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Organizing for a Strategic Ideas Campaign to Counter Ideological Challenges to U.S. National Security

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Introduction

The 9/11 attacks, which jolted Americans into recognizing that Islamist terrorists considered themselves at war with the United States, provoked a multifaceted U.S. response. Military, intelligence, law enforcement, financial, and diplomatic tools were all brought to bear. From the outset, some senior U.S. officials argued that the war on terrorism should include a serious effort to counter the ideology motivating America's radical Islamist enemies. Indeed, some officials have argued that the “battle of ideas” is not simply important, but is essential to victory.¹

Yet no such serious effort was made by either the Bush administration or the Obama administration. Commentators across the political spectrum have noted that the U.S. government has done poorly over the last decade in its efforts to counter hostile ideologies. This has been the conclusion of studies done inside and outside the government.²

In the fight against jihadist terrorism, military action and law enforcement cannot be decisive. As valuable as it is to capture and kill terrorists and to disrupt their finances, the United States will achieve victory only if it can prevent people from becoming our terrorist enemies to begin with. Challenging the ideological underpinnings of Islamist extremism—discrediting the beliefs that motivate individuals to commit terrorism and to provide financial and other support for it—is a key to reducing the terrorism threat to the point where it might someday be contained by ordinary law-enforcement methods.

Recent political upheavals in the Arab world have widened American concerns about Islamist extremism. The elections in Egypt and Tunisia tell much the same story: while the United States might wish to do business exclusively with

¹ See Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, *National Military Strategic Plan for the War on Terrorism* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Defense, February 2006), available at <http://www.defense.gov/qdr/docs/2005-01-25-Strategic-Plan.pdf> (accessed December 19, 2011). “Ideology is the component most critical to extremist networks and movements and sustains all other capabilities. This critical resource is the enemy’s strategic center of gravity, and removing it is key to creating a global antiterrorist environment” (p.18). The document was issued originally in classified form in March 2005 by General Richard Myers, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and published in an unclassified version February 1, 2006, by General Peter Pace, the successor Chairman of the Joint Chiefs.

² A 2009 RAND report, based on a review of current literature, begins as follows: “Countless studies, articles, and opinion pieces have announced that U.S. strategic communications and public diplomacy are in crisis and inadequate to meet current demand. There is consensus that such capabilities are critical and that they need to be improved.” Christopher Paul, “Whither Strategic Communication? A Survey of Current Proposals and Recommendations,” RAND Occasional Paper, RAND Corp., Santa Monica, CA, 2009, p. 1, available at http://www.rand.org/pubs/occasional_papers/2009/RAND_OP250.pdf. (Cited hereafter as RAND report.)

the secular or liberal forces within these societies, their popular support and “street cred” are limited. For the next few years, at least, these countries’ Islamist majorities will determine both the fate of their democracy and the extent to which their policies oppose American principles and interests. The United States has no choice but to encourage the kind of intra-Islamist discussion that might sharpen the divisions between uncompromising hard-liners and forces willing to make their peace with democracy and pluralism. In Egypt, there are some signs that the Brotherhood may be more comfortable forging a governing alliance with the liberal parties than with the Salafists, whose strong electoral showing surprised even seasoned observers of the Egyptian scene.

After Islamists won popular elections in Tunisia, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton told an audience of young Tunisians: “There are those here in Tunisia and elsewhere who question whether Islamist politics can really be compatible with democracy. Well, Tunisia has a chance to answer that question affirmatively, and to demonstrate there is no contradiction.” In our judgment, this kind of openness to democratic possibilities is a proper basis for American policy—unless the facts on the ground supply a negative answer to Secretary Clinton’s question. It is in America’s interests to do what it can to encourage a positive answer, including through a strategic ideas campaign of the type described here. Besides, for now there is no practical alternative.

U.S. Government Concerns

A U.S. government capability to counter hostile ideology through a “strategic ideas” campaign would pay dividends across the board in the national security field. Weakening radical Islamism and influencing Islamist organizations to reject radicalism would strengthen the U.S position in the Arab world and improve chances for achieving key foreign policy goals there. As Islamist organizations gain power, they will have a rendezvous with reality, in which they become responsible for governing and responding to popular economic, social, and political demands under challenging circumstances. This is likely to be a time of intellectual and political turmoil for them, and the ability to influence them away from radical Islamism would be a great asset for U.S. foreign policy.

The U.S. government's deficiencies in this field are of consequence because Islamist extremism remains a major national security problem. According to the Obama administration's *National Security Strategy*:

. . . There is no greater threat to the American people than weapons of mass destruction, particularly the danger posed *by the pursuit of nuclear weapons by violent extremists* and their proliferation to additional states.³

But nuclear terrorism is only one aspect of the larger danger posed by Islamist extremism. The following broader characterization of the threat, from the Bush administration's *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism*, remains true:

Today, the principal terrorist enemy confronting the United States is a transnational movement of extremist organizations, networks, and individuals—and their state and non-state supporters—which have in common that they exploit Islam and use terrorism for ideological ends.⁴

The Obama administration has said that “We are at war with a specific network, al-Qa’ida, and its terrorist affiliates who support efforts to attack the United States, our allies, and partners.”⁵ But this definition of the enemy appears to be too narrow. Consider the case, for example, of Major Nidal Hasan, the U.S. Army doctor who murdered thirteen people, including fellow soldiers, at Fort Hood in November 2009. There doesn’t appear to be any evidence linking Major

³ *National Security Strategy* (Washington, DC: White House, May 2010), p. 4 (emphasis added). The use of the term “violent extremists” reflects the Obama Administration’s uneasiness with acknowledging a link between terrorism and the religion that the terrorists claim to be serving.

⁴ *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism* (Washington, DC: White House, September 2006), p. 5.

⁵ *National Security Strategy*, May 2010, p. 20.

Hasan *organizationally* to al Qaeda,⁶ though he is part of the “transnational movement” mentioned above.

There is a need, then for a more precise definition of “Islamist extremism,” one that describes the views—not merely the organizations—we should aim to counter. (The attached doctrinal statement is intended to meet that need.⁷) The current report deals with the informational means American officials might use to counter Islamism. The use of other means (e.g., financial regulation, law enforcement, or military action) to counter beliefs only (that is, not actions) raises questions (such as the immediacy of the threat, legal considerations, etc.) that we do not treat here. We want to challenge the ideas of individuals who, while not directly advocating terrorism, provide a justification for terrorism committed by others (for example, by preaching that the West is inevitably hostile to Islam) but that does not mean it would be proper to use other than informational means against those holding these beliefs.

