased 43 percent from 2007 to 2010.[27] Yet such efforts do little to address the immediacy of violent extremism. Even the targeted killings of al-Qaeda leaders plotting attacks today may in the long run create new recruits hungry for revenge. It is axiomatic that the United States cannot simply kill its way out of the problem; it must find ways to take on the

al-Qaeda and its affiliates. Recognizing that the more "kinetic" side of counterterrorism gets the lion's share of the administration's attention—especially with U.S. troops still deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan and terrorists trying to attack us at home—the White House needs to direct more attention to combating the ideology that animates the violent groups. The government should assign bureaucratic priority to this endeavor and raise public consciousness of the need to stem the spread of radical extremist ideology. To be sure, officials need to make very clear that they do not consider Islam itself a danger, only the distorted version of Islam perpetrated by radical extremists. But they—and, in particular, the president—must also come to terms with the fact that individuals implicated in each of the recently exposed plots in the United States were imbued with a common radical ethos.

Counterradicalization in all its forms is an essential complement to counterterrorism. The latter we do rela-

tively well, the failure to connect the dots prior to the attempted bombing of Flight 253 notwithstanding; the former we barely do at all. The result: a group of middle class Muslim Americans from northern Virginia videotape a militant message, leaves for jihad at the advice of a Taliban recruiter, and is arrested in the home of a known militant in Pakistan. "We are not terrorists," one of them said as he entered a Pakistani courtroom, "We are jihadists, and jihad is not terrorism."[28] All elements of national power should be used to counter this proposition and its myriad implications, so that the very notion that Muslims have a religious duty to commit acts of terror is challenged and debunked.[29] There are no guarantees that if the United States had been fully engaged in this effort for the past ten years, the young Virginia men would not have boarded that flight to Pakistan. But unless we accelerate and expand our efforts now, we can be assured that others will follow in their footsteps.

Recommendations

Core Recommendations

1.1 Explicitly recognize the impact of ideology as a key driver framing, motivating, and justifying violent extremism.

1.2 Ensure that Islamism—a radical political ideology separate from Islam as a religion—is recognized internally within the U.S. government as the key ideological driver of the violent extremist threat posed by al-Qaeda and other radical Islamist groups. Meanwhile, U.S. public diplomacy efforts should sharpen the distinction between the Muslim faith and the violent political ideology of Islamism.

1.3 Mobilize government to counter the impact of ideology that motivates and justifies radical Islamist extremism and violence. This will require a more explicit expression of the ideological challenge that individual agencies and offices are trying to tackle. Otherwise, the unity of purpose and whole-of-government integration essential to counter radicalization will prove elusive.

1.4 Broaden and expand U.S. government cooperation with foreign governments, nongovernmental organizations, activists, and peoples around the world to empower credible Muslim voices to marginalize the purveyors of radical Islamist ideology and win the contest for control of public space, public institutions, and public debate in Muslim communities.

Strategic Recommendations

2.1 Identify radicalizers within communities and empower alternative influences to compete with them. Both at home and abroad, the United States must more effectively identify and support Muslim activists, entrepreneurs, writers, businesspeople, media personalities, students, and others who lead opinion within their communities, particularly at the local level.

2.2 Highlight diverse voices, from secular to religious. Religious piety is not synonymous with radicalization. U.S. policy should be to recognize that religious diversity and education can be a bulwark against extremism. In its engagement with Muslims, at home and abroad, the administration should reach out to a broad spectrum of groups and individuals, from the pious to the secular.

2.3 Contest the radical narrative. When extremist speech articulates a threat of imminent violence, which could qualify as criminal hate speech, law enforcement authorities should take appropriate action. Short of such an imminent threat, however, extremist speech should not be banned but contested. Given First Amendment and Establishment Clause considerations, silencing objectionable views or arresting their proponents is anathema to American democracy. In contrast, debate is a cornerstone of the American project. Without banning violent extremist views, responsible leadership demands debating them. Short of arresting their proponents, authorities must be aware of who the radicalizers are and foster alternative influences promoting moderate ideas more in line with traditional American tolerance.

2.4 Maintain a strong and consistent voice on the importance of human rights and democratic governance worldwide, and specifically in the Arab Middle East. The National Security Strategy articulates a clear rationale for why the United States should support democracy and human rights around the world. The administration, however, has so far not demonstrated convincingly to the governments or the peoples of the region that these issues are real priorities. The upcoming political transition in Egypt will be a key test for the administration's approach. In this regard, the United States should be clear that progress toward economic prosperity and political liberalization should go hand in hand and not be pursued in sequence.

