EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Defeating Terrorists, Not Terrorism:

Assessing U.S. Counterterrorism Policy from 9/11 to ISIS

September 2017

Task Force on Terrorism and Ideology

Co-Chairs

Governor Thomas H. Kean
Former Chairman, 9/11 Commission; Former Governor of New Jersey

Representative Lee H. Hamilton
Former Vice Chairman, 9/11 Commission; Former Representative from Indiana

Members

Cheryl Benard
President, ARCH International

Joseph Braude
Advisor, Al-Mesbar Studies and Research Center in Dubai; Senior Fellow, Foreign Policy Research Institute

Dr. Tarek Elgawhary
President, The Coexist Foundation

John Gannon
Adjunct Professor, Center for Security Studies, Georgetown University; Former CIA Deputy Director for Intelligence and Chairman of the National Intelligence Council

Ambassador Husain Haqqani
Senior Fellow and Director for South and Central Asia, Hudson Institute; Former Ambassador of Pakistan to the United States

Bernard Haykel
Professor of Near Eastern Studies and Director, Institute for Transregional Study of the Contemporary Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia, Princeton University

Charles Hill
Brady-Johnson Distinguished Fellow in Grand Strategy at Yale University; Research Fellow of the Hoover Institution, Stanford University

Sir John Jenkins
Executive Director, International Institute for Strategic Studies Middle East; Former British Ambassador to Syria, Iraq, Libya, and Saudi Arabia

Nibras Kazimi
Author, *Syria Through Jihadist Eyes: A Perfect Enemy*

Christopher Kojm
Professor of International Affairs, Elliot School of International Affairs, The George Washington University; Former Chair of the National Intelligence Council

Kristin Lord
President and CEO, IREX

Staff

Blaise Misztal
Director of National Security

Nicholas Danforth
Senior Policy Analyst

Jessica Michek
Policy Analyst

Samuel Tadros
Contributor

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

BPC staff would like to thank those whose expertise, insights, and efforts are reflected in this report, and gratefully acknowledges Michelle Pea and Blake Hollister for their contributions during their internships.

Letter from the Co-Chairs

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, killed nearly 3,000 innocent Americans. Thousands more Americans have died in the subsequent military campaigns and intelligence operations that have kept America safe. Sixteen years later, we pause to honor those Americans lost on 9/11 and those who have served and sacrificed to protect the American people in the years since.

In 2004, the *9/11 Commission Report* offered 41 bipartisan recommendations to secure the homeland, defeat terrorist networks, and ultimately prevail in what we termed the "generational struggle" against Islamist terrorism. Thanks to the efforts of policymakers in both parties, most of those recommendations have been implemented in whole or in part.

Overall, the U.S. government's record on securing the homeland and taking down terrorist networks is good. The courage and skill of our military, intelligence, and law enforcement agencies have prevented another mass-casualty attack on U.S. soil. Congress created the National Counterterrorism Center and reorganized the intelligence community under a new Director of National Intelligence. Homeland security officials have closed security gaps at airports and at the border. Overseas, U.S. operations have killed Osama bin Laden and severely damaged the al Qaeda network. A U.S.-led coalition has nearly driven ISIS from Iraq and is pushing into its strongholds in Syria.

Yet despite these tactical successes, it is hard to conclude that we are winning. While we have pummeled terrorists on the battlefield, we have struggled to defeat their ideas. Unfortunately, recent evidence suggests that jihadist ideology remains attractive to many, including in the West. In 2014, ISIS's call to jihad attracted thousands of "foreign fighters" from across the world into its ranks. Over the past year, even with the ISIS caliphate rapidly losing territory, ISIS-inspired "homegrown" terrorists have conducted attacks in Europe and the United States. As long as jihadists can replenish their ranks as fast as we can take them off the battlefield, the threat will persist.

We can, and must, do better to defeat terrorists' ideas. Since 9/11, the United States has expended hundreds of millions of dollars on counter-radicalization and counter-messaging programs, with limited success. Indeed, basic questions remain unanswered: What role does ideology, as opposed to political, social, or economic grievances, play in driving people to terrorism? What is the relationship between Islamist terrorism and other strains of Islamist thinking? Can the United States and other non-Muslim actors meaningfully influence cultural and religious currents in the Islamic world? Which Muslim partners are most credible and effective in reducing the appeal of jihadism?