⁶ His spiritual guide was Anwar al-Aulaqi, an American-born Islamic cleric who preached terrorism from his base in Yemen. While U.S. officials described Aulaqi as a “leader” of al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, it is not clear how far back this affiliation went. In any case, there does not appear to be much about his nefarious activities that would have required such an organizational connection, since his main activity appears to have been preaching. See the Department of Justice motion, “Opposition to Plaintiff’s Motion for Preliminary Injunction and Memorandum in Support of Defendants’ Motion to Dismiss,” September 24, 2010, p. 5, in the case of *Aulaqi v. Obama* (Civ. A. No. 10-cv-1469 (JDB)). Aulaqi was killed by a drone strike on September 30, 2011. Mark Mazzetti, Eric Schmitt, and Robert F. Worth, “Two-Year Manhunt Led to Killing of Awlaki in Yemen,” *New York Times*, September 30, 2011, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/01/world/middleeast/anwar-al-awlaki-is-killed-in-yemen.html?pagewanted=all> (accessed February 21, 2012).

⁷ Assuming that an organization (whether governmental or private) had the task of countering the extremist Islamist ideology, our doctrinal statement is intended to illustrate how such an organization should conceive of its mission and go about accomplishing it.

Purpose of This Study

In reviewing the U.S. government's response to the Islamist terrorist challenge, one point stands out: for all the progress we have made in attacking terrorist networks abroad and bolstering security measures here at home, there has been a general failure to confront the ideological “center of gravity” of the terrorist threat.⁸ This study outlines how the U.S. government could mount an effort to address this failure and change the ideological climate in the Muslim world more generally, and it addresses specifically what sorts of governmental and nongovernmental organizations should be created to conduct the effort.

The study's authors imagined that they were called into the Oval Office and that the president spoke to them as follows: “We've had military and law enforcement successes against terrorist groups. But they continue to attract new recruits and supporters. We haven't inoculated key audiences against the terrorists' ideas. At the same time, we don't seem to be well positioned to affect the way the political situation is evolving in countries like Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya, and perhaps elsewhere in the current political turmoil in the Middle East. This is a long-standing failure in the area of ‘soft power.’ What can I do about this problem? What should be our basic approach? Do we need a new governmental agency or nongovernmental organization to undertake this task? What would it do?”

This report, along with the accompanying doctrinal statement, represents our response.

Our key points are these:

- The terrorism problem is not just an al Qaeda problem. We cannot solve it by focusing our efforts on a single organization and its affiliates. The problem's essence is ideological.
- The hostile ideology is an extremist or radical version of Islamism. Islamism, also referred to as political Islam, is a political ideology which, while appealing to Muslim identity and sensibility, emphasizes less the spiritual aspects of Islam than its potential to solve political, social, and economic problems. In its radical or extremist versions, it preaches that the West is inevitably hostile to Islam and must be fought, including by means of terrorism. Recent political upheavals in the Arab world (referred to

⁸ See below for a discussion of a series of studies and investigations that have all recognized and addressed this failure.

collectively as the “Arab Spring”) give the U.S. an increased stake in how Islamist organizations such as the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood evolve.

- Countering extremist Islamism is more than a matter of public diplomacy or strategic communications, activities that primarily involve U.S. officials transmitting messages to foreign audiences. The key is to stimulate and influence debate among Muslims in a way that promotes interpretations of Islam that do not assert or imply the legitimacy of terrorism. In other words, the heart of the matter is not what U.S. officials say to Muslims, it is what Muslims say among themselves. The challenge for U.S. officials is not to formulate messages; it is to devise ways to bring about and help shape a debate within Muslim communities that will diminish the influence of the Islamist extremists.
- Some new personnel, offices, and bureaucratic arrangements are necessary to allow the U.S. government to develop and implement strategies for countering Islamist extremism and other hostile ideologies. Unless responsibility for the development and implementation of such strategies explicitly rests with an individual or group, the requisite dynamism and sustained attention will not be forthcoming.
- Such strategies will also require cooperation among a number of different departments and agencies, including the White House, the State Department, the Defense Department, and the intelligence community. No organizational chart, however, will ensure such cooperation. A proper strategy, properly executed, will come about only if the president demands that his department and agency heads personally make that strategy a priority in their respective areas of responsibility. Such an inherently interagency mission cannot run on autopilot; it requires active leadership, beginning with the president.

Ideology as Terrorism’s “Center of Gravity”

Unlike states, terrorist groups cannot collect resources through taxes; nor can they conscript military manpower. Rather, they depend on the appeal of their ideology to win them the recruits and material support necessary for operations. Furthermore, the Islamist extremist groups and individuals targeting the United States (and others) for terrorism do not all have formal links among themselves; in particular, there is no one single human authority recognized and obeyed by all of them. What links them is ideology: common beliefs about their duties as Muslims that spawn and intensify hostility to the United States and to the West in general.⁹

It is of course true that ideology alone cannot explain why individuals are attracted to, join, or support a terrorist group. Idiosyncratic psychological or social factors can play a crucial role here.¹⁰ But while psychological or social factors can help explain why a young man feels alienated and hostile, for example, they do not explain why he becomes, say, an Islamist terrorist rather than a communist or a member of a far-right political party or, for that matter, a member of a youth gang or other cult.

It is the ideology that attracts recruits and material support to the radical Islamist cause and induces individuals in the movement to act, even without clear “command and control” ties to a movement leader. That is why we can say that Islamist extremist ideology is the *center of gravity* of the transnational movement that constitutes our terrorist enemy. The vigorous ideological debates among Islamist extremists demonstrate the importance they attach to ideology.

Given the importance of ideology to the terrorist threat, the United States should be to wage an “ideas campaign” with the ultimate objective of delegitimizing radical Islamist ideology, as the totalitarian ideologies of fascism and communism have been widely delegitimized.

The other counterterrorist tools (such as offensive and defensive military operations, law enforcement, and intelligence activities) remain important. But only through the delegitimation of their ideology can Islamist terrorists be defeated once and for all. Otherwise, they can renew themselves indefinitely.

⁹ This is not to deny that the various groups within the movement have serious ideological differences, which may sometimes even spill over into internecine violence. Indeed, these differences may provide us with important opportunities, as discussed in the doctrinal statement.

