



National Security  
Preparedness Group

# Preventing Violent Radicalization in America



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BIPARTISAN POLICY CENTER

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# National Security Preparedness Group

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Former Representative from Indiana and Co-Chair of the 9/11 Commission

**The Honorable Thomas Kean**

Former Governor of New Jersey and Co-Chair of the 9/11 Commission

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BPC Senior Fellow and Former Secretary of Agriculture

**Professor Bruce Hoffman**

Director, Center for Peace and Security Studies, Georgetown University

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## REPORT AUTHOR

**Dr. Peter Neumann**

BPC Visiting Scholar  
Founding Director, International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation at King's College London



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# Foreword

We serve as co-chairs of the Bipartisan Policy Center's National Security Preparedness Group (NSPG), which is a follow-on to the 9/11 Commission. NSPG monitors the implementation of the Commission's recommendations and focuses on emerging security threats to our nation.

Last September, we released a report, *Assessing the Terrorist Threat*, on the evolving nature of this threat to the United States. We concluded that the U.S. government had not adequately addressed the radicalization of homegrown terrorists. We set forth several pressing policy questions, including the fundamental question of who within the government is responsible for identifying radicalization and interdicting attempts at recruitment.

This report seeks to answer those questions and provide concrete policy recommendations for a counter-radicalization strategy – the elements of which should be implemented not just by the federal government, but by state and local officials and community organizations.

The death of Osama bin Laden – the mastermind of 9/11 and the most infamous terrorist of our time – has caused our nation to reflect on the future of al Qaeda and the terrorist threat to the United States. While bin Laden's death was a setback for al Qaeda and its ideological movement, it is not time to declare victory. Al Qaeda is a network, not a hierarchy, and it will not be destroyed by the death of one man.

Al Qaeda has decentralized its operations, so leadership from its traditional core is not critical. Significant threats to American national security now come from the affiliates of al Qaeda – like al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, where U.S.-born Anwar al Awlaki has played a central role. Al Qaeda's influence is also on the rise in South Asia and continues to extend into failing or failed states such as Yemen and Somalia.

The threat from al Qaeda is more diverse and more complex now than ever – although less severe than the catastrophic proportions of the 9/11 attacks. It continues to hope to inflict mass casualties in the United States.

Most troubling, we have seen a pattern of increasing terrorist recruitment of American citizens and residents. In 2009, there were two actual terrorist attacks on our soil. The Fort Hood

shooting claimed the lives of 13 people, and a U.S. military recruiter was killed in Little Rock, Arkansas. In 2010, 10 Muslim Americans plotted against domestic targets, and five actually carried out their plots. Today, we know that Americans are playing increasingly prominent roles in al Qaeda's movement. Muslim-American youth are being recruited in Somali communities in Minneapolis and Portland, Oregon, in some respects moving the front lines to the interior of our country.

We know that individuals in the United States are increasingly engaging in "virtual" radicalization via the internet. This process is often influenced by blogs and jihadist internet forums promoting violent Islamist extremism. While there are methods to monitor some of this activity, it is simply impossible to know the thinking of every at-risk person. Online radicalization poses a grave threat to the United States.

Radicalization also cannot be detected by profiling likely target individuals. Senior U.S. counterterrorism officials have called attention to al Qaeda's strategy of "diversification" – mounting attacks involving a wide variety of perpetrators from different national and ethnic backgrounds that cannot easily be profiled. Recent plots inside the United States, such as the act by Fort Hood shooter Nidal Hasan, have also shown the danger of lone wolves who are not members of a formal terrorist organization and who do not fit any particular ethnic, economic, educational, or social profile.

While we do not know who will attempt the next terrorist attack, we do know that our enemies will continue to probe our vulnerabilities and design innovative ways to attack us. Al Qaeda's capabilities to implement large-scale attacks are less formidable than they were 10 years ago, but al Qaeda continues to have the intent and reach to kill dozens, or even hundreds, of Americans. Because al Qaeda and its affiliates will not give up, we cannot let our guard down. We must not become complacent, but remain vigilant and resolute. Implementing the recommendations in this report is the best way that we can begin to do so.

Sincerely,



Tom Kean



Lee Hamilton



# Table of Contents

<b>Executive Summary</b> . . . . .	7	<b>Chapter 5: A Strategic Survey</b> . . . . .	30
<b>Radicalization and Counter-radicalization</b> . . . . .	7	<b>Background</b> . . . . .	30
<b>Lessons from Abroad</b> . . . . .	7	Box 3: A Dialogue on Our Nation's Security . . . . .	31
<b>The American Experience</b> . . . . .	8	<b>Current Activities at the Federal Level</b> . . . . .	32
<b>Strategic Survey</b> . . . . .	8	<b>Current Activities by State and Local Governments</b> . . . . .	33
<b>Recommendations</b> . . . . .	9	<b>Current Activities by Non-Governmental Entities</b> . . . . .	34
<b>Chapter 1: Introduction</b> . . . . .	12	<b>The Emerging Approach</b> . . . . .	34
<b>Chapter 2: Radicalization and Counter-radicalization</b> . . . . .	15	Box 4: Partnering with Communities to Prevent Violent Extremism in America . . . . .	35
<b>Radicalization</b> . . . . .	15	Box 5: U.S. Attorney Outreach in Portland, Oregon . . . . .	37
Box 1: Key Terms and Concepts . . . . .	16	<b>Chapter 6: Recommendations</b> . . . . .	39
<b>Counter-radicalization</b> . . . . .	17	<b>Messaging</b> . . . . .	39
Figure 1: The Role of Community Policing . . . . .	19	<b>Structure and Organization</b> . . . . .	40
<b>Chapter 3: Lessons from Abroad</b> . . . . .	21	<b>Information-Sharing</b> . . . . .	41
Box 2: Britain's <i>Prevent</i> Policy: Case Studies . . . . .	23	<b>Outreach and Engagement</b> . . . . .	41
<b>Chapter 4: The American Experience</b> . . . . .	26	Box 6: Gang Prevention in Los Angeles . . . . .	42
		<b>Capacity-building</b> . . . . .	43
		<b>Training</b> . . . . .	44
		<b>Community Policing</b> . . . . .	44
		<b>Endnotes</b> . . . . .	46



# National Security Preparedness Group



# Executive Summary

In December 2010, Attorney General Eric Holder told journalists that the terrorist threat had changed from “foreigners coming here to... people in the United States, American citizens.” A number of independent studies have confirmed this assessment. One of the most recent – published by the New America Foundation and Syracuse University – showed that “nearly half” of the 175 cases of al Qaeda-related homegrown terrorism since September 11, 2001 occurred in 2009 and 2010.

The threat is sufficiently serious to ask whether the U.S. government is fully prepared to confront this new challenge. “Hard” counterterrorism efforts – both at home and abroad – have become sophisticated and successful, yet there still is no domestic equivalent of the State Department’s “Countering Violent Extremism” policy seeking to prevent young Americans from being radicalized at home.

Last September’s report by the Bipartisan Policy Center’s (BPC) National Security Preparedness Group, *Assessing the Terrorist Threat*, concluded that the lack of a coherent approach towards domestic counter-radicalization has left America “vulnerable to a threat that is not only diversifying, but arguably intensifying.” The purpose of this report is to provide guidance on ongoing efforts aimed at developing such an approach.

## Radicalization and Counter-radicalization

- *There isn’t a simple template or formula that would explain how people radicalize.* Radicalization involves many steps and stages at which the process can be stopped or reversed. There are opportunities for prevention which can – and should – be harnessed by policymakers.
- *Unlike counterterrorism, which targets terrorists, counter-radicalization is focused on the communities that are targeted by terrorists for recruitment.* The aim is to protect, strengthen, and empower these communities so that they become resilient to violent extremism.
- *Counter-radicalization is a policy theme, not a single policy.* It is delivered through multiple channels. The range of relevant activities is potentially unlimited, but typically involves messaging; engagement and outreach; education and training; and capacity-building.
- *None of the instruments of counter-radicalization are coercive.* Counter-radicalization is not primarily a law enforcement tool. Law enforcement, however, has a role to play. It represents a “bridge” between counterterrorism and counter-radicalization, and helps to inform both.

## Lessons from Abroad

In recent years, many Western countries have launched counter-radicalization policies. They offer useful lessons for how counter-radicalization may work in a democratic setting:

- *It’s important to be clear about the policy’s aims.* Policies will differ depending on whether they seek to prevent “cognitive” or “violent” radicalization.
- *Governments need to be careful in choosing community partners.* Outreach efforts should reflect communities’ diversity, and distinguish between “engagement” and “empowerment.”
- *Most counter-radicalization is local.* National governments can provide guidance, resources, and coordination, but relationships and networks have to be leveraged from the ground up.

- *Governments should avoid “securitizing” their relationships with communities.* Counter-radicalization and counterterrorism must be separate.
- *It is critical – but not always easy – to measure success.* Governments should be rigorous in assessing the impact and effectiveness of local initiatives.

## The American Experience

Any policy needs to be informed by America’s unique set of constitutional, political, and cultural imperatives:

- *Policymakers need to respect the values embodied in the U.S. Constitution.* This means countering extremist narratives in the “market place of ideas,” and refraining from “adjudicating intra-religious affairs.”
- *Any policy should reflect the size, complexity, and dynamics of the U.S. government.* Domestic counter-radicalization will require strong leadership and coordination. It also needs to be cost effective, and should take full advantage of the American philanthropic tradition.
- *Counter-radicalization in America must account for the diversity and attitudes of Muslim Americans.* Approaches need to be varied and should seek to capitalize on the Muslim Americans’ commitment to the American Dream.
- *Policymakers need to address concerns about counterterrorism policies.* Perceived grievances about counterterrorism and America’s role in international affairs should be dealt with proactively.

## Strategic Survey

Despite the absence of an openly stated policy, the range and scale of counter-radicalization-related activities at the federal level have increased significantly since early 2010.

While many of these activities are positive, they sometimes lack coordination and strategic oversight:

- *Engagement* with Muslim Americans is carried out through the Department of Homeland Security’s (DHS) Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties; the Department of Justice’s (DoJ) Community Relations Service; the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI); the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC); and the U.S. Attorneys.
- It remains unclear who is leading the effort to *share information*. Both DHS and DoJ’s Office for Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) share best practices on community policing. NCTC coordinates information sharing on counterterrorism.
- Very little *training* is aimed specifically at counter-radicalization. DHS and DoJ offer counterterrorism and cultural competency training for their staff. They also provide training grants for state and local governments.
- Activities that serve to *promote good governance and build capacity* within Muslim communities include civil rights enforcement at DoJ; programs for new immigrants and prisoners at DHS and DoJ; as well as civic education and community empowerment at the Departments of Education and Health and Human Services.
- *Analysis* on issues related to violent extremism is produced by units within DHS and NCTC.
- High-level *messaging* on violent extremism originates within the National Security Council.

*State and local government involvement in counter-radicalization is uneven.* Only a small number have institutionalized engagement with Muslim communities, while most have delegated this responsibility to their police forces. *Of the non-governmental entities involved in counter-radicalization, those that don’t describe themselves as “Muslim” or “Islamic” are often overlooked.*

The federal government's emerging policy aims to provide coherence and a clearer division of labor between federal agencies as well as between the federal and other levels of government. Its underlying assumptions are fundamentally sound:

- The overall framework will be generic and allow for different kinds of threats to be addressed. The government's principal target for the time being will be al Qaeda, and most counter-radicalization efforts will therefore revolve around mobilizing Muslim Americans against al Qaeda and its ideology.
- The federal government will serve as a “broker” and “convener,” who empowers states, local governments and communities. The aim is to produce a “mosaic of engagement” in which the federal government coordinates, evaluates, and shares best practices but does not run activities on the ground.