This Bipartisan Policy Center project aims to take stock of 16 years of counterterrorism struggle and make recommendations for long-term success. As in the *9/11 Commission Report*, we begin by "looking backward in order to look forward." This paper takes stock of U.S. counterterrorism efforts since 2001, with a focus on U.S. efforts to counter extremist ideology. A future paper will make recommendations for defeating terrorists' ideas over the long term.

Governor Tom H. Kean

Representative Lee H. Hamilton

Executive Summary

Sixteen years after the 9/11 attacks, the United States continues to grapple with how to defeat the terrorist threat. The fight against terrorism dominated the national security agenda of the past two U.S. administrations. It will almost certainly remain among the major challenges confronting the current president.

This new Bipartisan Policy Center project springs from the conviction that it is time to assess U.S. progress in this struggle. Much as the 9/11 Commission examined how the horrendous attacks of that day occurred, it is appropriate and necessary, more than a decade and a half later, to take stock of both the state of the terrorist threat and the record of U.S. counterterrorism policies in combating that threat.

What have the significant investments the United States has made in its intelligence, military, law enforcement, and public diplomacy capabilities achieved? Has the terrorist threat diminished? Is the United States safer today than it was 16 years ago? Is the U.S. approach to counterterrorism working? Or is something different needed?

This paper provides an assessment of U.S. counterterrorism policy to date, its achievements and shortcomings, and compares them against the scale and scope of the current terrorist threat.

This paper aims to answer these questions. It provides an assessment of U.S. counterterrorism policy to date, its achievements and shortcomings, and compares them against the scale and scope of the current terrorist threat. A future study will develop recommendations for a more effective, comprehensive, and long-term counterterrorism strategy.

In the homeland, and on the battlefield, the legacy of post-9/11 counterterrorism efforts is in many respects a successful one. Prodigious efforts by intelligence agencies, law enforcement, and the military have prevented another mass-casualty attack on U.S. soil. American forces have found and killed tens of thousands of terrorists abroad. The combined efforts of the U.S. government have degraded terrorist leadership, disrupted terrorist financing, and thwarted hundreds of terrorist plots.

> *"It is impossible to conclude that the enemy has been defeated. Rather, the threat of terrorism has metastasized."*

Yet, it is impossible to conclude that the enemy has been defeated. Rather, the threat of terrorism has metastasized. Last year, terrorists launched five times as many attacks as in 2001, with terrorism afflicting more than 104 countries.[1] Terrorist groups have taken root in Europe, Africa, and Asia, in addition to the Middle East. New recruits sign up for jihad as quickly as the United States eliminates them on the field of battle. For each threat defused, another soon takes its place; for each terrorist group disrupted, another soon arises; for each terrorist killed, more eager recruits appear.

The 9/11 Commission warned that terrorism "will menace Americans and American interests long after Usama Bin Ladin and his cohorts are killed or captured."[2] The Commission was right. But U.S. policy has not heeded this warning. Too often U.S. counterterrorism efforts have focused on a specific group or threat, while doing too little to prevent new generations from taking up the banner of jihad.

Even as the military defeat of the Islamic State, or ISIS, appears imminent, American policymakers must avoid the temptation of confusing the defeat of one brutal terrorist organization with victory against terrorism. Victory against Islamist terrorism cannot be achieved only through the military action, law enforcement, or even targeted messaging campaigns that have been the hallmark of bipartisan U.S. policy across three administrations now. To reduce the threat posed by terrorism to its homeland, its citizens, its interests, and the world order it has constructed, the United States will have to work to attenuate the conditions that continue to attract new recruits to the terrorist cause, including the Islamist ideology that provides jihad with its justification and objective.

Assessing the Terrorist Threat

The terrorist threat to the United States today, although diminished since 9/11, remains grave. Though degraded, both al Qaeda and ISIS remain dangerous; though better protected, the United States remains vulnerable.