¹⁰ See Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004) for a detailed discussion of the social factors that lead individuals to involvement in terrorist groups. Sageman recognizes that adopting the Islamist “narrative” strengthens and solidifies the recruit’s new identification with the group: “Ideology also played a central role in sustaining commitment to this version of Islam. Although affiliation is a social phenomenon, intensification of faith and beliefs is a stage characterized by active personal learning about the new faith” (p. 117).

As for terrorism-related threats emanating from a foreign country, the United States could, of course, hold at risk nonideological interests of that country, but there would still be an advantage in weakening the ideological basis for its hostile policies.

The Record So Far

Over the past decade, the main effort by the U.S. government to counter radical Islamist ideology has come under the rubric of “public diplomacy.” That term typically refers to activities that foster communication between U.S. officials and foreign populations (such as radio and television broadcasts, government-sponsored websites, and government-sponsored libraries or film festivals in foreign cities) or between ordinary American citizens and foreign populations (such as student, scientific, and cultural exchange programs, scholarships for foreign students to study at American schools, and training programs for foreign professionals).

The point of such activities is to improve the foreign populations’ understanding of the United States and to persuade them to view America and its policies more favorably.¹¹ In the language of Madison Avenue, State Department officials in both the Bush and Obama administrations aimed to improve America’s image or “brand” abroad, especially in the Muslim world.

The reference to commercial advertising is not accidental; the George W. Bush administration’s first Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Affairs, Charlotte Beers, came from that industry. In the words of former secretary of state Colin Powell, “she got me to buy Uncle Ben’s rice and so there is nothing wrong with getting somebody who knows how to sell something.”¹²

Public diplomacy’s premise is that foreign populations, if they become better disposed to the United States, will influence their governments in ways favorable to the United States—or, at any rate, make it easier for those governments to pursue favorable policies. However reasonable that notion is, it does not reach the core of the Islamist terrorism problem. What moves individuals to commit such terrorism is not negative attitudes toward the United States.

¹¹ Advisory Group on Public Diplomacy for the Arab and Muslim World “Changing Minds, Winning Peace: A New Strategic Direction for U.S. Public Diplomacy in the Arab & Muslim World” (Washington, DC: Advisory Group on Public Diplomacy for the Arab and Muslim World, 2003) defines public diplomacy as “the way the U.S. communicates its values and policies to enhance our national security” (p. 8).

¹² Quoted in Margaret Carlson, “Can Charlotte Beers Sell Uncle Sam?” *Time*, November 14, 2001, available at <http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,184536,00.html>; cited in Robert R. Reilly, “Ideas Matter: Restoring the Content of Public Diplomacy,” Heritage Special Report, SR-64, Heritage Foundation, Washington, DC, July 27, 2009, p. 3.

Numerous people have such attitudes yet pose no terrorist threat. The key rather is acceptance of the radical Islamist ideology that justifies, indeed commands, jihad in the form of terrorism against the United States and other Western targets.

In general, the emphasis on improving the U.S. “brand” appears overambitious and misguided—overambitious because it is not necessary for people to like the United States, or its policies or people, in order for them to be convinced that attacking the U.S. does not make sense for them; and misguided because it appears to assume that attitudes toward the United States are somehow matters of intrinsic importance to Muslim populations, on a par, at least, with considerations about their own future, and the kind of societies in which they and their children will live.

Neither the Bush nor Obama administration took up the task of delegitimizing extremist Islamism. President Bush often spoke of promoting democracy and personal freedoms in Muslim countries in order to reduce the attractiveness of the terrorists' ideology. In his second inaugural address, President Bush explained:

... as long as whole regions of the world simmer in resentment and tyranny—prone to ideologies that feed hatred and excuse murder—violence will gather, and multiply in destructive power, and cross the most defended borders, and raise a mortal threat. There is only one force of history that can break the reign of hatred and resentment, and expose the pretensions of tyrants, and reward the hopes of the decent and tolerant, and that is the force of human freedom.¹³

The Obama administration's initial approach, on the other hand, focused on improving socioeconomic conditions, including women's rights, while downplaying the importance of political freedom. This “soft power” strategy was spelled out in a major speech by President's Obama's key advisor on counterterrorism, John Brennan.¹⁴ While denying that poverty or lack of education causes terrorism, he did assert that

when children have no hope for an education, when young people have no hope for a job and feel disconnected from the modern world, when governments fail to provide for the basic needs of their people, then people become more susceptible to ideologies of violence and death. Extremist violence and terrorist attacks are therefore often the final murderous

¹³ President George W. Bush, Second Inaugural Address, Washington, DC, January 20, 2005, available at <http://www.bartleby.com/124/pres67.html>

¹⁴ “A New Approach to Safeguarding Americans” (speech given at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, DC, August 6, 2009, http://csis.org/files/attachments/090806_remarks_john_brennan.pdf, accessed October 13, 2010).

manifestation of a long process rooted in hopelessness, humiliation, and hatred.

Brennan further maintained that

Therefore, any comprehensive approach has to also address the upstream factors—the conditions that help fuel violent extremism. ... we cannot shoot ourselves out of this challenge. We can take out all the terrorists we want—their leadership and their foot soldiers. But if we fail to confront the broader political, economic, and social conditions in which extremists thrive, then there will always be another recruit in the pipeline, another attack coming downstream.

As the 2011 political upheavals spread throughout the Arab region, however, Obama administration officials began to assert that it was U.S. policy to promote democratization throughout the Muslim world. In May 2011, the president said:

it will be the policy of the United States to promote reform across the region, and to support transitions to democracy. That effort begins in Egypt and Tunisia, where the stakes are high — as Tunisia was at the vanguard of this democratic wave, and Egypt is both a longstanding partner and the Arab world's largest nation. Both nations can set a strong example through free and fair elections, a vibrant civil society, accountable and effective democratic institutions, and responsible regional leadership. *But our support must also extend to nations where transitions have yet to take place.*¹⁵

The link between this policy of promoting democracy and our counterterrorism goals was spelled out in the *National Strategy for Counterterrorism* issued the following month:

Promoting representative, responsive government is a core tenet of U.S. foreign policy and directly contributes to our CT [counterterrorism] goals. Governments that place the will of their people first and encourage peaceful change directly contradict the al-Qa'ida ideology. Governments that are responsive to the needs of their citizens diminish the discontent of their people and the associated drivers and grievances that al-Qa'ida actively attempts to exploit. Effective governance reduces the traction and space for