## Recommendations

### Messaging

- *Communication with Muslim communities must include an “ask.”* If the government believes that Muslim Americans have a unique role to play, it should not be reluctant to say what it is.
- *Al Qaeda's ideology should be challenged as well as contested.* The government's current efforts focus on contesting al Qaeda's ideology by contrasting the positive vision of equal citizenship, religious freedom, and shared aspirations with al Qaeda's claim that being Muslim is incompatible with being an American. Especially in smaller settings, rather than only offer a competing vision, it may be appropriate to challenge the group and its ideology directly and aggressively.

- *The government should be careful not to meddle in religious debates.* While the government should rebut the claim that devout Muslims cannot be loyal Americans, government pronouncements about the character of Islam or the “true” meaning of religious concepts – however well intentioned – are not credible, nor do they do justice to complex theological debates.
- *The policy of refusing to name the ideological underpinnings of al Qaeda is contrived and counterproductive,* especially when educating law enforcement officers and other officials. Police officers, FBI agents, and prison guards should be taught how to distinguish between the faith practices of ordinary Muslims and the murderous ideas of “violent Islamist extremists.”

### Structure and Organization

- *Any policy requires strong leadership and coordination.* The White House should lead the policy across government. For each policy function, there needs to be a lead department or agency.
- *Counterterrorism and counter-radicalization must be separate.* None of the agencies that are mainly concerned with counterterrorism should be seen to play a dominant role in counter-radicalization.

### Information-sharing

- *The White House should designate one agency that serves as the principal hub for collecting, disseminating, and evaluating information on counter-radicalization.*
- *Government must promote standards for effectiveness.* The objective is for benchmarking to become a “best practice” so that uniform standards will emerge over time.

- *The development of an intervention capability that is consistent with American culture and values should be a priority.*

### **Outreach and Engagement**

- *Outreach efforts should reflect the diversity of Muslim communities.* Government must not rely on religious interlocutors alone to convey its message to Muslim Americans.
- *Officials need to understand the difference between engagement and empowerment.* The government should seek to maintain open lines of communication with a wide array of community groups, but recognize that not all groups are appropriate government partners. As a minimum, government partners should be committed to (1) upholding the Constitution of the United States, and be consistent in (2) expressing their opposition to acts of terrorism and (3) the killing of Americans anywhere.
- *Federal engagement efforts need to galvanize local activities.* Otherwise, federal outreach remains an intermittently engaged “flying circus” while local engagement continues to be reactive, not proactive.
- *The new role of U.S. Attorneys as anchors of federal outreach is positive and should be institutionalized.* They should be given adequate resources and institutional incentives to fill it.

### **Capacity-building**

- *Capacity-building must focus on “at risk” places and populations.* It should concentrate on penetrating difficult environments and hard-to-reach populations.
- *Each department and agency should “scan” existing programs for counter-radicalization impact.* Doing so will help “mainstream” the concept. It also makes good fiscal sense.

- *Government must engage non-profits and the private sector.* The government should use its “convening power” to bring “outsiders” to the table.

### **Training**

- *DHS and DoJ must overhaul their procedures for awarding training grants.* In their current state, they counteract the aims of counter-radicalization.
- *More training needs to be offered on engagement, outreach, and cultural competency.* Such training should be available to police and “civilian” officials at all levels of government.

### **Community Policing**

- *Government must recognize the limits of community policing.* Community policing is an important element of generating trust, but it is not a substitute for counter-radicalization.

Above all, the government must be persistent. Building resistance to al Qaeda and its narrative will not occur overnight, and it will require the government to review how well counter-radicalization policy is being implemented and improved over a long period of time. Congress and the American public have an important role to play in ensuring the nation’s commitment to challenging and countering radicalization never wavers. As the 9/11 Commission pointed out, making America safe from terrorism is a “generational challenge,” and “the American people are entitled to expect their government to do its very best” in meeting it.



# Chapter 1: Introduction

One of America's "most wanted" is a 25-year-old Pakistani American who grew up in New York City and recently lived in Charlotte, North Carolina. His name is Samir Khan, and he is the editor of *Inspire*, an English language online magazine that calls on Muslim Americans to join al Qaeda and attack the United States. The first issue of *Inspire* was published in June 2010, and featured stories such as "How to Build a Bomb in the Kitchen of Your Mom" and "What to Pack When You Leave for Jihad." A more recent edition encouraged readers to "blow up Times Square [and] pull off [a] Mumbai [style attack] near [the] White House till martyrdom." The head of the National Counterterrorism Center believes that Khan's magazine is "attractive to English speakers,"<sup>1</sup> and that its language and presentation resonates with the "American experience."<sup>2</sup>

*Inspire* wasn't Khan's first internet venture. In 2004, he set up a blog which told the stories of Western "martyrs" who had gone abroad to fight and die with al Qaeda. Another blog was titled "United States of Losers" and contained the latest al Qaeda videos from Iraq.<sup>3</sup> When his father learned about the websites, he connected him with Muslim community elders in Charlotte who explained how the killing of innocent people was against the principles of Islamic faith. But the intervention failed. In late 2009, Khan left the United States for Yemen, where he joined al Qaeda's most aggressive affiliate organization, al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP).<sup>5</sup>

Samir Khan is one of the "homegrown terrorists" that have recently hit headlines. Senior policymakers believe that they are part of a trend. In December, Attorney General Eric Holder told journalists that the terrorist threat had changed from "foreigners coming here to... people in the United States, American citizens."<sup>6</sup> In March, the president's Counterterrorism and Homeland Security advisor, John Brennan, observed that "a very small but increasing number

The threat from al Qaeda-inspired homegrown terrorism is sufficiently serious to ask whether the U.S. government is fully prepared to confront this new challenge.

of [Americans] have become captivated" by al Qaeda.<sup>7</sup> A month earlier, Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano expressed the view that "the threat today may be at its most heightened state since the [September 11] attacks nearly 10 years ago," and that al Qaeda-inspired homegrown terrorism was one of its "most striking elements."<sup>8</sup>

A number of studies and reports seem to confirm these assessments.<sup>9</sup> One of the most recent – published by the New America Foundation and Syracuse University in February – showed that "nearly half" of the 175 cases of al Qaeda-related homegrown terrorism since September 11, 2001 occurred in 2009 and 2010.<sup>10</sup> This figure, the study points out, includes many of the most serious plots in the post-9/11 period, such as Najibullah Zazi's plan to blow up the New York City subway, the Fort Hood shootings in November 2009, and the attempted bombing of New York's Times Square in May 2010.<sup>11</sup>

Experts are right to caution that the numbers are small and that, overall, the threat from al Qaeda-inspired homegrown terrorism remains modest.<sup>12</sup> It is sufficiently serious enough to ask, however, whether the U.S. government is fully prepared to confront this new challenge. "Hard" counterterrorism efforts – both at home and abroad – have become sophisticated and successful. Yet there still is no domestic equivalent to the State Department's "Countering Violent Extremism" policy that seeks to prevent young

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Americans from being radicalized at home. In strategic terms, the absence of this “fourth pillar” – that is, a domestic counter-radicalization policy that complements “hard” counterterrorism at home and abroad, as well as counter-radicalization overseas – represents a key vulnerability, which has exposed the homeland to current and future homegrown threats. Had such a policy been in place, there might have been a better chance to detect Samir Khan’s descent into violent extremism at an earlier stage, and for the Muslim community’s intervention to be more effective.

A previous report by the Bipartisan Policy Center’s (BPC) National Security Preparedness Group concluded that the lack of a coherent approach towards domestic counter-radicalization was “fundamentally troubling” and that “America is thus vulnerable to a threat that is not only diversifying, but arguably intensifying.”<sup>13</sup> Since the publication of that report, the Obama administration has made efforts to formulate such an approach. The purpose of this report is to offer guidance and support. It provides an overview of what is known about radicalization and counter-radicalization; other countries’ experiences with counter-radicalization programs; the uniquely American context; and a strategic survey of existing efforts, including a summary of the emerging approach. It concludes by setting out recommendations to inform the administration’s ongoing efforts.

The report draws on a comprehensive review of official documents, speeches, congressional testimony, two field trips (to Portland, Oregon, and Los Angeles, California),<sup>14</sup> and nearly 40 interviews with officials, former officials, experts, and other stakeholders in Washington, D.C.<sup>15</sup> It also benefits from relevant books and articles, numerous conference presentations and panel discussions, as well as the insights and advice given by members of the National Security Preparedness Group, led by Governor Tom Kean and Congressman Lee Hamilton.

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## Chapter 2: Radicalization and Counter-radicalization

Samir Khan wasn't born a terrorist, and he didn't become one overnight. From what we know, his journey began in New York City in 2002 when he attended the summer camp of a radical Pakistani group, *Tanzeem-e-Islami*; it was not until seven years later that he left the United States and joined al Qaeda in Yemen. This long period in which he gradually moved from radical – yet non-violent – activism to being a terrorist bent on violence is what social scientists refer to as radicalization (see Box 1). What do we know about this process, and how can it be prevented?

### Radicalization

Most experts agree that *there isn't a simple formula or template that would explain how people radicalize*. Each case is different, and each individual's pathway needs to be examined on its own merits. That doesn't mean, however, that the concept is “unfounded” or that the whole idea of radicalization is a “myth.”<sup>16</sup> Those who are familiar with the academic literature on the subject know that over the past decade, researchers have managed to identify a number of drivers that seem to be common to the majority of radicalization trajectories:

- One is the perception of *grievance* – conflicted identities, injustice, oppression, or socio-economic exclusion, for example – which can make people receptive to extremist ideas.<sup>17</sup>
- Another is the adoption of an *extremist narrative or ideology* that speaks to the grievance and provides a compelling rationale for what needs to be done.<sup>18</sup>
- Also important are *social and group dynamics*, given that radicalization often happens in “dense, small networks of friends,”<sup>19</sup> and that extremist ideas are more likely to resonate if they are articulated by a credible or charismatic leader.<sup>20</sup>

The three drivers may help to explain why certain environments have become known as “places of vulnerability.”<sup>21</sup> Through the internet, for example, individuals gain access to visually powerful video and imagery which can magnify grievances and convey extremist narratives. Moreover, web forums and chat rooms allow people to connect with others and form relationships that are similar to the “dense, small networks of friends” that are needed to radicalize in the “real” world.<sup>22</sup> Charismatic leaders, such as the American born cleric Anwar al Awlaki, have skillfully exploited these dynamics in order to build a global network of followers and incite acts of terrorism.<sup>23</sup>

Many academics believe that *it is important to distinguish between the cognitive and violent aspects of radicalization*.<sup>24</sup> The three drivers – grievance; ideology; and mobilization – all focus on the transformation of people's beliefs. The assumption is that “all kinds of action – moderate, angry, very angry, and even violent – is the product of reasoning”<sup>25</sup> and that extreme actions are the consequence of an extremist mindset. Terrorists, after all, “do not inhabit a [political and] social vacuum.”<sup>26</sup> But not all extremists turn to violence. Only a minority even of al Qaeda supporters will go as far as Khan and join the group, or become involved in acts of terrorism. The three drivers, therefore, must be seen as “risk factors,” increasing the likelihood but by no means guaranteeing that an individual will end up engaging in terrorism. They are necessary, but not sufficient as explanations for extremist violence.