The terrorist contingent has only grown since 9/11. The number of jihadis more than doubled between 2010 and 2013, according to a RAND study, as terrorist groups attract followers almost as quickly as the U.S. military can kill them.[3] For example, despite estimates that U.S. forces have killed at least 60,000 ISIS fighters, the U.S. government believes the group has as almost as many members now (15,000, according to the State Department) as it did in 2014 (20,000, according to the CIA).[4]

Moreover, the past few years have witnessed an unprecedented increase in terror incidents. Last year, some 25,000 people died in roughly 11,000 terrorist attacks in 104 countries.[5] That is over three times as many deaths and five times as many attacks (7,000 and 2,000, respectively) as were recorded in 2001.[6] Although each of today's terrorist acts might be smaller than the major attacks conducted over a decade earlier and although many might be happening far from the American homeland, they have nevertheless created a perception of vulnerability and fear in Western societies.

Terrorist Groups and Their Evolution

ISIS will not cease to exist with its loss of Raqqa. Even as it loses territory in Iraq and Syria, ISIS has already expanded into other geographic areas, including Libya, Afghanistan, and even Southeast Asia, and founded new "branches," including in Nigeria. All of these could prove the seeds for new caliphates. But even without a territory to call its own, ISIS will remain a menace.

Its unprecedented use of social media for recruitment and dissemination of propaganda can be expected to continue. Foreign fighters who traveled from the West to fight with the group may return to their home countries—perhaps using civilian migration routes into Europe to disguise their true identities, as some of the perpetrators of the 2015 Paris attacks did. For some disaffected Muslims in the West who were not able to join it, moreover, the idea of the ISIS caliphate will remain an inspiration.

While overshadowed by ISIS's meteoric rise, other terrorist groups remain dangerous and continue to seek to attack the United States. Al Qaeda's nominal leader, former Osama bin Laden deputy Ayman al Zawahiri, remains at large in the Afghan-Pakistan borderlands. Hayat Tahrir al Sham, al Qaeda's Syrian affiliate, remains a powerful force in that country's civil war. Al Qaeda also has affiliates in North Africa (al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb) and the Indian subcontinent. The most worrying, however, is al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), a sophisticated adversary with a record of attempts to strike the U.S. homeland.

It would be a mistake, however, to assume that this constellation of groups will continue to define the universe of terrorist organizations. Or that the same approach pursued by ISIS in Iraq and Syria will characterize future iterations of the terrorist threat. Ninety years ago, there was no Muslim Brotherhood; 50 years ago, there was no Jihadi Salafism; 25 years ago no al Qaeda; and five years ago no ISIS. Five years from now, new terrorist organizations will emerge, remnants of the earlier jihadi organizations will linger, and the extremists will adapt.

Indeed, jihadist thinking has never been static. Groups like al Qaeda and the Islamic State are fanatically committed to their worldview, but they have shown a remarkable ability to adapt their tactics to the circumstances in which they find themselves. As ISIS's terrestrial caliphate collapses, jihadist thinking will likely evolve in response.

ISIS imitators will likely attempt similar territory grabs in the years ahead. The idea of the caliphate, once glimpsed, will retain its allure. Others may push for a return to the al Qaeda methodology of focusing on terrorist attacks in the West. Alternatively, some jihadist groups may revert to the pre-al Qaeda methodology of targeting the "near enemy"—local regimes.

Whatever its manifestations, the next iterations of terrorism will remain a significant threat to the United States, its interests, and its partners.

U.S. Vulnerabilities at Home and Abroad

The most direct threat to the U.S. homeland is likely to continue to come from "enabled" attacks and terrorist exploitation of the internet. But the threat to U.S. national interests is not limited to terrorist activity on American soil.

As terrorist groups lose geographic sanctuaries, they have sought to strike back by urging potential followers to conduct attacks in the West. ISIS and AQAP have pioneered and perfected enabled or remote-controlled attacks. In this model, terrorist operatives use the internet to identify disaffected young people and direct them to commit attacks in their home countries in the West, often using low-tech tactics. These simple plots do not require advanced skills, funding, travel, or communications. As seen in Nice, Berlin, London, and Barcelona, a truck driven by a committed terrorist into a crowd of bystanders can kill scores of people and instill widespread fear. Such attacks offer little to no warning, meaning that there is almost no way for counterterrorism officials to stop them.