¹⁵ “Remarks by the President on the Middle East and North Africa,” State Department, Washington, DC, May 19, 2011, available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/05/19/remarks-president-middle-east-and-north-africa> (accessed March 29, 2012). (Emphasis added.)

al-Qa'ida, reducing its resonance and contributing to what it fears most—irrelevance.¹⁶

On September 9, 2011, President Obama issued Executive Order 13854,¹⁷ formally recognizing and empowering the State Department's Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications, which had been created one year earlier.¹⁸ The center's purpose is to “develop U.S. strategic counterterrorism narratives and public communications strategies to confront and discredit the extremist messages.” The center seeks to achieve this goal both by providing lines of argument for use by U.S. government officials in Washington and abroad, and by engaging directly with Muslims on the internet via blogs, participation in forums and social networking sites, and the posting of videos. The ideological justifications for terrorism put forward by al Qaeda and its affiliates are the center's target. As its director, Ambassador Richard LeBaron, has explained:

While I would like [those vulnerable to recruitment by al Qaida] to also develop positive perceptions of the United States, to support our policies and appreciate our values, that is not the mission of our Center. Our job is to nudge people into a different path; help them question some of their assumptions; and contribute to an environment in which terrorist violence is not considered a viable, acceptable or effective option.

While the center addresses the ideological attraction exerted by al Qaeda, it stops short of engaging the Islamist extremist ideology on a more fundamental level; in particular, it does not address the notion that a politicized extremist distortion of the religion of Islam is the fount of the ideology with which we are concerned.¹⁹ Similarly, in keeping with the Obama administration's view that we are at war with al Qaeda and its affiliates (rather than with the “transnational terrorist movement” defined by the Bush administration²⁰), the center is focused solely on countering the al Qaeda “narrative.”

¹⁶ *National Strategy for Counterterrorism* (Washington, DC: White House, June 2011), p. 5.

¹⁷ “Developing an Integrated Strategic Counterterrorism Communications Initiative and Establishing a Temporary Organization to Support Certain Government-wide Communications Activities Directed Abroad,” *Federal Register* 76, no. 179, September 15, 2011, available at <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2011-09-15/pdf/2011-23891.pdf>

¹⁸ The description of the center, including the quotations, are from remarks by Ambassador Richard LeBaron, Coordinator, Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications, at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, November 18, 2011, available at <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/documents/4ec69d5f0e959.pdf> (accessed March 8, 2012).

¹⁹ For example, Executive Order 13854 nowhere addresses the fact that the “communications efforts” of al Qaeda, which the United States seeks to counter, proclaim duties supposedly imposed by Islam on its adherents.

²⁰ “America is at war with a transnational terrorist movement fueled by a radical ideology of hatred, oppression, and murder.” *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism*, September 2006, p. 1.

Recent Studies of U.S. Government Efforts

There is general agreement among observers across the political spectrum, that U.S. government efforts to counter hostile ideologies have been ineffective. This indeed has been the conclusion of studies since 2001 done inside and outside the government.²¹ Our project team concurs, but we believe this literature suffers from major deficiencies.

The studies tend to misconceive the ideological challenge simply as a requirement to counter anti-Americanism in general or to rebut criticism of specific, controversial U.S. foreign policies. They often frame the issue as essentially a public relations challenge, not a problem of countering a worldview antagonistic to the way of life of Western liberal democracies.

For example, a prestigious group established by then–secretary of state Colin Powell to study the issue of public diplomacy defined the problem largely in terms of opposing “anti-Americanism.”²² Similarly, a Brookings Institution report presents the problem as one of “present[ing] a more accurate and nuanced vision of America” and “promot[ing] shared values and their champions.”²³ Thus, that report recommends supporting an initiative for “carry[ing] America’s values around the globe.”²⁴

Not surprisingly, given this focus on anti-Americanism, some reviews of U.S. strategic communications efforts have made the point that U.S. officials too often address Muslim audiences from an American point of view, in terms foreign to those audiences. Such criticism contends that the core of the effort should be to influence political ideas current in the Muslim world so as to reduce the power of extremists hostile to the United States. For example, the Defense Science Board recognized that “the United States is engaged in a generational and global struggle about ideas,” and that “Islam’s crisis must be understood as a contest of ideas and engaged accordingly.”²⁵ The board’s report nevertheless sees the issue as one of

²¹ See footnote 2, above.

²² Advisory Group on Public Diplomacy for the Arab and Muslim World, *Changing Minds, Winning Peace*, p. 25. The report defines the problem as follows: “In the mid-1990s, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the United States abandoned many of the tools of public diplomacy that had helped win the Cold War When the terrorists attacked on September 11, the importance of *opposing anti-Americanism* with words as well as weapons became obvious, but the United States was caught unprepared.” (Emphasis added.)

²³ Kristin M. Lord, *Voices of America: U.S. Public Diplomacy for the 21st Century* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, November 2008), p. 1, available at http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Files/rc/reports/2008/11_public_diplomacy_lord/11_public_diplomacy_lord.pdf.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

²⁵ *Report of the Defense Science Board Task Force on Strategic Communication* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, Office of the Under Secretary of Defense, for Acquisition, Technology, and

American *credibility*, and of “open[ing] a working channel of communication,”²⁶ rather than as an issue of America’s ability to affect the debate within the Muslim world.

Much of the current literature on strategic communications ignores or gives short shrift to the U.S. government’s experience during the Cold War, especially the early years (late 1940s, early 1950s), when the United States developed a robust capability to conduct ideological campaigns through information operations. This failure to analyze how our Cold War efforts should inform today’s ideas-related strategies and activities represents a missed opportunity.

Finally, the literature on strategic communication does not adequately address the organizational and operational requirements of a comprehensive government effort to counter a hostile ideology. It fails to acknowledge that the ideological fight against extremist Islamism must be conducted, in the main, by other Muslims—that Muslims can appeal with greater credibility to Muslim audiences. Thus the literature also fails to recognize that the government should encourage and energize various nongovernmental organizations (foundations, universities, think tanks, and even corporations) to take action; in some cases, find ways to support them without undermining their independence.

One advantage of private organizations is that they don’t carry the “taint” of U.S. government involvement in such sensitive matters. But even aside from this consideration, they offer considerable expertise and resources of private organizations, and retain the ability to act more quickly and flexibly than can government agencies.