This leads to the conclusion that *the process of radicalization is not linear, and that the progression towards violence is not inevitable*. Many of the older and, arguably, more simplistic models of radicalization conceived of radicalization as a “conveyor belt”<sup>27</sup> which moved people from peaceful activism to tacit support, then to material support and, finally, to active participation in acts of

### Box 1: Definitions—Key Terms and Concepts

*Radicalization* is the process whereby individuals or groups become political extremists.<sup>a</sup> The term extremist, however, is ambiguous, and may refer to “extremist” ideas as well as “extremist” methods (see below). Accordingly, some authors distinguish between *cognitive* radicalization (extremist ideas) and *violent* radicalization (extremist methods).<sup>b</sup> Others presume that extremist beliefs are the precondition for extremist actions, and that cognitive and violent radicalization are intimately connected.<sup>c</sup> This line of thinking is reflected in many official definitions, such as the British Home Office’s, which states that radicalization is “the process by which people come to support terrorism and violent extremism and, in some cases, then to participate in terrorist groups.”<sup>d</sup> A similar definition was put forward by the Department of Homeland Security, which described radicalization as “the process of adopting an extremist belief system, including the willingness to use, support, or facilitate violence, as a method to effect societal change.”<sup>e</sup>

*Counter-radicalization* seeks to prevent non-radicalized populations from being radicalized. The objective is to create individual and communal resilience against cognitive and/or violent radicalization through a variety of non-coercive means. The U.S. government frequently uses the term “Countering Violent Extremism” to describe counter-radicalization efforts abroad.

*De-radicalization and disengagement:* The two terms describe processes whereby radicalized individuals (or groups) cease their involvement in political violence and/or terrorism. While de-radicalization aims for substantive changes in individuals’ (or groups’) ideology and attitudes, disengagement concentrates on facilitating behavioral change, that is, the rejection of violent means. According to the psychologist John Horgan, “the disengaged terrorist may not be ‘de-radicalized’ or repentant at all. Often physical disengagement may not result in any concomitant change or reduction in ideological support.”<sup>f</sup> Additionally, many authors distinguish between collective and individual de-radicalization and/or disengagement, depending on whether the process is led by, or aimed at, individuals or entire groups.<sup>g</sup>

*Extremism:* The term can be used to refer to political *ideas and ideologies* that oppose a society’s core values and principles. In the context of liberal democracies, this would apply to ideologies that advocate racial or religious supremacy and/or oppose the core principles of democracy and constitutional government. On the other hand, the term can also refer to the *methods* by which political actors attempt to realize their aims, that is, by using means that “show disregard for the life, liberty, and human rights of others.”<sup>h</sup> Many governments describe terrorists and insurgents as “violent extremists” – a term, which is intended to emphasize the violent, rather than purely cognitive, nature of their extremism.

violence. In reality, the vast majority of individuals will stop or revert at one of the earlier stages without progressing to active involvement and support for terrorism. What distinguishes the many who resist the lure of cognitive and violent extremism from the few who do not is the subject of vigorous academic debate. Is it strong ties to family, friends, and community?<sup>28</sup> A pluralist and cohesive society?<sup>29</sup> Exposure to counter-ideological narratives?<sup>30</sup> A settled understanding of religion?<sup>31</sup> The existence of non-violent outlets for expressing one's frustrations?<sup>32</sup> Or all of the above?

There are, no doubt, many things we still do not know or understand about radicalization.<sup>33</sup> In that sense, radicalization is no different from any other area of public policy, where policies are based on imperfect knowledge. What we do know is that radicalization is a process, not an event, which often unfolds over long periods of time. We also know that people radicalize gradually, and that the process involves many steps and stages at which the process can be stopped or reversed. In fact, we even know many of the "risk factors" – grievance; extremist ideology; mobilization – and have some good ideas for how they can be countered. In other words, what we do know about radicalization – imperfect as it may be – is sufficient to show that there are opportunities and tools for prevention which can (and should) be harnessed by policymakers.

## Counter-radicalization

Within the U.S. government, there are two visions for Countering Violent Extremism (CVE). For Homeland Security Secretary Napolitano, CVE involves supporting local law enforcement and helping police forces establish partnerships with Muslim communities around the country. In her view, the key to confronting homegrown, al Qaeda-inspired terrorism lies in community policing, more training for law enforcement officers, and the improved

sharing of information and best practices.<sup>34</sup> The State Department's approach, on the other hand, is based on the recognition that even the best "intelligence operations and law enforcement efforts alone" will not be sufficient in countering the "long-term challenge" posed by al Qaeda. According to the State Department's Counterterrorism Coordinator, Daniel Benjamin, the aim of CVE is to "make environments non-permissive for terrorists seeking to exploit them." Doing so, he says, requires a broad range of "non-coercive" instruments, such as messaging, capacity-building, outreach to civil society, and educational campaigns.<sup>35</sup>

The difference in approach cannot be explained with the two departments' different jurisdictions alone. Rather, it reveals a more fundamental disagreement about the meaning of CVE. For Napolitano, CVE is, in essence, a softer, more community-oriented form of counterterrorism, revolving around the police and remaining focused on the core mission of finding terrorists and thwarting plots – principally, it seems, by getting more "tips" from within communities. The State Department, on the other hand, wants to make it harder for terrorist groups to radicalize and recruit in the first place. Its definition of CVE is closer to the concept of counter-radicalization, which aims to inoculate communities against the appeal of extremist groups and empower them to protect themselves (see Box 1). Counter-radicalization, in that sense, is about terrorism prevention, and – though undoubtedly related – its audience, objectives, and policy instruments are different from counterterrorism.

*Unlike counterterrorism, which targets terrorists, counter-radicalization is focused on the communities that are targeted by terrorists. Its core assumption is that society, government, and communities all have a shared interest in preventing terrorist attacks, and that those communities which – for whatever reason – are targeted by terrorists*

## Muslim Americans should be engaged in domestic counter-radicalization efforts not as potential suspects, but because their communities are best positioned to repel al Qaeda's advances.

for radicalization and recruitment need to be protected, strengthened, and empowered in order to help them resist violent extremism. The aim is *not* to stigmatize people or turn entire groups into potential suspects, but to make them partners in the joint endeavor of preventing terrorism. Muslim Americans, therefore, should be engaged in domestic counter-radicalization efforts not as potential suspects, but because their communities are vulnerable to radicalization and recruitment<sup>36</sup> and because they – in partnership with the government – are best positioned to repel al Qaeda's advances.

*The objectives of counter-radicalization are connected to the core dynamics of radicalization (see previous section):*

- *Counter-grievance:* If violent extremists aim to exploit grievances, real or perceived, one of the core objectives of counter-radicalization is *to address these grievances or the perception thereof.*
- *Counter-ideology:* If violent extremists seek to promote extremist narratives and make their ideology resonate, the purpose of counter-radicalization is *to expose and counter such ideas; educate communities and thereby strengthen their defenses against the extremists' narrative; and empower community leaders to speak out against violent extremists and their ideas.*
- *Counter-mobilization:* If violent extremists attempt to form cells and recruit followers, the objective of counter-radicalization is *to help communities build networks, knowledge, and "tools" that can be used to challenge and resist such attempts.*

In the first two categories – counter-grievance and counter-ideology – counter-radicalization is firmly (and exclusively) directed at non-radicalized populations. In the third category – counter-mobilization – it overlaps with *de*-radicalization, which has a narrower focus and deals with “cognitive” radicals who are on the cusp of becoming operational (see

Box 1). As an example, counter-mobilization may consist of mentoring and tailored interventions, which can be theological, psychological, and/or socio-economic. They are performed in partnership with government agencies. The aim, however, is *not* to gather evidence or “entrap” people, but to provide support, reduce vulnerabilities, and *prevent* “at risk” individuals from engaging in criminal behavior.<sup>37</sup>

*Counter-radicalization is a policy theme, not a single policy.* It is delivered and implemented through multiple channels and programs which, in many cases, do not have the label “counter-radicalization” attached to it. There may, of course, be “*stand-alone*” activities – training and education, for example – that are focused on counter-radicalization and are recognizable as such. More often, however, counter-radicalization is *embedded within existing government activities* such as programs dealing with community safety challenges or educating new immigrants. In certain situations, the government's role is limited to *convening relevant parties* so that new networks and partnerships (including those between communities and the private sector) can be leveraged.

*The range of activities that serve the aims of counter-radicalization is potentially unlimited* (for examples, see Box 2 in Chapter 3). Typically, they fall into one (or several) of the categories mentioned above. They include:

- *Messaging* (through speeches, television programs, leaflets, social media, etc.)
- *Engagement and outreach* (town halls, roundtables, advisory councils, etc.)
- *Capacity-building* (youth and women's leadership initiatives, community development, community safety and protection programs, etc.)
- *Education and training* (of community leaders, public employees, law enforcement, etc.)<sup>38</sup>

*None of the instruments of counter-radicalization are coercive.* Properly understood, counter-radicalization is entirely compatible with civil libertarians' demand that "no law enforcement action should be taken unless someone's behavior indicates criminal intent."<sup>39</sup> Law enforcement, nevertheless, has an important role to play because police forces are the most visible government presence in many communities.<sup>40</sup> Rather than being a source of grievance, they should be trusted by the communities they serve. Secretary Napolitano is right in principle, therefore, to highlight the community policing approach as one of the elements of counter-radicalization.<sup>41</sup>

From a strategic point of view, policing represents the "bridge" between counterterrorism and counter-radicalization and should help to inform both (see Figure 1).<sup>42</sup> It is for the police to make sure that counterterrorism does not inadvertently – and unnecessarily – undermine community outreach. In turn, policing needs to make certain that

counter-radicalization remains focused on the terrorist threat, and that law enforcement is present and alert when extremist beliefs turn into criminal action.

In general, though, the separation between counterterrorism and counter-radicalization must be maintained. Counter-radicalization is not about intelligence-gathering, nor is it primarily about policing. As demonstrated in the following section, the surest way for counter-radicalization itself to become a grievance is to "securitize" the communities at which it is directed.

**Counter-radicalization is not about intelligence-gathering, nor is it primarily about policing.**

**Figure 1: The Role of Community Policing**





## Chapter 3: Lessons from Abroad

At the time of the London transit bombings on July 7, 2005, Britain's four-pronged counter-terrorism policy "Contest" had been in place for two years, but its counter-radicalization component, "Prevent," had received little money or attention.<sup>43</sup> One of the reasons for the government's subsequent interest can be found in the biography of Hasib Husain, the youngest of the four suicide bombers. According to Norman Bettison, who served with the British Association of Chief Police Officers at the time of the bombings:

We started to unpick what was known about [Husain]. He had never come to the notice of the police at any stage in his young life... However, what we did discover is that, as a model student, ... his exercise books were littered with [supportive] references to alQaeda... To write in one's exercise book is not criminal and would not come on the radar of the police, but the whole ethos, the heart of Prevent, is the question for me of whether someone in society might have thought it appropriate to intervene... I do not mean kicking his door down at 6 o'clock in the morning and hauling him before the [courts]. I mean should someone have challenged that?<sup>44</sup>

Over the course of the following five years, Prevent became the world's most extensive counter-radicalization policy. Denmark, Australia, and Canada all launched strategies similar to Prevent, while Germany and Sweden incorporated elements into their national counterterrorism policies.<sup>45</sup> The Netherlands had started developing their own approach as early as 2004.