These attacks are enabled by terrorists' significant presence in cyberspace, using it for propaganda and recruiting, especially on social media. This growing significance of the internet as a medium for radicalization as well as terrorist use of encrypted communications to discreetly plot and orchestrate attacks are likely to remain the most challenging fronts in the cyberwar against terrorists. Despite jihadi threats to launch cyber attacks, their technical capabilities in this arena appear limited.

Even if the United States could prevent all terrorist activity within its homeland, however, it will never be safe so long as terrorism thrives in the rest of the world. "In the post-9/11 world, threats are defined more by the fault lines within societies than by the territorial boundaries between them," the 9/11 Commission wrote.[7] Because of the unprecedented interconnectedness of the world in the 21st century, new threats can emerge quickly and reach all the way across the world to menace Americans, leading the Commission to declare, "[T]he American homeland is the planet."[8]

The danger that unchecked terrorist activity can pose to the United States is most glaringly underscored by the continued threat of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) falling into terrorist hands. The Islamic State, for example, has chemical weapons in Syria and appears to have acquired radioactive materials in Iraq.[9] Should they succeed in using these materials to mount a WMD attack on the United States or Europe, the results would be devastating.

But even if the United States is not targeted directly, it still suffers from the spread of terrorism. Transnational jihadi terrorism is inherently expansionary—if left unchecked, it will continue to spread, eating away at the foundation of the free, open, and lawful international system and the alliances that the United States depends on for its prosperity and security. Terrorism's toll on the U.S. homeland, on the vibrant democracies of America's European allies, on the stability of Middle Eastern partners, and on the security of the global commons is alarming. Even when the United States is not the target, terrorism endangers and harms the United States and its interests.

Why is the Threat Still So Potent?

Even as the Islamic State's caliphate collapses in Syria and Iraq, policymakers must confront the question of why the terrorist threat remains so potent, despite 16 years of effort by the United States and a like-minded coalition of international partners. BPC's review of U.S. efforts in the fight against terrorism suggests several limitations in the way that U.S. counterterrorism policies have been formulated.

Mismatch Between Strategic Objectives and Tactics

Since 2001, leaders of the United States have promised victory: against al-Qaeda, against ISIS, and against terrorism itself. What is more, U.S. policymakers have realized that pursuing such a complete victory would require deploying more than just military might against the terrorist threat. Thus, successive publicly articulated U.S. strategies have developed "whole of government" approaches meant to apply "all elements" of American power to this challenge.

Yet, the reality of the tactics that the United States has been pursuing on the ground has been very different from what U.S. leaders have been telling the American people. Rather than the greater struggle against a widespread, amorphous, and ideologically motivated adversary, U.S. policymakers have focused on the much narrower and shorter-term goal of degrading whatever terror network or threat is most pressing at the moment.

This mismatch between the tactics the United States employs in fighting terrorism and the bipartisan, strategic objective that has been described to the American people creates confusion about what results to expect. The rhetoric used by policymakers of "victory" does not square with the reality of 16 years of conflict and a metastasizing threat. Worse, the longer U.S. policy pursues goals other than the form of "victory" against terrorism that it has promised, the more difficult it becomes to implement a strategy that could achieve such a victory.

Focusing on Terrorists, Not Terrorism

The United States has become exceptionally effective and ruthless in its ability to target and eliminate terrorists. And yet, this has done little to diminish the threat or stanch the flow of willing recruits to the jihadi cause. As then-Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld put it in a 2003 memo: "The U.S. is putting relatively little effort into a long-range plan, but we are putting a great deal of effort into trying to stop terrorists. The cost-benefit ratio is against us! Our cost is billions against the terrorists' costs of millions." He went on to ask: "Is our current situation such that 'the harder we work, the behinder we get?'"[10]

As long as jihad maintains its overpowering appeal, even in the face of almost certain death, terrorist movements will persist. Defeating terrorism must entail weakening this magnetic attraction. For all its battlefield and intelligence successes, the United States has demonstrated little ability to degrade support for the ideology underlying jihadist terrorism.