Logistics, September 2004), pp. 2, 17, 29, available at <http://www.acq.osd.mil/dsb/reports/ADA428770.pdf>. (Cited hereafter as *Defense Science Board Report*).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 41, 46.

Organizational Proposals

After the fall of the Berlin Wall and collapse of the Soviet Union, many Western leaders concluded that the great ideological wars of the 20th century had ended with the definitive victory of constitutional democracy, free markets, and individual liberty. Not only was defense spending reduced after the Cold War, but institutions created after World War II to counter the spread of communism were downsized or eliminated. In 1999, the once-proud U.S. Information Agency (USIA) was dismantled and many of its functions transferred to a reorganized State Department. (Broadcasting activities were consolidated under a new entity, the Broadcasting Board of Governors, or BBG.)

The events of 9/11 and their aftermath shattered the illusion that liberal democracy no longer had ideological enemies and revealed that significant threats existed, not just to American interests but also to our principles and way of life. The numerous reports on and recommendations for countering hostile ideologies that have been issued since 9/11—at least 24, according to a recent survey—agree that the U.S. government is not structured to create and implement an effective plan for this purpose. Ad hoc devices have failed to yield the desired outcomes, and some have generated controversy.

The rather amazing fact is that no one in the U.S. government has the responsibility to prosecute the ideological element of the campaign against Islamist extremist terrorists. And even if the president decided to assign such a responsibility, he has no very good options.

If the status quo is unsatisfactory, what are the options? During the past decade, three serious proposals for new arrangements within the U.S. government have come to the fore: (1) establish a new independent agency for countering hostile ideologies—in effect, a 21st-century USIA—and consolidate now-scattered functions under its aegis; (2) strengthen the capacity of the State Department—currently the lead agency—to run a government-wide effort; or (3) create within the Executive Office of the President a new entity empowered to lead, not just “coordinate” activities in this area. A fourth possibility recommended by many studies is some type of nongovernmental organization that could combine public and private funding, and bring the vast resources of business, the foundation world, and academia to bear on this ideological challenge.

Our recommendation is that the third proposal be adopted, and that this entity be aided by a nongovernmental organization that would solve certain institutional problems the new entity would face. We explain below why the disadvantages of the first two proposals outweigh their advantages; why the third

choice is the most appropriate; and what role a nongovernmental organization would play in the effort to counter hostile ideologies.

A 21st-Century USIA

The case for a new independent agency is straightforward. It would highlight the importance of countering hostile ideologies and guarantee both voice and visibility for the issue in interagency discussions. It would produce a cadre of specialists focused on a single mission and rewarded for their contribution to it—a team that agency leaders could direct and deploy as needed. And it would separate the long-term strategic challenge of promoting alternatives to Islamist extremism from the tactical pressures of day-to-day diplomacy.

A decade of experience suggests that in each of these respects (and others besides), an independent agency would offer significant advantages over an office within a larger entity such as the State Department.

- A new agency could organize the recruitment and training of a corps of specialists for campaigns to counter Islamist extremist ideology (and perhaps, in the future, other hostile ideologies), and give them a career path leading to positions of responsibility. Members of this corps could serve in U.S. embassies and consulates abroad as well as in the agency's Washington headquarters. This arrangement would increase chances for coherent execution of programs.
- In developing its own training curriculum, this agency could help spark development of educational programs in nongovernment academic institutions. Such programs would promote expertise in this area in general. The new agency could sponsor research on issues relating to strategic communication and other ideological efforts.
- A new agency would be well positioned to develop and execute long-term strategies for ideas campaigns. While overall coordination with foreign policy could be ensured by having the new agency's director report to the secretary of state, the working levels would be insulated from any attempts by State Department country desks to protect their tactical diplomatic interests by suppressing or diluting the new agency's efforts.

Despite these advantages, however, a new independent agency of this kind is not the best approach. It is noteworthy that even observers who recognize the deleterious effects of USIA's abolition do not call for its re-creation.²⁷ According

²⁷ See Lord, *Voices of America*, p. 4: "Though some now regret the demise of the United States Information Agency (USIA) and we might be pleased with that organization if it existed today, we should not simply

to a RAND report, there are “significant barriers” to reestablishing USIA: “First it would take some time . . . Second, . . . the new agency would, by necessity, strip personnel from existing organizations and dismantle the existing network, thus resulting in a step backward and lost time before the next step forward is taken. Third, it is not clear that the new USIA would be a complete solution.”²⁸

The disadvantages of a new independent agency do not end there. Even the most consensual government reorganization occasions disruption and generates large material and human costs. USIA veterans commonly report that their transfer to the State Department resulted in a loss of momentum and organizational élan from which their mission has never fully recovered. And there are good reasons to doubt that a new reorganization of this kind would be consensual. Not only would the secretary of state likely resist fiercely, but there would be substantial congressional opposition. Some of the officials and groups who pushed for the elimination of the USIA in the mid-1990s would oppose its revival. More generally, the political climate for the creation of a new government agency could not be less favorable; all of the pressures are in the other direction. Quite possibly these obstacles would prove insurmountable. They could be overcome, if at all, only with the expenditure of political capital that would be unavailable for follow-up battles over priorities and resources.

The most significant disadvantage of establishing a new independent agency lies elsewhere, however: it would suggest to other departments that a campaign of ideas is someone else’s job with which they need not concern themselves. That message would be acceptable if the new agency’s resources and reach were enough to get the job done. But it is unlikely that they would be, given current fiscal realities. The battle of ideas against Islamist extremism cannot be waged from a headquarters building in Washington. It requires also an active presence on the ground in many countries. And the mission requires the active cooperation of the State Department, the Defense Department, and the intelligence community to help mobilize country teams and combatant commands.

While the idea of a 21st-century USIA does have some ardent supporters, its critics are far more numerous, even among those who advocate a more vigorous

recreate it now.” See also Senator John F. Kerry, “U.S. Public Diplomacy—Time to Get Back in the Game,” S. Prt. 111-6, A Report to Members of the Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Senate, February 13, 2009, p. 1, available at http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=111_cong_senate_committee_prints&docid=f:47261.pdf: “Most agree that U.S. focus on Public Diplomacy began to diminish from this point on [abolition of USIA in 1999]. (Nonetheless, recreating USIA, or something similar, is neither feasible nor affordable in today’s budgetary environment.)”