Neither Prevent nor any of the other policies can, or should, be replicated in their entirety by the U.S. government. But they offer a useful resource of experiences for how

counter-radicalization may (or may not) work in a Western democratic setting. This is especially true for the two longest running policies – those in Britain and the Netherlands – from which scholars like Lorenzo Vidino and others have started extracting meaningful lessons.<sup>46</sup>

*First, be clear about the policy's aims.* British policymakers never quite decided if Prevent was about countering *cognitive* or *violent* extremism. The focus has changed on several occasions, and both aims were at times pursued concurrently.<sup>47</sup> For example, while empowering non-violent Islamists who denounced Western values but were opposed to terrorist attacks in Britain,<sup>48</sup> Prevent also handed out grant money to the non-violent Islamists' more secular opponents who accused the Islamists of providing the ideological "mood music to which suicide bombers dance."<sup>49</sup> Prevent, in other words, tried to do everything at once and, in the course of doing so, managed to confuse and alienate some of its erstwhile supporters. The Dutch policy, by contrast, has focused more consistently on countering not just *violent* extremism but radicalization in all its forms and manifestations, including non-violent and non-Muslim extremists.<sup>50</sup> Its definition of cognitive extremism, however, which includes all kinds of "anti-democratic behavior[s] that could result in polarization, inter-ethnic and inter-religious tensions and serious social unrest,"<sup>51</sup> is so broad that it has prompted concerns about the government trying to criminalize simply unpopular or unwelcome ideas.<sup>52</sup>

*Second, choose partners carefully.* The British government initially hoped it could empower a national umbrella organization, the Muslim Council of Britain, to serve as the principal interlocutor through which to speak to British Muslims. In doing so, it underestimated the diversity of British Muslim communities, many of whom did not

## Most counter-radicalization is local. Relationships and networks have to be leveraged from the ground up.

recognize the religiously conservative group as a legitimate interlocutor.<sup>53</sup> Even when the outreach was broadened to include others, it mostly revolved around mosques and faith groups, which ignored that young people and women often had no mosque association, and that many secular Muslims did not identify with faith groups.<sup>54</sup> The Dutch policy made a more conscious effort not to define Muslims by their faith alone. It actively empowered secular Dutch Muslims as examples of successful integration, while also reaching out to “religious seekers” through a wide range of (mostly local) Muslim community leaders.<sup>55</sup> Equally important, the Dutch carefully distinguished between “engagement” and “empowerment;” while recognizing that it may be useful for government “to have good contact”<sup>56</sup> and maintain open lines of communication with even the most troubling Islamist groups, they largely refrained from treating Islamists as quasi-official leaders of the Muslim community, providing them with funding or giving them public recognition.<sup>57</sup>

*Third, most counter-radicalization is local.* In both countries, the national governments provided guidance, resources, and coordination while playing an important role in high-level engagement and messaging. But relationships and networks had to be leveraged from the ground up. The Netherlands in particular gave local mayors much freedom to design their own strategies and do whatever they felt was effective in reaching their Muslim communities.<sup>58</sup> The idea was that good practices would emerge over time, and that cities would “start copying” each other.<sup>59</sup> In Britain, the government launched its outreach with nationally organized

road shows, but soon recognized that locals had to be given the lead (for examples, see Box 2). Another important consideration in devolving responsibility for Prevent was that local government was seen as less “tainted” by unpopular foreign policy issues, particularly Britain’s involvement in the Iraq war.

*Fourth, avoid “securitizing” the relationship with communities.* The fundamental flaw of Prevent was that it never maintained a clean separation between counter-radicalization and counterterrorism, and that as a consequence, it came to be regarded as an instrument for “spying” on Muslim communities.<sup>60</sup> One of its supporting objectives was to “develop supporting intelligence, analysis, and information,” which meant that even the most benign outreach effort could be interpreted as a form of surveillance. Rather than empowering Muslim communities to stand up to al Qaeda and violent extremism, the policy itself became a grievance because it seemed to illustrate how Muslims in Britain were treated not as citizens but members of a “suspect community.” Indeed, the British government’s recently concluded review of Prevent will break up the program into several parts: targeted programs and interventions, including the so-called “Channel Project”<sup>61</sup> where security agencies will remain involved, and the more general outreach and messaging which will become entirely “civilian.”<sup>62</sup> This is similar to the Netherlands where local mayors, not police chiefs or the intelligence services, took early ownership of the policy and became its (often popular) public faces. The domestic intelligence service has played a very limited role in outreach and engagement, and considers its principal task to be that of supporting interventions that deal with “very radicalized people.”<sup>63</sup>

*Finally, it is critical – but not always easy – to develop measures for success.* Neither of the two policies has established metrics that would make it possible to measure

## Box 2: Local Projects—Britain’s Prevent Policy: Case Studies

Prevent has provided funding for hundreds of local projects in “priority areas” across Britain.<sup>a</sup> According to a 2008 review, the majority of these projects consisted of “debates, discussions and forums” (54%); a third (33%) were considered “educational.”<sup>b</sup> A plurality of the projects (45%) explicitly referred to the aim of preventing terrorism, while the remainder addressed the policy’s objectives by promoting “general cohesion and integration” (40%), or by providing counter-radicalization related research, training, and capacity-building (15%).<sup>c</sup> The examples below<sup>d</sup> do not claim to be representative, but serve to illustrate the range of local activities that have been supported by Prevent.

- Based on a popular British news program, young Muslims in East London are meeting once a week for “Newsnite.” The aim is to provide a safe space where young Muslims can talk about current issues and challenge radical groups’ narratives. The young people themselves set the agenda and steer the debate of the meetings held in a youth center. The sessions have been attended by local politicians, police officers, and even officials from the British Foreign Office.
- Muslim mothers and local school teachers from the London borough of Harrow participated in an “e-safety awareness course” which sought to promote a better understanding of the risks related to minor’s use of the internet. The course dealt with violent extremism alongside other online safety challenges, such as cyber-bullying, pedophilia, and pornography. The course was run by the local Council in collaboration with several community partners, including the local mosque, and cost less than \$800.
- The Youth Theatre in the northern English city of Burnley developed a play entitled “Not in My Name” which aimed to educate young people about homegrown terrorism and violent extremism. It featured local students as actors, and was performed in schools throughout the Burnley region. Every showing was followed by a discussion in which members of the audience could voice their views. Within a year, 4,000 students had watched the play, 99% of whom found it to be “challenging, informative, and relevant.”<sup>e</sup>
- The London borough of Hounslow and soldiers from a local British Army regiment organized a Junior Leadership Program, bringing together young people from different cultural backgrounds, including many young Muslims, and addressed tensions about British foreign policy, especially the country’s involvement in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Many believe the project strengthened community relations and produced no financial cost other than staff time.
- The school authority in Lancashire county in northern England helped to develop a website that offers online resources about violence and extremism. Using cartoons, news clips and discussion tools, the aim is to assist teachers in developing lessons about different kinds of violent extremism, football hooliganism, and other forms of violence. The website ([www.wherestheline.co.uk](http://www.wherestheline.co.uk)) has recently been made available to students across Britain.

and compare their effectiveness. Open support for al Qaeda is undoubtedly more of a taboo in Muslim communities now than it used to be, and it is equally true that the number of “potentially violent extremists” in both countries has gone down or stagnated over the past few years. Whether these developments have anything to do with the counter-radicalization strategies or a long list of other factors is impossible to say. Officials from both countries often present anecdotal evidence to back up their claims of success. Dutch officials, for example, talk of how their relationships with Muslim leaders calmed tensions when the far right politician Geert Wilders released a controversial movie in 2008, preventing a Danish cartoon style escalation of the crisis.<sup>64</sup> British officials say that, of the more than 1,000 “cognitive” radicals who have gone through the Channel Project, not one has become involved in terrorism.<sup>65</sup> Nevertheless, the recently published review of Prevent bluntly conceded that, “evaluation of Prevent activity has been poor” and that “[m]oney has been wasted.”<sup>66</sup> As a consequence, both countries have recognized the need to become more rigorous in assessing the impact of local initiatives, and have recently started to insist on stricter criteria for “delivery,” typically consisting of a combination of quantitative metrics and more finely granulated qualitative indicators.<sup>67</sup>

The recently published review of the British Prevent policy concluded that “money has been wasted.”

Even if the success of any of the strategies could be empirically validated, this would not necessarily make them right for the United States. Counter-radicalization needs to be tailored to suit the nature of communities, while reflecting the political and constitutional parameters and imperatives of society at large. As a result, prison-based de-radicalization programs in countries like Saudi Arabia and Indonesia would not be appropriate for the United States – or any other Western democracy – however successful they are in their respective countries and contexts.<sup>68</sup> What makes American society and culture unique, as well as the opportunities and constraints that result from this uniqueness, is the subject of the following section.



## Chapter 4: The American Experience

One of the greatest obstacles to introducing counter-radicalization to the United States is the word “radical.” Not only is being a radical no crime in America, the very idea of “radicalism” has positive connotations in a nation whose founding principles were seen as radical, even revolutionary, at the time. In the words of the eminent historian Gordon S. Wood, “[The American revolution] was the greatest revolution the world has known, a momentous upheaval that not only fundamentally altered the character of American society but decisively affected the course of subsequent history.”<sup>69</sup> American history books are full of reminders that many of the rights and freedoms now taken for granted were fought for by individuals who were condemned as “radicals” and “extremists” by their contemporaries. Abolitionists “faced violent mobs and hostile legislators who interfered with their mail and destroyed their presses”; women campaigning for their right to vote “were called ‘hysterical’ and... banned from public speaking”; Martin Luther King Jr. was “smeared and threatened” by the government.<sup>70</sup> This collective experience has taught Americans of all political persuasions that “radicals” are essential parts of their national story, and on many occasions they have been drivers of positive change and renewal.

In this and other respects, the American context is different from all the countries that have run counter-radicalization programs. This does not mean that counter-radicalization cannot work here, but it shows that any successful policy needs to be informed by the unique set of constitutional, political, and even cultural imperatives that define the

**A genuinely American policy would not make any speech illegal, but be more robust in standing up to extremist hate speech.**

United States. This section defines what those imperatives are and highlights the constraints and opportunities which, together, represent the American context.

*First, respect the values embodied in the U.S. Constitution.* The First Amendment guarantees free speech, protecting most of the activities that occur during the period of radicalization and making it impossible to, for example, prosecute someone for speaking out in favor of al Qaeda or publishing a website that glorifies terrorism. Some officials seem to believe that this impedes counter-radicalization efforts,<sup>71</sup> while some civil libertarians have concluded that counter-radicalization is a cover for “criminalizing” and “policing” thought.<sup>72</sup> In reality, of course, counter-radicalization does not seek to criminalize people, nor do any of its core activities bring prosecutions (see above). Properly understood, counter-radicalization aims to challenge extremist narratives in the “marketplace of ideas,” and, in doing so, draws on a long and well-established American tradition of speaking out against intolerance, racism, and “hate speech.”<sup>73</sup> A genuinely American policy, therefore, would not make any kind of speech illegal, however distasteful and disagreeable, but try to be more robust in standing up to extremist hate speech, specifically when it seems to legitimate violence, and encourage communities to do the same.

Equally important is the First Amendment’s “establishment clause” preventing government from funding religious groups or making rules that seek to “entangle” government and religion.<sup>74</sup> All the countries that were mentioned in the previous section have given grants to mainstream religious organizations, hoping to strengthen their capacity to reach out to young people and become more sophisticated in confronting al Qaeda’s narrative. The Constitution’s prohibition would prevent American policymakers from directly funding religious activities, but this may, in fact, be less of a constraint than is commonly imagined. A closer look at other countries’ experiences shows that government

funding for certain types of religion often exacerbated tensions within Muslim communities and, in several instances, had the perverse effect of undermining the very groups the government sought to empower.<sup>75</sup> Thanks to the establishment clause, American officials will never find themselves in a position where they have to “pick winners” or “adjudicate in intra-religious affairs.”<sup>76</sup>

*Second, consider the size, nature, and dynamics of American government.* With more than two million civilian employees, America’s federal government is one of the largest, most complex organizations in the world. Given that counter-radicalization itself is complex and draws on many different actors, departments, and agencies, the implementation of any counter-radicalization policy will require strong coordination.<sup>77</sup> Potentially even more challenging is the involvement of non-federal and, in some cases, non-governmental actors. If most counter-radicalization is local (see previous section), state and local governments will be leading much of the activity on the ground. For the federal government, this means that not only will state and local governments have to be coordinated, they will need to be persuaded that counter-radicalization is worthy of their time, attention, and money.<sup>78</sup>

All of this takes place against a background of spending cuts across all levels of government. Any American policy will have to be the most cost conscious – and cost effective – of all the countries that have run similar programs. Rather than creating new funding streams, officials will need to embed counter-radicalization activities within existing ones. Instead of setting up new bureaucracies, they have to attach counter-radicalization responsibilities to existing offices. Not least, they need to invest significant effort and energy into mobilizing non-profits and the private sector, and take full advantage of the American philanthropic tradition. In that sense, counter-radicalization is not “free” because it competes with existing priorities for time and money, but it may prove to be less expensive than anticipated.