Misunderstanding the Enemy: Organizations vs. Movement

This tendency to tailor the U.S. counterterrorist mission and objective around the most immediate terrorist threat was on display in President Barack Obama's May 2010 National Security Strategy: "We are at war with a specific network, al Qaeda, and its terrorist affiliates who support efforts to attack the United States, our allies, and partners."[11] The singular focus on al Qaeda contributed to American policymakers underestimating ISIS for too long. But neither al Qaeda nor ISIS, nor any other terrorist group worldwide, is the sole manifestation of the Hydra-headed enemy the United States seeks to defeat.

The terrorist threat confronting the United States is a broader movement. It includes groups and individuals that are unrelated to al Qaeda or the Islamic State, but are, like them, inspired by an extremist ideology that claims to represent one of the world's greatest religions. As the 9/11 Commission argued, "[T]he United States has to help defeat an ideology, and not just a group of people."[12]

Focusing on Means, Not Ends

U.S. counterterrorism policy has focused on the prevention of violence—those thinking about, plotting, or carrying out violent attacks—without engaging the ideological messages and narrative that justify and incite that violence.

U.S. attempts at counter-messaging have often focused on the group's brutality, depicting ISIS beheadings and crucifixions with the stated aim of sending "a message that this is actually a squalid, worthless, dirty thing."[13] But it is not ISIS's means of conquest that are the source of its strength. What its supporters endorse is the Islamic State itself, the ends its violence is meant to achieve, an end they have come to believe justifies any means. To argue with them about the validity of violence is to have lost the argument already.

The 9/11 Commission warned against this narrow focus: "The small percentage of Muslims who are fully committed to Usama Bin Ladin's version of Islam are impervious to persuasion. It is among the large majority of Arabs and Muslims that we must encourage reform, freedom, democracy, and opportunity."[14] Focusing on the relatively small number of those who use violence ignores the larger context in which violent groups operate. What U.S. policy has lacked is an understanding of those beliefs, and the ends that terrorist groups are employing violence to achieve. Understanding the ideology—what extremist groups want and what vision they sell their followers—is crucial to a comprehensive counterterrorism strategy.

As long as the ends that terrorists seek are not challenged and discredited, their appeal will continue to persuade individuals to use violence as a means of achieving those goals.

The Gnarled Roots of Terrorism: Grievance and Ideology

An emerging understanding of radicalization identifies its locus in the combination of underlying conditions and ideology, acknowledging that both of these factors play different roles, and interact with each other.

A Unites States Agency for International Development (USAID) study divides the drivers of violent extremism into "push" and "pull" factors.[15] While "push" factors are sources of alienation from society and disenfranchisement, such as such as large-scale poverty, unemployment, and government repression, "pull" factors make terrorist groups attractive. These include the lure of financial gain, a desire for community, a drive to feel important, the propaganda of a persuasive and pragmatic leader, and the honor that comes with battling a foreign adversary or for a particular ideology.

An understanding of terrorism that combines both factors recognizes the importance of conditions that make individuals vulnerable to indoctrination by extremist groups while also recognizing that people are shaped by more than their circumstances. Socioeconomic conditions are not fate; individuals have a choice in how they respond. It takes a noxious ideology that prescribes violence as the path to a better world to turn grievances into terrorism.

A Region Aggrieved

Extremism thrives amid adverse social conditions, failures in governance, and conflict. These are problems of which the Middle East has more than its fair share.

The region is experiencing a "youth bulge," with 65 percent of the total population under the age of 30 and around 30 percent of those youth unemployed.[16] This demographic fact presents a profound risk: the population most targeted by terrorist recruiters, who need young bodies on the battlefield, is the same population failed by Middle Eastern governments and therefore at greater risk of recruitment.