²⁸ RAND Report, p. 10.

program to counter Islamist extremism. All things considered, we cannot endorse this option as the most promising way forward.

A Strengthened State Department

By contrast, strengthening the State Department's capacity seems to represent the path of least resistance. After all, State now has the public diplomacy mission and has inherited much of the USIA; moreover, its organizational structure already includes an under secretary for public diplomacy and public affairs.

There is little doubt that, as between the Departments of State and Defense, the former would be the better choice. Strategic communications (outside of military operations) are reasonably seen as a civilian function for which the Defense Department is not best suited to serve as lead agency. Also, in a campaign of ideas, American activities abroad will often be less effective if seen as serving U.S. government policy. This problem would be aggravated if activities are seen as serving specifically the government's *military* interests. Furthermore, the Defense Department's strategic communications structure includes three separate entities: the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, and the Joint Staff. Coordination among these elements is cumbersome, labor intensive, and often unachievable, arguably more difficult than coordination problems among bureaus within the State Department.

But other considerations suggest that efforts to increase State Department capacity are unlikely to produce more than incremental change. Public diplomacy remains a stepchild within State; an assignment in that field is not career enhancing. While a determined under secretary can get some useful things done, as demonstrated by James Glassman in the last months of the George W. Bush administration, success requires rowing upstream in an unsupportive environment.

There are deeply rooted cultural reasons for this. Diplomacy emphasizes dealing with foreign governments regarding immediate, practical interests—theirs and ours—while strategic communications and operations to change the way people think require a focus on ideological issues. A clash of interests lends itself to resolution or mitigation through compromise, which diplomacy can easily promote. Ideological differences, however, often cannot be reconciled through compromise, so they are traditionally not the object of diplomacy. Accordingly, State Department officials tend to approach problems tactically, emphasizing the here and now. By contrast, a strategic ideas campaign requires a longer-term perspective, given that many activities can bear fruit only over a period of years.

Another problem with giving the State Department responsibility for strategic ideas initiatives is that this responsibility will inevitably conflict with the requirements of day-to-day diplomacy. U.S. diplomats often have to try to work constructively on practical matters with officials of states (Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and China, for example) that promote or represent views that the United States has an interest in countering. If the State Department is responsible for both diplomacy and countering hostile ideologies, the latter, being a long-term project with intangible results, will inevitably be subordinated to the pressing daily requirements of diplomacy. This outcome would be in line with the standard phenomenon of the urgent crowding out the important.

A final difficulty is that, as traditionally defined, public diplomacy composes only a part or slice of a comprehensive strategic campaign of ideas. Beyond the cultural exchanges, citizen-to-citizen contacts, libraries, and translations that are the stuff of public diplomacy, such a campaign would involve strengthening indigenous voices. This is a distinction with a difference. The point is to advance specific U.S. objectives, not necessarily to improve the general image of the United States. And the voices needed to do that may not be—and to counter Islamist extremism, cannot be—predominantly American voices. So while the State Department can make important contributions to an overall strategy, its bureaucratic DNA, as it were, makes it ill suited for the lead role.

First Recommendation: A Reconfigured NSC in the Lead

The best approach, we believe, would be to create a new entity in the Executive Office of the President focused on countering hostile ideologies. We would call the new entity the Counter Terrorist Ideology Committee (CTIC). There are a number of ways of creating this entity. The easiest would be through an executive order, a course for which there are numerous precedents. One in particular parallels the current debate over the future of ideological campaigns.

As the Cold War intensified in the late 1940s, President Harry Truman authorized the State Department to take the lead in what was then termed “psychological warfare.” This step failed to achieve its objectives, for reasons that continue to exist today. According to historian Douglas Stuart, the State Department “had been slow to act and reluctant to be associated with covert operations that might damage State’s reputation if they became public.”²⁹ In short, State was unwilling to conduct psychological warfare in a way that would alter or subordinate its traditional diplomatic modus operandi and goals. In response, President Truman issued an executive order creating a Psychological Strategy Board (PSB) within the National Security Council (NSC). Comprising senior

²⁹ Douglas T. Stuart, *Creating the National Security State: A History of the Law that Transformed America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), p. 240.

appointed officials from State, Defense, and the CIA, the board was charged with providing “more effective planning, coordination, and conduct . . . of psychological operations”—defined as efforts designed to promote national defense and foreign policy objectives through means other than overt media.

The board took action in June 1953, when a workers’ demonstration in East Berlin turned into a violent riot against the Soviet-backed East German regime. Among the measures the board recommended was an effort to persuade the Soviets that the probability of continuing resistance was higher than in fact it was. The thought was that, if the Soviets believed this, they would be more likely to resort to a forceful crackdown, which could undermine the East German government's perceived independence and legitimacy.

The PSB met regularly, often with the president in attendance, and issued useful analyses and recommendations. But it fell short of its stated objective. In the absence of statutory authorization, the board’s authority was not commensurate with its responsibility, and its ability to turn plans into effective action on the ground was limited. And what one president did, the next could undo. Within nine months of taking office, President Eisenhower issued an executive order terminating the PSB and transferring some of its functions to a new board of the National Security Council.

While it may be true, as Stuart argues, that “there is no institutional solution to the problem of interagency cooperation,”³⁰ we believe that a statutory approach could have been more effective six decades ago and would be more effective today. To conduct an effective campaign of ideas, a new entity needs two attributes the PSB lacked—congressional buy-in and the formal power to induce balky departments and agencies to support the president’s policies.

Despite the ease of an executive order, the preponderance of the evidence, supports the statutory approach in policy arenas, including those relating to ideological efforts. Drafters of the new legislation would have to begin by resolving a threshold question: should a new office to counter hostile ideologies be a freestanding entity reporting directly to the president, or should it be housed within the NSC staff? The Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) exemplifies the freestanding option, which offers significant advantages, including a Senate-confirmed director, equal standing with cabinet secretaries in determining budget submissions, and direct reporting to the president. Despite these advantages, however, the ODNI has gotten off to a rocky start. It has generated a large and partially duplicative new bureaucracy, and the previously existing intelligence institutions see it as a competitor rather than coordinator. It is not yet

³⁰ Ibid., p. 257.

clear whether these difficulties can be mitigated or whether they result from the ONDI's basic structure.

Although it is a close call, we recommend placing the new entity—the Counter Terrorist Ideology Committee—within the National Security Council staff apparatus, and having it headed by a deputy assistant to the president for national security affairs (DAPNSA). Many of the committee's decisions would have to be hammered out within the NSC process and approved by the national security advisor or in a Principals Committee meeting. And having the national security advisor as an advocate would add heft to the CTIC's recommendations.