*Third, account for the diversity and attitudes of Muslim Americans.* The most extensive surveys of Muslim Americans have shown that there are fewer Muslims in America than is often claimed,<sup>79</sup> but that Muslim American communities are more diverse than other ethnic and faith communities. The Pew Research Center’s 2009 world survey estimated that there were 2.5 million Muslim Americans, which amounts to 0.8% of the U.S. population.<sup>80</sup> An earlier Pew study found that Muslim Americans are predominantly recent immigrants (65% are foreign born) with no dominant country or region of origin.<sup>81</sup> About one fifth are African Americans and/or converts to Islam.<sup>82</sup> More than half are based in the four metropolitan areas of New York, Detroit, Chicago and Los Angeles,<sup>83</sup> but smaller clusters in places such as Columbus, Minneapolis, Washington, D.C., Toledo, Houston, and San Diego have grown in importance.<sup>84</sup> Muslim Americans, therefore, are not all the same. They do not fit a single profile and they will be more difficult to reach and require more varied approaches than their European brethren who are more concentrated and ethnically homogenous.<sup>85</sup>

In other respects, however, Muslim Americans are uniquely suited for outreach and engagement. A Pew 2007 survey showed that the incomes of Muslim Americans and their share of college graduates are similar to the national average.<sup>86</sup> Large majorities say they happy with their lives (78%) and agree with the notion that, in America, “hard work leads to success” (71%).<sup>87</sup> Pockets of socio-economic deprivation and disillusion undoubtedly exist, especially among African American and Somali Muslims.<sup>88</sup> Overall, though, Muslim Americans are strongly committed to the American Dream (more so, in fact, than any other ethnic group, including Caucasians),<sup>89</sup> prompting some officials to embrace the notion of “Muslim American exceptionalism.”<sup>90</sup> This should not foster a sense of complacency, nor should it be used to argue that homegrown terrorism “could not happen here.”<sup>91</sup> Instead, it should be seen as an opportunity to enlist Muslim Americans in the struggle against al Qaeda,<sup>92</sup>

based on their aspirations and achievements and, most importantly, their sense of having a stake in American society. It also provides an appealing counter-narrative to notions of grievance, victimhood, and the idea – so central to al Qaeda’s narrative – that being Muslim and American are incompatible.

*Finally, address concerns about counter-terrorism policies.* Complaints about counterterrorism and counterterrorism-related policies are among the most frequently cited “grievances” of Muslim Americans.<sup>93</sup> There is a perception that Muslims, based on their names and/or physical appearance, are singled out for searches and questioning at airports and by local law enforcement,<sup>94</sup> and that mosques and Islamic community centers are under blanket surveillance by security agencies.<sup>95</sup> Moreover, the frequent use of undercover agents and confidential informants as “agents provocateurs” in FBI operations<sup>96</sup> has raised concerns that homegrown terrorism cases are being “manufactured” by security agencies,<sup>97</sup> despite the Attorney General’s insistence that “those who characterize the FBI’s activities... as ‘entrapment’ simply do not have their facts straight.”<sup>98</sup> Whether justified or not, the *perception* that counterterrorism policies are unfairly targeting Muslim American communities has created tensions with engagement activities, which seek to empower the very same communities who believe that government agencies view them as potential suspects. For counter-radicalization in America to be effective, such grievances need to be addressed openly and proactively.

This is true also for America’s unique role and position in global affairs. Al Qaeda’s narrative of the “West at war with Islam” has largely failed to resonate among Muslim Americans. Despite leading the invasion of Iraq, the war caused only a very modest amount of domestic radicalization and recruitment.<sup>99</sup> Likewise, the number of

**Muslim Americans’ commitment to the American Dream provides an appealing counter-narrative to notions of grievance, victimhood, and the idea that being Muslim and American are incompatible.**

Muslim Americans who are known to have joined foreign training camps or “battlefronts” may have increased, but it remains low compared to some Western European countries, especially Britain.<sup>100</sup> On the other hand, foreign policy issues – Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, for examples – are frequently brought up at town hall meetings,<sup>101</sup> and al Qaeda has on many occasions sought to exploit them for the purpose of radicalization and recruitment. Given that “Muslim anger” about foreign policy is often based on “emotion,” simplistic assumptions, and, in some cases, outright misinformation,<sup>102</sup> the government should make an effort to listen, explain, and embark on “genuine political engagement founded on rational argument.”<sup>103</sup> In America’s case, a domestic counter-radicalization policy will inevitably have to address international concerns.

The defining features of the American context – the Constitution; the nature and dynamics of American government; the attitudes and diversity of Muslim Americans; and their perceptions of counterterrorism, domestic and global – provide a framework against which existing counter-radicalization activities and approaches should be analyzed. To what extent such approaches currently exist will be examined in the following section.



## Chapter 5: A Strategic Survey

The concept of counter-radicalization has a longer history in American policy making than the recent surge of interest suggests. *The 9/11 Commission Report* published in July 2004 concluded that “[o]ur enemy is twofold: al Qaeda, a stateless network of terrorists that struck us on 9/11; and a radical ideological movement... inspired in part by al Qaeda, which has spawned terrorist groups and violence across the world.”<sup>104</sup> It called for a two-pronged approach: “[T]he strategy should consist of offensive operations to counter terrorism... [But] our effort should be accompanied by a preventive strategy that is as much, or more, political as it is military.”<sup>105</sup> Three years later, the Implementing Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Act identified the spread of “‘homegrown’ extremists... as a potential threat within the United States,”<sup>106</sup> and it stated that the federal government should make “countering domestic radicalization... a priority.” Like the 9/11 Commission, this law stressed that “radicalization... cannot be prevented... through law enforcement and intelligence measures [alone].”<sup>107</sup>

This section reviews how policymakers have responded to these calls. It surveys approaches and activities at different levels of government and outside government, and concludes by setting out the principles and objectives behind the government’s emerging policy.

### Background

Following the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, President George W. Bush understood that mainstream Muslim Americans had to be embraced. Throughout his Presidency, he regularly welcomed Muslim faith leaders to the White House, made several high profile visits to mosques, and became the first President to keep a copy of the Quran at the White House and appoint a Muslim to the government’s anti-discrimination board.<sup>108</sup> In doing so, he sent a strong message that being Muslim *is* compatible with being American, and that Islam must not be equated with terrorism.

Although federal outreach to Muslim communities was launched immediately after the September 11 attacks, it was not before late 2006 that the government started giving serious thought to a domestic counter-radicalization strategy.<sup>109</sup> Policymakers concluded that federal engagement needed to be better coordinated, and that Muslim Americans had to be given opportunities to play a role in the ideological struggle – the so-called “battle of ideas” – against al Qaeda which had featured prominently in the government’s counterterrorism strategy<sup>110</sup> and its subsequent National Implementation Plan for the War on Terrorism.<sup>111</sup> This prompted many officials to educate themselves, establish “ground rules” on issues such as terminology,<sup>112</sup> and learn lessons from abroad.<sup>113</sup> It also galvanized a small cadre of experts who have played important roles in developing the current approach. The hoped-for strategy, however, never materialized, and few people outside of Washington, D.C. ever realized that anything was underway.<sup>114</sup> A May 2008 report by the Senate Homeland Security Committee concluded that domestic counter-radicalization efforts were “limited, isolated, and not part of a strategic, government-wide policy.”<sup>115</sup>

Like his predecessor, President Barack Obama has been consistent in highlighting the contributions of Muslim Americans. His inaugural address described the United States as “a nation of Christians and Muslims, Jews and Hindus, and non-believers.”<sup>116</sup> His Cairo speech in June 2009 pointed out that “Islam has always been part of America’s story.”<sup>117</sup> There are no indications, however, that the Obama administration had invested much effort into developing a coherent approach on domestic counter-radicalization until late 2009, when a number of incidents of homegrown terrorism, including the Fort Hood shootings and a plot to bomb the New York subway, had occurred.

The seeds of the emerging approach were planted in the first half of 2010. As early as January, the White House

### Box 3: Recent Speeches on Counter-radicalization: John Brennan\* A Dialogue on Our Nation's Security

#### **New York University – New York, February 13, 2010**

Islam is part of America's story... American Muslims serve with honor in every branch of our armed forces. Many have given their lives... and are rightly honored as heroes in the proud story of America's fight for freedom...

These Americans and many, many others help keep us safe from the threats that are real and serious, among them the threat from violent extremism. Violent extremism is neither unique nor inherent to any one faith. Violence is something that every faith rejects but that every faith had to confront...

We have seen extremists called al Qaeda, who purport to be Islamic, murder people of all faiths... We should never forget that terrorist attacks on our nation, including the 9/11 attacks, have also taken the lives of many American Muslims. Innocent men, women and children whose lives were lost simply because they too were American citizens...

As Muslims, you have seen a small fringe of fanatics, who cloak themselves in religion, try to distort your faith, though they are clearly ignorant of the most fundamental teachings of Islam... There is nothing – absolutely nothing – holy or pure or legitimate or Islamic about murdering innocent men, women and children...

As families with relatives and friends around the world, you know that it is actually Muslims who have suffered most at the bloody hands of violent extremism. It is your Muslim brothers and sisters... who have paid the highest price. As one study recently noted, in recent years, nearly all of al Qaeda's victims (98%) have been innocents from Muslim countries...

As parents, it is your sons and daughters, young people the age of students here today, who are being targeted by al Qaeda and its hateful ideology. Until recently, some thought that this challenge was for other countries, where often Muslims had not been assimilated or accepted into mainstream society. But as we have seen here in recent months, al Qaeda seeks to steal the souls of young people in America as much as they seek to steal them overseas.

In this sense, al Qaeda is not unlike drug lords, gang leaders or human traffickers, preying on the confused and the vulnerable, who are perhaps struggling with their own identity and seeking a sense of belonging, brainwashing them with the false promise of paradise and using them instead as cannon fodder for their own murderous agenda. And so, increasingly, American Muslims, mothers and fathers, face the challenge of protecting their own sons and daughters.

*\*John Brennan, Assistant to the President for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism*

tasked various departments and agencies with developing policy. Five months later, the National Security Strategy listed “Empowering Communities to Counter Radicalization” as one of five domestic priorities.<sup>118</sup> In the meantime, the President’s Counterterrorism and Homeland Security Advisor, John Brennan, gave a landmark speech entitled “A Dialogue on Our Nation’s Security,” articulating key ideas and assumptions (see Box 3).<sup>119</sup> A year later, in March 2011, the Deputy National Security Advisor, Denis McDonough, delivered another speech on counter-radicalization, “Partnering with Communities to Prevent Violent Extremism in America,” that fleshed out many of the ideas that Brennan had articulated (see Box 4).<sup>120</sup>

By early June 2011, a policy or strategy document still had not been published which means that, for the time being, the conclusion of a 2010 RAND study stating that “the United States does not have a domestic counter-radicalization strategy”<sup>121</sup> remains true.