Middle Eastern countries are experiencing an acute crisis of governance. The modern Middle Eastern state has failed to create a sense of nationhood among its population. Rather than provide services to its population, Middle Eastern states generally distribute patronage to members of the ruling family, tribe, ethnic group or sect, while marginalizing and repressing the rest of society. The vast majority of the people of the Middle East, 83 percent, live in countries that Freedom House characterizes as not free.[17]

Conflict has also been prevalent in the Middle East's modern history. Preceding the upheaval of the Arab Spring and current civil war in Syria is a long history of conflict. Arab-Israeli wars, the wave of Arab nationalism of the 50s and 60s, experiments such as the United Arab Republic, civil wars in Lebanon, Sudan and Yemen, the Iran-Iraq war, and two U.S.-led Gulf Wars have resulted in enormous bloodshed and population transfers. Such violence only begets violence and provides a breeding ground for extremism—over 90 percent of terrorist attacks occur in nations ravaged by conflict.[18]

The Role of Ideology

Grievances alone, however, are not sufficient to explain terrorism. Out of the hundreds of millions of people living in poverty, or in conflict zones, or under the rule of repressive governments, only a small number support terrorist groups, let alone become terrorists themselves.[19] Grievances on their own are passive. They are a result of conditions that an individual is subjected to; they do not require, presuppose, or imply any sort of action by the individual herself. Another ingredient, beyond onerous socioeconomic circumstances, is necessary to spur someone to action, particularly violence.

Ideology is that ingredient. It weaponizes grievances by giving individuals an account of what is causing their suffering, a vision of a better world, and a path to achieving it. Yet, it remains poorly understood. "Ideology," even in scholarly studies, is most often treated as synonymous with "worldview" or "belief-system," a set of ideas that provide order and understanding to the world.

But ideology, in contrast to a worldview, is not about how things are, but how they should be. It influences not navigation of the immutable features of the real world, but action meant to change the temporary and conditional structures of society and politics. And rather than an individual belief, ideology is a shared identity.

Nor is ideology the same as religion. Where religion is charged with the preservation of a certain metaphysical arrangement of the world, ideology seeks complete transformation of the man-made social and political spheres. Where religion is focused on the sacred, ideology's purview is purely profane, its concern solely with this earthly world.

An ideology entails belief that one's current circumstances are not ideal—i.e., grievances—and must be changed, a diagnosis of who or what is to blame for the existence of these conditions, an alternative vision of a healed world, and the steps that need to be taken to transform this vision into reality. Critically, the ambition of ideology is not just to improve the individual's lot in life; it demands the transformation of entirety of society and politics.

When combined with grievances, ideology, therefore, presents a totalistic political alternative to the onerous present, an alternative that demands revolutionary transformation and replaces traditional models of social identity.

Understanding Islamist Ideology

The specific ideology tied to jihadist terrorism—Islamism—plays on Middle Eastern and Muslim grievances to discredit current societies and states in favor of a transnational, revolutionary vision.

What is Islamism?

Islamism is an elusive ideology to define.[20] It was born out of and as a response to the crisis of modernity in the world of Islam. Prompted by the discovery of Western technological, material, and military superiority, this crisis made Muslims aware of the huge gulf that separated them from modern Europe and gave rise to the questions "what went wrong?" and, more importantly, "how can we catch up?" The crisis only intensified as the encounter with the West progressed from losses to Western armies on faraway battlefields or admiration of Western intellectual achievements to, with time, Western presence as an occupier of the very heart of the Muslim world.

The Islamist diagnosis of this crisis is that the decline in Islam's worldly fortunes is directly tied to the decay of Islamic rituals, symbols and practices in the daily lives of Muslims. Thus, the solution that Islamism champions is a simple one: a return to an earlier period of time when the Islamic world was not in decline but in ascendance by returning Islam to its rightful central place in the lives of Muslims. For Islamists, Islam is incomplete without a state. The goal of all Islamist movements is the establishment of an Islamic State, or as a leading Egyptian Salafi described it "a state that connects heaven and earth."