The legislative route offers additional possibilities for strengthening the CTIC's hand. In an influential report, the Defense Science Board, which proposed the creation of a Strategic Communications Committee (SCC) similar to our CTIC, recommended that its head have the right to concur in the appointment of key relevant personnel in the Departments of State and Defense and of the Chair of the Broadcasting Board of Governors. The SCC head would also work with the Director of the Office of Management and Budget in developing strategic communication budget priorities.³¹

As a matter of practical politics, it might prove impossible to enact legislation giving the DAPNSA veto power over personnel choices in departments and agencies. But at a minimum, the DAPNSA should be empowered to take the lead in developing budgets for strategic communications and in negotiating with the OMB director. Without budget power, the CTIC would devolve into just another ineffectual coordinating mechanism.

Established departments and agencies can be expected to resist this incursion onto their turf, and enacting these new powers into law might not be possible. Still, it is better to wage these battles up front during the legislative process than to settle for new entities with inadequate authority, which would guarantee endless bureaucratic trench warfare rather than proper deliberations and effective implementation.

It should be possible to mitigate, though not eliminate, the fears of existing departments and agencies by clarifying in law the distinction between a strategic ideas campaign and other related but separate activities. Specifically: although the CTIC would include representatives of the State Department and the BBG, its enabling legislation would *not* give it jurisdiction over traditional diplomatic activities, existing exchange programs, public affairs, or ongoing broadcasting activities guided by standard journalistic canons.

³¹ *Defense Science Board Report*, p. 64.

Additional steps to create an effective CTIC include membership of appropriate scope and rank. Here again the Defense Science Board's recommendations make sense: members of the committee should be at the rank of under secretary or equivalent and represent State, Defense, Homeland Security, Justice, the Chief of Staff to the President, the Office of Management and Budget, the White House Communications Director, the Director of National Intelligence, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, the U.S. Agency for International Development, and the Broadcasting Board of Governors.³² This membership would allow a "whole of government" approach and ensure that White House views would be represented at the takeoff as well as the landing.

In addition to powers of convening and coordinating, the CTIC should be able to plan, or at least participate in planning, the work of line agencies in areas within its mission. This authority would be a logical extension of its authority to work jointly with the line agencies in the devising of their ideas-campaign budgets. And while the CTIC should not be directly involved in executing the president's policies, it should be able to divide and assign operational responsibilities among agencies. Thus, the CTIC's powers would be similar to those of the Strategic Operational Planning Directorate of the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) and, regarding the planning of the line agencies' work, would exceed the NCTC's authority. It bears noting, however, that, in actual practice, the NCTC has not exercised much power over the line agencies.

Like all groups, the CTIC needs a mechanism for making decisions. Given bureaucratic realities, investing that power either in the DAPNSA or in a majority of the council will give incentives to dissenters to end-run the CTIC or to resist complying with its decisions. The National Security Council's operating charter should therefore specify an appeal process, which could involve two stages. First, dissenters could bring the controversy to the National Security Advisor, who could choose either to convene a Principals Committee meeting or to render a decision based on memos respectively from the dissenters and from the DAPNSA. Second, if an agency head who did not receive a favorable response from the National Security Advisor so chooses, the issue could be referred to the president for decision.

The CTIC could also promote effective interagency coordination by convening meetings in the field among those in the State Department, Defense Department, and the CIA concerned with a given group of countries. A regional working session could include representatives of the U.S. ambassadors to the countries in the region and their country teams (including the CIA stations) and

³² *Defense Science Board Report*, p. 65.

the relevant combatant commander. Based on general guidance from the CTIC, such a session would analyze the situation in the given region and develop an overall plan for dealing with it; the presence at the session of many of the officials who would be responsible for implementing the resulting strategy would facilitate “buy-in” and implementation.

For example, the working session could follow a template similar to that developed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff and involve the following steps:³³

- Mapping the key actors in the region with respect to the development and transmission of extremist ideology (e.g., media platforms, schools, scholars, preachers, etc.)
- Identifying the way in which these actors are connected with each other to form a network (e.g., ascertaining the sources of funding for a given school or preacher).
- Developing an action plan for weakening hostile voices and supporting those voices opposed to them. (In many cases, the action plan would call for cooperation between the U.S. government and the relevant foreign government.)
- Developing metrics to assess the effectiveness of actions taken pursuant to the plan.
- Tracking progress relative to those metrics.

Second Recommendation: A New Center for Counterterrorism Research

The proposed structure would give the executive branch capacities it now lacks to plan and implement a coordinated, whole-of-government campaign to counter hostile ideologies. But there are two problems that the CTIC could not solve on its own. First, the government has a hard time doing the kind of long-range planning a campaign of ideas requires; that is true whether the government is doing the planning internally or is mobilizing nongovernmental intellectual resources on its behalf. Second, the relationships with foreign nationals that a campaign of ideas requires may prove impossible for State, Defense, and the intelligence agencies to create or manage.

To address these problems, a number of studies have recommended the creation of a new nongovernmental organization, which we will call the Center for

³³ Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, *National Military Strategic Plan for the War on Terrorism*, pp. 6–7.

Counterterrorism Research (CCR). The center would have a range of functions, including conducting research (in part through in-house assets but principally through contracts), engaging the private sector, forging connections with related nongovernmental organizations at home and abroad, mobilizing and convening networks of experts, establishing high-quality flagship publications, and making grants to foreign nationals and organizations. Upon request, the center would provide advice to the U.S. government. Over time, the CCR could even help train a cadre of professionals, knowledgeable about the theory, research, and operations of ideas campaigns, on which departments and agencies could draw.

Such an organization would be better postured than the U.S. government to support Muslim groups and individuals who, in the name of Islam, oppose extremist Islamism. As we discuss in the accompanying doctrine paper, such support could include fellowships for scholarship and writing, sponsorship of conferences and other venues for networking, and establishment and financial support for platforms (publications, broadcasting, etc.) for voicing moderate views and other means for carrying on the debate.

A private organization could provide this support without making recipients into direct U.S. government beneficiaries.³⁴ It could also help mobilize the efforts of private groups and individuals across the U.S. and in other countries. The most important progress in this type of campaign will come from bold and creative individual religious thinkers and groups—and these are more likely to be recognized and supported by private organizations than by a government agency. In addition, such an organization would support the building up of expertise and provide continuity across administrations.