## Current Activities at the Federal Level

Despite the absence of an openly stated policy and a single point of leadership and/or coordination on counter-radicalization, the range and scale of activities at the federal level have increased significantly since early 2010. *Outreach and engagement* with Muslim Americans, for example, are carried out through a variety of platforms and for different purposes:

- DHS’s Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties holds town hall and community roundtable events in nine cities with significant Muslim populations. They offer community leaders and young people opportunities to air grievances and seek redress, while providing DHS with a chance to raise awareness about issues related to violent extremism.<sup>122</sup>
- The Department of Justice (DoJ) engages with minorities, including Muslim Americans, through its Community Relations Service. Described as the Department’s

“peacemaker,” it responds to requests for mediation and conflict resolution but has no systematic strategy for Muslim outreach, per se.<sup>123</sup>

- In fall 2010, the Attorney General empowered the U.S. Attorneys (the chief federal law enforcement officers in their districts) to make community engagement about violent extremism part of their portfolio (see Box 5).<sup>124</sup>
- The FBI engages Muslims through its Community Outreach program, which has officers in each of the Bureau’s 56 field offices.<sup>125</sup> A more recent creation is the Specialized Outreach Team, based at FBI headquarters in Washington, D.C. that seeks to engage “insular” or “isolated” communities.<sup>126</sup>
- Part of the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) is the Global Engagement Group which cultivates relations with Muslim organizations and coordinates federal outreach to Somali American communities.<sup>127</sup>

It remains unclear who is leading the effort to *share information and best practices*. There are currently three departments and agencies which claim to be involved:

- In addition to having a broader mandate for “information sharing” about “community-based efforts to combat violent extremism,” DHS’s Homeland Security Advisory Council (HSAC) has devoted much energy and attention to sharing best practices about community policing.<sup>128</sup>
- The DoJ’s office for Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) also claims to be a hub for sharing best practices on community policing, including, but not limited to, violent extremism.<sup>129</sup>
- Meanwhile, NCTC is responsible for coordination and information sharing on all matters related to counterterrorism,<sup>130</sup> and is the only government agency to have begun developing concrete ideas for how best practices on counter-radicalization could be made available across government, and beyond.<sup>131</sup>

## Of the training that is offered and/or funded by the federal government, very little is aimed specifically at counterradicalization.

Of the *training* that is offered and/or funded by the federal government, very little is aimed specifically at counter-radicalization. Elements of existing courses and programs may nevertheless be relevant:

- DHS and DoJ provide counterterrorism and cultural competency training for their departmental staff and employees of relevant agencies, such as U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), Customs and Border Protection (CBP), the Transportation Security Administration (TSA), and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). A number of agencies – the FBI and the Bureau of Prisons, for examples – maintain their own training infrastructures.
- In addition, DHS and DoJ offer grants through the State Homeland Security Grant Program, the Urban Areas Security Initiative, the Justice Assistance Grants, and the Office for Justice Programs that provide funds for law enforcement and state and local officials training.

Other activities appear to have a “secondary” effect on preventing violent extremism by *promoting good governance, addressing grievances, or building capacity* within Muslim communities:

- The Civil Rights Division within DoJ works to uphold the liberties of Muslim Americans and, since September 2001, has made it a priority to prosecute hate crimes and incidents of discrimination against Muslims and people who are perceived to be Muslim.<sup>132</sup>
- Through agencies such as ICE and USCIS, DHS is seeking to promote departmental missions that protect vulnerable individuals, such as new immigrants, against al Qaeda and prevent its message from resonating.<sup>133</sup> The DoJ pursues a similar approach via the Bureau of Prisons.<sup>134</sup>
- The Departments of Education and Health and Human Services have recently become involved in discussions about countering violent extremism as part of their

programs on civic education and empowerment, community safety challenges, anti-bullying, and other issues.<sup>135</sup>

*Analysis* on issues related to radicalization and violent extremism is produced by units within DHS and NCTC:

- DHS’ analysis is filtered through its network of 72 regional “fusion centers” that facilitate the sharing of terrorism related information and intelligence between federal and non-federal government agencies, as well as the non-governmental sector.
- NCTC’s Radicalization and Extremist Messaging Unit has produced a number of unclassified reports, including a primer on “Radicalization Dynamics”<sup>136</sup> and a Community Awareness Briefing, that “can be used to educate and empower parents and community leaders.”<sup>137</sup>

High-level *messaging* on violent extremism originates within the National Security Council staff, but does not appear to be synchronized with other departments and agencies.<sup>138</sup>

## Current Activities by State and Local Governments

A comprehensive survey of ongoing activities and initiatives by state and local governments is beyond the scope of this report. It seems obvious, though, that only a very small number of states and local governments have institutionalized engagement with Muslim communities through units such as Maryland’s Office of Community Initiatives and its Council for New Americans.<sup>139</sup> Typically, state and local governments are most active in places where incidents of homegrown terrorism have taken place or fears exist that communities may be vulnerable. For example, the indictment of 20 Somali Americans from Minnesota in 2009 prompted the Mayor of Minneapolis to become personally involved in different forms of outreach and take a leadership

In many cases, engagement efforts by police forces have been limited to “superficial contacts” that have failed to “develop long term relationships of mutual benefit.”

role in addressing the community’s lack of resilience, integration and socio-economic opportunities.<sup>140</sup> Similar efforts coordinated with state and federal partners have been pursued by local officials in Columbus, Ohio, which is home to the second largest Somali American community in the United States.<sup>141</sup>

Most states and local governments remain happy for terrorism prevention to be dealt with as a law enforcement matter, and have delegated responsibility for community engagement to their police forces. The Los Angeles Police Department, for example, has implemented an ambitious program for community outreach, including advisory councils, community education, and training programs, with the goal of “engender[ing] the loyalty and good citizenship of American Muslims.”<sup>142</sup> The New York City Police Department, which is often said to be more focused on intelligence and disruption than engagement,<sup>143</sup> maintains a separate Community Affairs Bureau with responsibility for reaching out to new immigrants and minority communities on a range of issues, including violent extremism.<sup>144</sup> In many other cases, however, engagement efforts by police forces have been limited to “superficial contacts” that, according to the Homeland Security Institute, have failed to “develop long term relationships of mutual benefit.”<sup>145</sup>

## Current Activities by Non-Governmental Entities

Of the non-governmental entities engaged in countering violent extremism, national Muslim organizations are the easiest to identify. All major groups – the American Islamic Congress (AIC), the Council of American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), the Muslim American Society (MAS), the Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC), and the Islamic Supreme Council of America – have acknowledged that Muslims have a responsibility to counter al Qaeda’s narrative. In addition to condemning terrorism,<sup>146</sup> they all run counter-extremism

campaigns to dismantle al Qaeda’s theological case for violence and explain how Muslims can respond to injustice and conflict by peaceful means. MPAC, for instance, has organized a “grassroots campaign” that provides mosques with brochures, testimonials of terrorist victims, and a range of well-produced video clips which can be shown as part of larger events or be watched individually.<sup>147</sup>

Equally important, yet frequently forgotten, are ethnic, professional, cultural, and athletic organizations that do not identify themselves as “Muslim” or “Islamic.” A compelling example is the Center for Intercultural Organizing in Portland, Oregon.<sup>148</sup> Located in a socio-economically deprived part of the city with many new immigrants, the center has provided civic education and leadership training for thousands of young Muslims as well as non-Muslims. It is run by a charismatic Somali American whose principal objective is to tackle young people’s grievances and make them better citizens.<sup>149</sup> Because the Center does not push any particular version of Islam, its founder and director is often not recognized as a “Muslim” community leader, and his contribution to preventing radicalization is rarely acknowledged.

Not least, there are numerous non-Muslim foundations, not-for-profit groups and private sector companies that support research and capacity-building. This includes, for example, the One Nation Foundation, which aims to counter negative stereotypes about Muslims and strengthen Muslims’ sense of being American.<sup>150</sup> It extends to major Silicon Valley companies such as Google and Facebook that have offered mainstream Muslim groups training in how to be more effective in conveying their message on the internet.

## The Emerging Approach

Despite the absence of an openly stated policy, recent speeches and official statements (see, for example, Boxes 3 and 4) provide a good sense of the federal government’s emerging policy.

## Box 4: Recent Speeches on Counter-radicalization: Denis McDonough\* Partnering with Communities to Prevent Violent Extremism in America

### Adams Center – Sterling, Virginia, March 6, 2011

[Regarding] our approach at the federal level... we are working along five areas of effort: First, we're constantly working to improve our understanding of the process of radicalization that leads people to terrorism... [W]ith al Qaeda and its adherents constantly evolving and refining their tactics, our understanding of the threat has to evolve as well...

Second, equipped with this information, we've expanded our engagement with local communities that are being targeted by terrorist recruiters... But we've also recognized that this engagement can't simply be about terrorism. We refuse to "securitize" the relationship between the government and millions of law-abiding, patriotic Muslim Americans and other citizens... So other departments... have joined with communities to better understand and address the social, emotional and economic challenges faced by young people... And our U.S. Attorneys are leading a new coordinated federal effort to deepen our partnerships with communities on a host of issues...

Third, we're increasing the support we offer to communities as they build their own local initiatives. Every community is unique, and our enemy—al Qaeda—is savvy... So we're working to empower local communities with the information and tools they need to build their own capacity to disrupt, challenge and counter propaganda, in both the real world and the virtual world. Where the federal government can add value, we'll offer it. But often times, the best expertise and solutions for a community will be found in that community... In those instances, the federal government will use our convening power to help communities find the partnerships and resources they need to stay safe.

Fourth, because the federal government cannot and should not be everywhere, we're expanding our coordination with state and local governments, including law enforcement, which work directly with communities every day. We are in close collaboration with local governments, like Minneapolis and Columbus, Ohio, and we're drawing on their best practices...

But we also recognize that while local officials have the best and deepest understanding of the challenges facing individuals, groups and families in their communities, they also have limited knowledge of al Qaeda and its tactics. We have therefore developed and expanded training for law enforcement, counter-terrorism fusion centers, and state officials...

Finally, we're working to improve how we communicate with the American people about the threat of violent extremism in this country and what we're doing to address it—because we cannot meet this challenge if we do not see it for what it is, and what it is not.

\* Denis McDonough, Deputy National Security Advisor

## The government's main message to Muslim communities is that al Qaeda are "predators" who have targeted Muslim Americans for radicalization and recruitment.

The overall framework is generic and allows for different kinds of threat to be addressed. Officials are determined not to "inflate" the threat or "securitize" the government's relationship with communities.<sup>151</sup> At the same time, they have made it clear that the principal target for the time being will be al Qaeda, and that most counter-radicalization efforts will, therefore, revolve around mobilizing American Muslims against al Qaeda and its ideology.<sup>152</sup>

The government's main message to Muslim communities is that al Qaeda are "predators" who have targeted Muslim Americans for radicalization and recruitment,<sup>153</sup> and that Muslim communities are "part of the solution, not part of the problem."<sup>154</sup> Based on this distinction, officials make the case for partnership. They argue that Muslims are well positioned to challenge al Qaeda's theological narrative, while the government should focus on highlighting the vision of equal citizenship, religious freedom and shared aspirations, and thereby contest al Qaeda's claim that Muslims cannot be loyal citizens of the United States.<sup>155</sup>

The *federal government's role* is limited to serving as a "broker" and "convener," empowering states, local governments and communities to pursue counter-radicalization activities on their own.<sup>156</sup> Officials recognize

that counter-radicalization is complex and that it requires a "whole of government" approach, drawing on the contributions of many departments and agencies, including "non-traditional" ones such as the Departments of Education and Health and Human Services.<sup>157</sup> The overall aim is to produce a "mosaic of engagement" in which the federal government coordinates, evaluates and shares best practices but does not run activities on the ground.<sup>158</sup>

The *types of activity* that will be covered by the policy include messaging, outreach, training, and capacity-building. Officials recognize the need to be consistent in conveying their message to Muslim Americans and "improve how we communicate with the American people about the threat of violent extremism" more generally (*messaging*).<sup>159</sup> They intend to increase efforts to reach out to Muslim Americans; share information and best practices; and connect community leaders with each other and sources of funding and expertise (*outreach*).<sup>160</sup> More attention will be paid to educating public officials and employees, as well as providing engagement skills and cultural competency (*training*).<sup>161</sup> The government also wants to make sure that existing programs are utilized to raise awareness, build capacity, and combat key grievances, especially social isolation, political and socio-economic exclusion, and conflicted identities (*capacity-building*).<sup>162</sup>

The administration's counter-radicalization policy continues to develop. It is likely to become the most serious, ambitious, and comprehensive attempt to make sense of the government's role in domestic counter-radicalization and, thereby, heed the 9/11 Commission's call for a "preventive strategy." Whether the framework is consistent and effective, and what further recommendations and suggestions can be made, will be the subject of the next section.