By its very nature, Islamism claims not only to be *a* political manifestation of Islam, but *the only* possible manifestation of the religion. While Islamism exploits Islamic symbols and concepts for legitimacy, it is distinct from Islam as it is understood and practiced by the vast majority of Muslims worldwide. Islam is one of the world's great religions, worthy and deserving of respect. But Islamism rejects the diversity of thought and practice that has developed in Islamic civilizations over the centuries, and has broken from traditional Islam in matters of jurisprudence and theology. Moreover, while traditional Sunni Islam developed a certain separation between political and religious leaders, Islamism seeks to capture the state and sees the state as the principal instrument for making its vision of society possible. Indeed, Islamism requires the coercive power of the state to enact and enforce its dictates of public morality on the entirety of society.

Islamism, Violence, and the Threat to Order

Some Islamists believe that the current crisis of Islam can still be countered through non-violent means in Muslim societies, namely through religious indoctrination and Islamizing society. Others view the threat level as having reached a critical point, with violence the only possible response. In practice, however, the distinction between violent and non-violent Islamism turns out to be rather ambiguous, more a function of tactics and circumstance than of principle. Much more significant than any methodological disagreements between groups is what they share in common: a convergence of views that the world of Islam is under siege and it is the West that stands between it and the realization of its political ambitions.

Many of the founders of jihadi groups were originally members or passed through the indoctrination phase of non-violent Islamist groups. According to a recent study by The Centre on Religion and Geopolitics, for example, 51 percent of a sample of 100 jihadis had non-violent Islamist links; a quarter of those were to the Muslim Brotherhood or affiliated organizations.[21]

These close ties between different types of Islamist groups, whether violent or not, are based on their fundamental ideological alignment. No Islamist groups dispute that the solution to the crisis of the Muslim world is a return to Islam, as they understand it. No Islamist group disagrees that the West is continuously hostile to Islam. This common narrative endorsed even by non-violent groups—of dissatisfaction with and opposition to the current "fundamentally unjust, oppressive and un-godly" state of the world—is a stepping stone to the conclusion that overthrowing the current order is the only method capable of achieving the Islamist goal.[22]

The conflation of religion and politics renders Islamism a totalitarian worldview that rejects the pluralism that Islamic civilization had created throughout the centuries. This vision includes anti-democratic, anti-pluralistic, authoritarian, and non-compromising views, as well as a rejection of the rule of law and individual liberty. Islamism's belief in the need for a revolutionary transformation of the modern political world, from an order based on individual liberty and composed of nation states to a totalitarian and transnational autocracy, is the fundamental challenge posed by terrorism.

Toward a Comprehensive Strategy

The United States must confront this ideology in all its forms.

The fundamental objective of U.S. policy must be the prevention of violence against its citizens and interests. But the bipartisan approach of the three most recent

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administrations is not sufficient to protect the United States from the metastasizing terrorist threat.

Focusing solely on dissuading, jailing, or killing those planning to carry out violent terrorist acts has done little to stop the growth and spread of terrorism over the last decade and a half. So long as new generations continue being drawn to the cause of jihad, terrorism will plague and unsettle the world.

To prevail, the United States will need a comprehensive strategy that addresses the enemies of the United States and the ideology that encourages and sustains them, while differentiating the response to each. Such a long-term strategy would focus not on the adherents of Islamist ideology today—they can neither be dissuaded by the U.S. government, nor should it be U.S. policy to target, whether militarily or criminally, those who hold Islamist beliefs but do not act violently upon them—but the uptake of that ideology tomorrow.

The generational struggle against Islamist terrorism will come to an end only when the ambitions that motivate groups such as al Qaeda and the Islamic State return to the obscurity they richly deserve. To speed that process, the United States will have to support the conditions and values that counteract and undermine Islamism's appeal: governance, institutions, civil society, citizenship, pluralism, tolerance, and a strong separation between public and private spheres.

In their Preface to the *9/11 Commission Report*, Thomas Kean and Lee Hamilton urged policymakers to adopt "a balanced strategy for the long haul, to attack terrorists *and prevent their ranks from swelling* while at the same time protecting our country against future attacks."[23] Thirteen years after they wrote those words, the terrorists' ideas, repugnant as they are, still attract far too many young

Muslims to their ranks. It will not be easy, but the difficulty of discrediting Islamist ideology must not deter us from attempting it. BPC's next study will lay out a strategy for doing precisely that.

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Notes

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