2.5 Ensure that counterterrorism and counterradicalization policy goals are included among the factors that determine how and where U.S. international development aid is disbursed. The National Security Strategy currently states that the administration is "ensuring that our policy instruments are aligned in support of development objectives." This should be clarified in the forthcoming Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development report, and the relationship of policy instruments to development objectives should be inverted.

2.6 Encourage the State Department to use its convening power to promote greater involvement of U.S. private and nongovernmental sectors in countering violent extremism (CVE). The absence of various institutional actors is part of the reason why the military dominates efforts to combat violent extremism.

2.7 Build on and expand new media efforts, empowering mainstream Muslims to contest Islamists (and authoritarians) in cyberspace. The administration has made significant strides in encouraging the use of new media tools to connect people with ideas, with other people, and, increasingly, with resources to provide myriad alternatives to extremist narratives. Too often, however, these efforts have been tied directly to U.S. public diplomacy goals and not to contesting Islamist ideology per se.

2.8 Define a coherent, unified strategic framework for nonmilitary international broadcasting. The administration has so far completely ignored this element of national power that has an annual budget of $700 million. Undersecretary of State Judith McHale's March 2010 "Strategic Framework" discussed in some detail efforts to work through traditional foreign media and new media but failed to mention how the administration sees international broadcasting fitting into its CVE efforts. The Broadcasting Board of Governors encompasses all U.S. civilian international broadcasting, and its programming influences viewers via television, the internet, and new media tools. Thus, the administration should work urgently with Congress to specify CVE as a critical mission objective.

2.9 Build upon defections and disillusionment among ranks of radical extremists, including former al-Qaeda members and other ex-jihadists such as "Dr. Fadl," an Egyptian ideologue who broke with al-Qaeda after years of justifying the group's radical ideology and tactics.

2.10 Domestically, identify, connect, and empower local Muslim opinion leaders to compete with the message of radical extremists within the United States. These are the voices al-Qaeda leaders fear most. We should reach out to a broad spectrum of Muslim groups and individuals, pious and secular, following the successful examples of groups such as LibForAll, an Indonesia-based nongovernmental organization that partnered with a local rock star to produce a bestselling album, *Laskar Cinta* (Warriors of love), condemning radical Islamist extremism. The United States is engaged in such efforts abroad, but not domestically.

2.11 Treat Muslim Americans as full-fledged partners on the panoply of issues, foreign and domestic, with which the whole of American society is concerned, not solely on those related to CVE. U.S. governmental interaction with the Muslim American community should be broad-based and reflect the diversity of the community.

2.12 Engage not only with the most vocal groups, but also with the most representative. Ensuring maximum diversity in U.S. government outreach—especially at home but abroad as well—is critical. Domestically, this applies not only to determining which groups are invited to attend government functions and host major addresses by senior officials, but also to the organizations that train and certify chaplains in U.S. prisons and in the armed forces. Some prominent Muslim American groups have questionable links to banned groups that should disqualify them as trusted government partners in the effort to combat extremism. Others, perhaps less vocal and often active at a more local level, warrant greater institutional recognition and support.

Structural Recommendations

3.1   Designate a single address for the coordination of U.S. public diplomacy, strategic communication, and counterradicalization strategy within the White House. Empowering someone close to the president to orchestrate the overall effort to combat radicalization both at home and abroad is critical to maintaining strategic focus over the longer term. The deputy national security advisor for combating terrorism (DNSA) should remain focused on the president's stated goal to "disrupt, dismantle, and defeat" al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups. Meanwhile, a new senior director post should be created, with the appointee reporting to the DNSA and devoting his or her full time and attention to the ideological components of this struggle.

3.2   Empower the Office of the Special Representative to Muslim Communities and clarify its mandate. Although this office has been a tremendous innovation of the Obama administration, the lack of interagency acceptance of the concept reduces its effectiveness. Together with the Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, this office should be recast along more ambitious lines because it is the only one in the U.S. government whose mandate calls for strengthening mainstream voices that oppose extremists. It should also be consulted, in coordination with the Department of Homeland Security, on domestic outreach to Muslim American communities at home.

3.3   Balance civil and military resources. The military continues to engage in public diplomacy and counterradicalization efforts both in combat areas and noncombat zones. Although some progress has been made, addressing the imbalanced allocation of resources between military and civilian agencies—particularly the State Department—needs to be a top priority reflected in future administration budgets.