### Box 5: Case Study: U.S. Attorney Outreach in Portland, Oregon

Last fall, the U.S. Attorney General charged the U.S. Attorneys – the chief federal law enforcement officers across the country – with outreach and engagement in countering violent extremism. For Dwight Holton, the U.S. Attorney in Oregon, this became a priority in November, when he indicted one of his constituents, a 19-year-old Somali American from Portland, for attempting to blow up the city’s annual Christmas tree lighting.<sup>a</sup>

For Holton, the tree lighting incident created the need and, indeed, an opportunity for reaching out to Oregon’s Muslim communities. At the Islamic Center of Corvallis, where the suspect had occasionally prayed, he spent nearly 10 hours talking to the imam and part of his congregation. Within a week, Holton had met members of a refugee organization, who told him about the problems of new immigrants; listened to young Somali Americans at a youth center; and answered the questions of Bangladeshi Americans of all ages at a specially convened town hall meeting.<sup>b</sup>

None of the meetings were one-offs. Over a period of just two months, Holton managed to turn “contacts” into relationships, and generated trust where, initially, there had been a great deal of suspicion. In late January, he invited 15 of the community leaders to his house for dinner. The evening’s discussions ranged widely and didn’t spare controversial topics, such as U.S. foreign policy, homegrown terrorism, and FBI “sting” operations. Even so, his guests left him in no doubt that they all were “fundamentally committed to the American project, and determined to make it work.” He now considers many of them “personal friends.”<sup>c</sup>

In the coming months, Holton wants to set up a day long “engagement summit,” a mix of young people, faith and community leaders, as well as private companies and government, talking about what “forces” make young people susceptible to extremist messages, and what practical steps can be taken to counter them, including “what communities can do when someone seems to be heading astray.” The aim is to raise awareness and deepen understanding, but also to mobilize resources and enable partnerships for action.<sup>d</sup>

In the short term, Holton says, his network of Muslim community leaders provides a tool for responding to crises and tensions. The immediate objective is to educate Muslim partners and give them resources and support so they can counter radicalization on their own and, even more ambitiously, help “undermine the powerful forces that push young people away from the American project.”<sup>e</sup> He is conscious that “we’re not going to reach everybody.” Indeed, he fully understands that the principal role of counter-radicalization is not to “de-radicalize” extremists but to rather “shrink the pool of raw material” from which recruiters can draw.<sup>f</sup>

Holton believes that U.S. Attorneys are well positioned to do this kind of work, despite their close association with the FBI and traditional counterterrorism. U.S. Attorneys, he points out, are unique in being “hybrids, local officials charged with carrying out national policy.”<sup>g</sup> As a result, Holton thinks they are better suited than other officials to act as community conveners, who bring together (local) civil society on issues of (national) concern.<sup>h</sup>



## Chapter 6: Recommendations

For more than five years, Samir Khan, the editor of al Qaeda's English language magazine *Inspire*, was based in North Carolina while running pro-al Qaeda websites and internet discussion groups, entirely open in his support for terrorism. *The New York Times* and local television crews even interviewed him about his activities.<sup>163</sup> He was also not a stranger to the FBI who, reportedly, had him under surveillance as early as 2007.<sup>164</sup> Everyone was watching, but at no point did anyone challenge his behavior. The one exception was his father, who assembled a group of local elders. Their last ditch intervention, however, was too little, too late.<sup>165</sup> Just a few months later, Khan made his way to Yemen, where he joined al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula.

Khan's story illustrates why a more systematic approach towards counter-radicalization is needed. While no one knows if his decision to join al Qaeda could have been prevented, it is hard to deny that the absence of any systematic challenge made it more likely. The administration is right, therefore, in wanting to construct a "fourth pillar" of its response to terrorism to tackle domestic radicalization and, in doing so, complement the other three pillars, that is, "hard" counterterrorism at home and abroad, as well as the strategy for countering violent extremism overseas.

Whatever the administration decides to propose, the policy will no doubt be "too little" for those who view Islam as the enemy, while being "too much" for those who believe that radicalization is a "myth" and that any challenge to hateful ideas is an attempt to "criminalize thought." This should not prevent policymakers from pursuing a common sense approach, one that addresses the vulnerability but does not hype the threat.

Many of the principles and assumptions that underpin current government thinking are fundamentally sound. The administration is correct in seeking to construct a

generic, long-term framework that will make it possible for future governments to address violent extremist threats other than al Qaeda. It has put together a convincing case for partnership between the government and Muslim communities based on shared aspirations and the common challenge of protecting Muslim Americans. It goes beyond the traditional focus on violence in saying that communities need to challenge the ideas that drive al Qaeda's violence. It expresses a clear sense of the federal government's role as "enabler" and "convener," and sets out an ambitious vision for encouraging activities that are driven by local communities. In addition, it succeeds in supporting a uniquely American context while adopting important lessons from international experiences, such as the commitment not to "securitize" the relationship with Muslim communities.

The aim of the following recommendations, therefore, is not so much to call for an entirely different approach but, rather, to make sure that the emerging policy remains true to the positive intentions behind it. There are contradictions and tensions that have not been fully resolved. And there are, of course, many open questions. As a result, the majority of suggestions serve as benchmarks and indications encouraging policymakers to clarify their propositions and close gaps in the process of implementation.

### Messaging

- *Communication with Muslim communities must include an "ask."* While Muslims should be embraced and encouraged as partners in the struggle against al Qaeda, they have a right to know what is expected of them. Landmark speeches by administration officials have gone to great lengths to reassure Muslims of their constitutional rights and place in society, but none has stated clearly what the government wants them to *do*. As Americans, Muslims understand that citizenship involves rights and

responsibilities, and many would no doubt be happy to be “enlisted” in the struggle against al Qaeda and its ideology.<sup>166</sup> If the government believes that Muslim Americans have a unique role to play in the fight against al Qaeda, it should not be reluctant to tell them precisely what that role is.

- *Al Qaeda’s ideology should be challenged as well as contested.* The government’s current efforts focus on *contesting* al Qaeda’s ideology by contrasting the positive vision of equal citizenship, religious freedom, and shared aspirations with al Qaeda’s claim that being Muslim is incompatible with being part of American society.<sup>167</sup> In smaller settings, however, it may also be appropriate to *challenge* the group and its ideology more directly and more aggressively.<sup>168</sup> Not only do Muslim community leaders need to know what arguments al Qaeda is using and how they can be countered, there is much to be gained from highlighting the inconsistency between al Qaeda’s words and its actions. Senior officials are right in pointing out that al Qaeda and its leaders should not be provided with unnecessary attention and publicity,<sup>169</sup> but there clearly need to be channels (mailing lists, conference calls, PowerPoint presentations) that can be used to expose and rebut al Qaeda’s statements before they gain traction. In fact, several officials reported that this approach has been tried in local settings, where it turned out to be an “extremely powerful” tool in educating Muslim community leaders.<sup>170</sup>
- *Government should be careful not to meddle in religious debates.* Officials are correct in reassuring Muslims that their faith has a place in American society, and in rebutting those who say that devout Muslims cannot be loyal Americans. At the same time, government pronouncements about the character of Islam or the “true” meaning of religious concepts (such as jihad), however well intentioned, are not credible, nor do they

do justice to complex theological debates.<sup>171</sup> It is not for the U.S. government to decide what Islam, or any other faith, is and what it is not. If the administration is serious about not wanting to “adjudicate in intra-religious affairs,”<sup>172</sup> it must be careful, deliberate, and nuanced in its messaging on religious matters.

- *The policy of refusing to name the underpinnings of al Qaeda’s ideology is contrived and counterproductive.* Inconsistent and evasive statements by senior policymakers prevent lower level officials from learning the difference between the ideology of “violent Islamist extremism”<sup>173</sup> and the religion of Islam. There are good reasons for using the term sparingly, especially when addressing general audiences,<sup>174</sup> but there is no excuse for failing to teach police officers, FBI agents, and prison guards how to distinguish between the faith practices of ordinary Muslims and the murderous ideas of “violent Islamist extremists.”<sup>175</sup> If anything, doing so will help to protect the rights of mainstream Muslims to practice their religion.

## Structure and Organization

- *Any policy requires leadership and coordination.* Because no single department or agency can perform all, or even most, of the functions associated with counter-radicalization, the White House must be designated as the “single point”<sup>176</sup> from which the policy is led and coordinated. Furthermore, to ensure accountability and avoid duplication, there needs to be a lead department or agency for each policy function – training, outreach, messaging, capacity-building, analysis, evaluation, and information-sharing – that oversees implementation across the government.
- *Counterterrorism and counter-radicalization must be kept separate.* To avoid undermining counter-radicalization outreach and engagement efforts by creating a public

There needs to be a lead department or agency for each policy function – training, outreach, messaging, capacity-building, analysis, evaluation, and information-sharing – that oversees implementation across the government.

perception that they are associated with law enforcement activities or intelligence gathering, none of the agencies that are primarily concerned with counterterrorism and/or intelligence should play a dominant or visible role in the policy's implementation.

## Information-sharing

- *The White House should designate a single agency that serves as the principal hub for collecting, disseminating, and evaluating information on counter-radicalization.* Its main function would be to collect, analyze, and share best practices with a wide range of governmental and non-governmental actors, including community leaders and non-profits.
- *Government must promote standards for effectiveness.* The difficulties in measuring the effectiveness of counter-radicalization must not deter officials from promoting the adoption of evaluation criteria for local efforts and activities. The objective is for benchmarking to become a “good practice” so that uniform standards will emerge over time.
- *The development of an intervention capability that is consistent with American culture and values should be a priority.* Aggressive, government-run intervention and de-radicalization programs, such as the Channel Project in the United Kingdom, would be rejected as too intrusive in an American context.<sup>177</sup> Any new structure or office charged with sharing information on counter-radicalization should make it a priority to collect, disseminate, and promote the exchange of best practices on community-led interventions in the United States that will enable community leaders to understand what lessons have been learned when dealing with “at risk” individuals. In doing so, the office should be encouraged to study indigenous capabilities in related fields, such as

gang prevention (see Box 6), which can be adapted to deal with ideologically motivated violence,<sup>178</sup> as well as “after care” and “re-entry” programs supporting the re-integration of prisoners.<sup>179</sup>

## Outreach and Engagement

- *Outreach efforts should reflect the diversity of Muslim communities.* Government should not give the impression that it depends on religious interlocutors to convey its message to Muslim communities. The theological challenge to al Qaeda’s narrative is just one element of the broader counter-radicalization effort, aiming to promote good governance, citizenship, pluralism, and other, more secular, values. In addition to groups that defines themselves as “Muslim” or “Islamic,” Muslim Americans need to be engaged through ethnic, cultural, athletic, and professional organizations whose leaders are often more influential and knowledgeable than local imams or the local representatives of national Muslim organizations.<sup>180</sup> Indeed, if Muslim Americans are to be treated as full and equal citizens, government needs to make every effort to reach out to them directly as citizens of the United States instead of relying on mediators of any kind. The government must resist the temptation to “outsource” its relationship with part of its own population.
- *Officials need to understand the difference between engagement and empowerment.* There are good reasons for maintaining open lines of communication with all kinds of community groups. Equally, though, officials need to realize that not all groups are the same and, therefore, not all make appropriate government partners in promoting the goals and objectives of counter-radicalization. At a minimum, government partners should be committed to (1) upholding the Constitution

### Box 6: Case Study: Gang Prevention in Los Angeles

In the mid-2000s, Los Angeles was “home to the largest and most established gang population in the country” with over 400 gangs and 40,000 gang members. In 2006 alone, they were responsible for nearly 300 deaths and tens of thousands of violent crimes.<sup>a</sup> This prompted Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa to propose a comprehensive, four-pronged Gang Reduction Strategy – consisting of prevention, intervention, re-entry, and suppression – which the city adopted in 2007.<sup>b</sup>

Focusing on less than two dozen neighborhoods, prevention is directed at young people and risk factors that are known to increase their likelihood of joining gangs. Programs are delivered through schools and community groups and include gang awareness education and after-school and recreational activities.<sup>c</sup> Interventions, on the other hand, target individual gang members and those who are about to join. They are led by a case manager and bring together various city and county departments including education, employment, child and family services, and law enforcement.<sup>d</sup> The overall aim is to coordinate and mobilize all community resources so that vulnerable individuals can be stopped from engaging in “risky or unlawful behavior.”<sup>e</sup>

The involvement and government sponsorship of former gang members has generated much controversy, but is now considered one of the reasons for the strategy’s success.<sup>f</sup> Unlike police officers, former gang members are immersed in their communities and are widely known and trusted. Because they used to be involved in gangs, they bring credibility to young people who are at risk, and are capable of reaching out to active gang members. They take part in violence prevention activities such as giving talks at schools and organizing sports activities, and engage in “rumor control” when conflicts threaten to escalate. Most importantly, they help to identify those gang members who really want to make a change in their life.<sup>g</sup>

No doubt, the presence of former gang members has caused some friction, especially with law enforcement.<sup>h</sup> To preserve their standing with gang members, the former gang members do not always share information with the police, even when it could be vital to criminal investigations. They do not want to be seen as police informers, nor do they consider solving crimes to be their principal role. As one of them put it, “We don’t care who did the last shooting. We want to prevent the next one.”<sup>i</sup>

There are, of course, some differences between terrorist groups like al Qaeda and criminal gangs, in particular the absence of a political ideology.<sup>j</sup> But the individual experiences and social dynamics that lead young Latinos and African Americans in Los Angeles to join gangs may be quite similar to those that get young Muslims involved in terrorist groups. Moreover, all the elements of Los Angeles’ Gang Reduction Strategy have been subject to rigorous assessment,<sup>k</sup> which means that the underlying processes and dynamics are well-understood. In that sense, the gang prevention program in Los Angeles can offer useful lessons and may, in certain respects, serve as a framework that can be adapted for the purpose of counter-radicalization.

Unless the federal government provides incentives for state and local government, federal outreach will remain a “flying circus” while local engagement will continue to be reactive rather than proactive.

of the United States, and be consistent in (2) expressing their opposition to acts of terrorism and, (3) the killing of Americans anywhere in the world.<sup>181</sup> Where particular groups are to be promoted and empowered – for example by providing them with access to senior officials, giving them public recognition, or endorsing grant applications<sup>182</sup>– officials should make sure that the groups’ message is not aggressively sectarian or peddles narratives of grievance and victimhood that are positively correlated with support for violent extremism and run contrary to promoting the idea that being Muslim and being American are compatible.<sup>183</sup> It is understandable that senior officials are reluctant to codify and publish criteria,<sup>184</sup> but state and local officials should have access to guidance. At the very least, they should be reminded to use common sense, take an interest in groups’ and individuals’ record, and consider carefully whether particular groups’ outlook and approach will help to advance the aims of the policy.

- *Federal engagement efforts need to galvanize local activities.* Current federal outreach activities are “no more than touches,” that fail to have any lasting impact. As one official put it, “I have no time to dig deep. I am lucky if I get 15 minutes with the imam at the mosque.”<sup>185</sup> For federal involvement in community engagement efforts to make sense, it needs to focus on galvanizing local activities that can be sustained long after the federal officials have returned to Washington, D.C. Senior officials seem to understand this. What they have not explained is how they want to convince state and local governments to increase and sustain outreach efforts at times of tightened budgets and spending cuts. Unless the federal government provides incentives for state and local government for doing so, federal outreach will remain a “flying circus” while local engagement will continue to be reactive rather than proactive.<sup>186</sup>

- *The new role of the U.S. Attorneys in federal outreach should be institutionalized.* The U.S. Attorneys, who were recently charged with conducting outreach on behalf of the federal government, are ideally positioned to provide a bridge between national policy and local communities, and may help to avoid the duplication of efforts at the federal level (see Box 3). If they are to be effective in serving as the “anchors” for all federal outreach, their role needs to be formalized and they should be given adequate resources and institutional incentives to fill it.

## Capacity-building

- *Capacity-building must focus on “at risk” places and populations.* Despite nearly a decade of research into radicalization, no one can predict if any particular individual will become a “homegrown terrorist.” Even so, it seems obvious that certain populations – young males, for example – are more vulnerable than others. Likewise, there are places in which people are more likely to be exposed to grievances and extremist ideologies. These places include prisons where individuals are confronted with existential questions while isolated from family and friends; and the internet where narratives of grievance are powerfully portrayed and like-minded individuals can easily be found. Capacity-building efforts need to concentrate on penetrating such “difficult” environments and “hard to reach” populations.
- *Each department and agency should “scan” existing programs for counter-radicalization impact.* The government has recognized that there are numerous government programs and capabilities that advance the aims of counter-radicalization without this being their primary purpose. The Departments of Justice and Homeland Security, for example, promote good governance for minorities and new immigrants and, in

doing so, help to preempt grievances.<sup>187</sup> The Department of Education reaches young people through schools, anti-bullying campaigns, and community safety programs.<sup>188</sup> The Department of Health and Human Services offers grants for community-based capacity-building efforts.<sup>189</sup> Identifying additional opportunities to embed counter-radicalization within existing programs will help mainstream this concept. It also makes good fiscal sense.

- *Government must engage non-profits and the private sector.* The government can add value to counter-radicalization efforts by connecting people and bringing relevant parties to the table. In using its convening power, the government should look beyond Muslim communities and make more systematic efforts to connect Muslim community partners with industry, the mainstream media, non-profits, foundations, the philanthropy sector, and other non-governmental actors who can provide skills, expertise, and funding. This could be particularly valuable, for instance, in helping Muslim communities to become more effective in reaching out to their followers and countering the extremist narrative via the internet and social media.

## Training

- *The Departments of Justice and Homeland Security must overhaul their procedures for awarding training grants.* As recent reports have shown,<sup>190</sup> federally funded counterterrorism training for state and local law enforcement is often “inaccurate and even inflammatory,”<sup>191</sup> especially when dealing with issues related to Muslims and Islam. There does not seem to be any grant guidance, nor do there appear to be standards that allow grantees to ensure that training is carried out by qualified personnel and meets policy objectives. In their current state, federally-funded training programs not only fail serve the aims of counter-radicalization, they counteract them.

- *More training needs to be offered on engagement, outreach, and cultural competency.* The government should increase the volume of training on counter-radicalization and relevant skills and knowledge, and make such training available upon request to any and all civilian officials, including those from state and local governments. Doing so could provide an incentive for state and local officials to become involved in engagement efforts and galvanize local activities.

## Community policing

- *Government must recognize the limits of community policing.* Community policing is an important and positive element of generating trust between minority communities and law enforcement, but it is not the equivalent of counter-radicalization, nor should it be presented as such. The excessive focus on community policing has led to duplications of effort, resulting in two government departments collecting “best practices” on community policing but none doing the same for other types of counter-radicalization. Moreover, it deters elected officials, such as mayors and city council members, from engaging in active outreach, and fosters the impression that counter-radicalization is about policing and, therefore, equals “criminalizing belief.” Officials should be careful to present community policing in context, and emphasize that it represents one of many elements of the government’s planned “mosaic of engagement.”<sup>192</sup>

Above all, the government must be persistent. The National Security Preparedness Group’s previous report concluded by observing that, if the American people demonstrate their “national resilience in the face of terrorism, terrorist groups will have little to gain by attacking the American homeland.”<sup>193</sup> The same is true for Muslim Americans. If Muslim communities show themselves to be resistant to al Qaeda’s narrative and its advances, al Qaeda will eventually

## The key to successful counter-radicalization is consistent implementation over a long period of time.

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come to understand that their attempts at radicalizing and recruiting Muslim Americans are futile. This will take time, however, and requires the government's full support. Resilience, be it national or communal, does not emerge overnight, and it will not be possible, therefore, to fully assess the effectiveness of any policy for years to come.

The key to successful counter-radicalization may not lie in any particular policy prescription but, rather, how consistently the policy is implemented and maintained over a long period of time. As a result, the American public will have an important role to play in holding government to its word. They need to make sure that whatever approach the government adopts, its commitment and attention to challenging and countering radicalization never wavers. As the 9/11 Commission pointed out, making America safe from terrorism is a “generational challenge”<sup>194</sup> and “the American people are entitled to expect their government to do its very best” in meeting it.<sup>195</sup>

# Endnotes

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12. See, for example, Charles Kurzman, "Muslim-American Terrorism Since 9/11: An Accounting," Triangle Center on Terrorism and Homeland Security, February 2, 2011.
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14. The trip to Portland involved visits to a community center and a mosque, as well as interviews with two Muslim community leaders, the police chief, and the U.S. Attorney. During the stay in Los Angeles, interviews were conducted with the Mayor, the Deputy Mayor for Gang Prevention, two members of the Deputy Mayor's staff, and several LAPD officers. Nine former gang members made themselves available for a roundtable discussion. Both fieldtrips took place in April 2011.
15. The author carried out interviews with officials at the Departments of Homeland Security, Justice, and State, as well as the Federal Bureau of Investigations, the National Counterterrorism Center, the National Security Council, and the Dutch and British Embassies in Washington DC. Also interviewed were representatives of the American Civil Liberties Union, the Council for American-Islamic Relations, the Islamic Society of North America, the World Organization for Resource Development and Education, Muflehun, and the Muslim Political Affairs Council. Interviews with experts and former officials included: Arif Alikhan, National Defense University; Charles Allen, Chertoff Group; Jerome Bjelopera, Congressional Research Service; Frank Ciluffo, George Washington University; Stephen Flynn, Center for National Policy; John Gannon, BAE Systems; Ed Husain, Council on Foreign Relations; Charles Kurzman, University of North Carolina; Matt Levitt, Washington Institute for Near East Policy; Shiraz Maher, International Center for the Study of Radicalization, King's College London; Andy Polk, Office of Congresswoman Sue Myrick; Mark Randol, Congressional Research Service; Dina Temple-Raston, National Public Radio; Lorenzo Vidino, RAND Corporation; and Juan Zarate, Center for Strategic and International Studies. All interviews were carried out between February and May 2011.
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77. Interview with administration official. A previous report of the National Security Preparedness Group highlighted the absence of integration and clear leadership as one of the key impediments to making counter-radicalization work. See Bergen, "Assessing the Terrorist," p. 29.
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### Box 2

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- j. Interview with Arif Alikhan.
- k. Interview with Guillermo Cespedes.





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(202) 204-2400

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