3.4   Extend efforts to contest the radical narrative down to the state and local levels, where officials know their communities best. Federal aid will be critical to support such efforts and could be modeled on the longstanding and highly successful Justice Department community development programs aimed at protecting vulnerable youths from recruitment into violent gangs. Such programs—which provide federal grants that are executed at the local, grassroots level based on knowledge of the local community—should be disbursed locally in coordination with the Department of Homeland Security.

3.5   Develop country- or even city-specific strategies to strengthen mainstream voices in their struggles with both authoritarianism and extremist ideology. Increased funding for the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) and innovative efforts such as the Presidential Summit on Entrepreneurship are commendable. However, the administration must also develop diplomatic strategies to encourage allied authoritarian governments, primarily Egypt and Saudi Arabia, to implement policies and adopt legal frameworks that would encourage pluralism or, in the case of entrepreneurs, allow them to thrive. To achieve this goal, the secretary of state should require embassies to draft country-specific counterradicalization plans with measurable targets and goals.

3.6   "Civilianize" CVE activities domestically and overseas. Domestically, law enforcement agencies in particular remain the primary interlocutors with the Muslim American community. Town hall meetings and other forms of local engagement should be expanded to include representatives from service agencies as well, such as Housing and Urban Development, the Department of Education, and others. Integration programs should include Treasury Department financial literacy courses and other means of facilitating smooth integration into American society.

3.7   The secretary of state should form an advisory board to focus on how the U.S. government can help develop, sustain, and support a global countermovement to the ideology of violent extremism. Such an advisory board should be composed of experts from a variety of fields—from technology and media to Islamic scholarship, anthropology, and national security experts—to provide the secretary with a broad range of expertise in support of U.S. government efforts

to counter the ideology of violent extremism.

3.8 The executive branch should work with Congress to establish an endowment, similar to the National Endowment for Democracy, that would provide a flexible pool of funds to seed or support credible groups and individuals who are countering violent extremist ideology. The objective would be to stimulate the growth of networks of credible voices to counter extremist ideology in a variety of fields and contexts.

Functional Recommendations

4.1 The National Counterterrorism Center should complement data collection on hotspots of violent activity, at home and abroad, with parallel efforts to track radicalization hotspots where the ideology that fuels violence is being peddled to vulnerable youths. Analysis that identifies critical tipping points, geolocates clusters of radicalization incidents, and spots at-risk communities is critical. Such analysis should enlist social scientists, anthropologists, and field researchers to understand particular nodes and conduits leading to radicalization. That said, timely analysis should inform near-term programming instead of leading to "analysis paralysis."

4.2 Factor "resiliency" into the development goals of the U.S. Agency for International Development's Office of Conflict Management and Mitigation in order to make clear that policies and programs are developed to make Muslim-majority communities around the world more resilient to attempted Islamist subversion.

4.3 Make funds available to strengthen mainstream voices that seek increased influence in communities worldwide and are directly competing with extremists for this influence. Funding should surpass programs such as MEPI that can have ancillary counterterrorism benefits but are designed primarily for alternative purposes.

4.4 Recognize that the potential for controversial U.S. government action to radicalize populations at home or abroad is a legitimate concern, but proactively prepare public diplomacy plans to mitigate possible fallout. Predator missile attacks in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan, for example, have become increasingly precise in their targeting and effective in disrupting al-Qaeda activities even as they have raised concerns about creating more terrorists than they have killed. The anticipated outcry over a September 2009 U.S. Special Operations strike against an al-Qaeda operative in Somalia did not materialize, though it was a consideration in the interagency debate that preceded the operation. Proactively developing public diplomacy campaigns to mitigate potential fallout from the kind of "hard counterterrorism" actions that are sometimes necessary is critical.

Notes

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15. Judith A. McHale, "Future of U.S. Public Diplomacy," remarks before the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on International Operations and Organizations, Human Rights, Democracy, and Global Women's Issues, March 10, 2010, http://www.state.gov/r/remarks/138283.htm.

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who wish to counter violent extremism. See Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, "Remarks on Internet Freedom," January 21, 2010, http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/ 2010/01/135519.htm.

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29. Although Washington must adopt an activist stance, it must do so subtly, since overt government involvement could taint the counterradicalization narrative. Indeed, this is a struggle that emerged from within Muslim societies, with al-Qaeda pulling America in from the sidelines. Given these challenges, it is pivotal that Washington determine how best to engage in this battle without feeding the enemy's narrative (e.g., not providing opportunities to cast America as anti-Islamic or imperialist).

The Washington Institute for Near East Policy

"Integral to a comprehensive counterterrorism strategy is a corresponding priority to counter the violent extremism underlying the terrorist threat we face today."