There are two possible organizational models for this new center: a federally funded research and development corporation, such as RAND, or a congressionally funded, but private, nonprofit organization, such as the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). We incline toward the NED model for several reasons.

First, RAND's work is based on contracts with departments and agencies, which means that it reflects existing government interests and priorities. In contrast, the NED receives public funding principally through a line-item appropriation, which it then disburses in accordance with internally developed

³⁴ One could object that, given the organization's funding by the U.S. Congress, the U.S. "taint" is inevitable. This is true to some extent, as the unfortunate recent events in Egypt attest, but the problem is a matter of degree. The new organization would not be directly involved in pursuing specific U.S. foreign policy interests, and its leadership would include prominent individuals not associated with, and perhaps publicly known as being opposed to, the administration of the moment. It is a common trope of many anti-U.S. government groups that they are not opposed to the American people, but only to the policies of its government. This form of organization can take advantage of that distinction.

priorities. This is gives it greater autonomy and greater capacity for long-range thinking, which are characteristics important for the CCR.

Second, most of RAND's work is done by in-house researchers. While the NED does have a small headquarters staff, the bulk of its work is conducted through grants to individuals and organizations, including its four major affiliates (controlled respectively by the Democratic and Republic parties, the AFL-CIO, and the Chamber of Commerce). This is how the CCR should operate as well.

Third, RAND's focus is on studies and research, while the NED's emphasis, supported by the bulk of its grant making, is operational. Here again, the CCR would be more like the NED than like RAND, for, as we envision the CCR, its emphasis would be operational. (Although the CCR would have a large research component, its research efforts would support its own operations as well as those of the U.S. government.)

Finally, NED's structure provides real and visible independence from the U.S. government. This is vital: many of its grantees would not or could not accept money directly from a U.S. government department or agency. The NED model is again appropriate for the CCR, as some degree of independence would be required for the research it funded (especially if done by foreign nationals) and an even greater degree for overseas grants for operational purposes.

Like NED, the CCR could be incorporated in the District of Columbia by a group of prominent U.S. citizens as a nonprofit organization and governed by a self-perpetuating board of directors, with the initial members chosen by the incorporators. Its articles of incorporation could specify the organization's objectives along the lines discussed above.

To explore the NED/CCR analogy in greater depth, the project team examined the July 1983 report that led to NED's formation. Entitled *The Commitment to Democracy: A Bipartisan Approach*,³⁵ it was produced by the American Political Foundation (APF) Democracy Program, a bipartisan team cochaired by Ambassador William E. Brock III and the heads of the Republican and Democratic National Committees, Frank J. Fahrenkopf, Jr., and Charles T. Manatt, respectively. It detailed the history of U.S. democracy promotion efforts, emphasized the importance of reaching out to nongovernmental actors, and included a proposal for NED and four subordinate institutes.

After its establishment in 1979, the APF leadership worked to build bipartisan interest in creating a democracy-promotion "quango" (quasi-

³⁵ Democracy Program, *The Commitment to Democracy: A Bipartisan Approach* (Washington, DC: Democracy Program, 1983), available at <http://www.ned.org/docs/democracyProgram.pdf>.

autonomous nongovernmental organization). Between 1979 and 1982, support for U.S. democracy-promotion efforts increased. President Reagan's election in 1980 marked a turning point.

On June 4, 1982, APF leaders wrote a letter to President Reagan recommending a study to resolve questions about establishing a democracy-promotion quango.³⁶ President Reagan's enthusiasm for the idea was evident from his having made it a key part of his famous democracy speech to the British Parliament on June 8.³⁷ The Democracy Program commenced the study the following November.

The NED itself has been remarkably successful in involving nongovernmental organizations in an effort of major strategic significance for the United States. Still, there are some difficulties that would have to be overcome if the NED model is to serve as the template for a new Center for Counterterrorism Research.

First of all, there would be considerable overlap between the activities of the NED and of the new organization. The NED's current activities promote the ideas on which democracy rests and aim to strengthen the institutions that make democracy possible. The Democracy Project report makes clear that ideological and institutional efforts complement each other.³⁸ Thus a new organization on the NED model could create confusion and lead to unnecessary duplication. The CCR's founding charter would have to distinguish clearly between its scope and mission and that of the NED.

Second, and more significantly, the NED does most of its work through four affiliated institutions, representing the two major political parties, the AFL-CIO, and major business organizations. These four affiliates have their own status as private organizations that are major elements of U.S. civil society. The NED can therefore persuasively claim that it represents and acts of behalf of the United States as a society, rather than the U.S. government. This structural feature helps the NED present its activities as promoting U.S. principles and ideals rather than promoting the U.S. government's foreign policy interests.

For the CCR, however, there would be no such already-existing private organizations that could serve as "affiliates." From the outset, the new organization would have to engage a wide range of civil society groups—representing the private sector, religion, and academia, among other sectors—and do so in a manner that preserved both the reality and appearance of their independence from government control.

³⁶ Ibid., appendix A.

³⁷ Ibid., appendix G.

³⁸ For example, see *ibid.*, pp. 39–42.

Assuming that these difficulties could be surmounted, creating a CCR along these lines would offer a number of advantages. Among them: the ability to mobilize private sector resources, to some extent material or in-kind but especially intellectual; the capacity to conduct in-depth research and to maintain continuity of focus rather than responding to daily events and in-basket crises; with that, the opportunity to build long-term intellectual capital for countering hostile ideologies; the capacity to form international networks, as the NED has done with democracy-promotion leaders and organizations around the world; and finally, the luxury of functioning in a relatively nonbureaucratic framework, in which there is more operational flexibility than the government typically achieves.

While creating a nongovernmental organization is reasonably straightforward (especially compared to standing up a new agency), cost is a consideration. In the start-up years, and probably well beyond them, the bulk of the funding would have to come from annual appropriations, not a trivial matter in today's fiscal circumstances. The good news is that the price tag ought to be quite modest. The NED, which awards more than a thousand grants each year and engages in various other activities, has never had an annual budget much above \$100 million. It has been in business for a quarter of a century, moreover, and started out much smaller. While the CCR's mission would be quite different, its steady-state budget should be somewhere in the same ballpark, and it should ramp up gradually to that steady state.

The relationship between the CCR and the CTIC poses a challenge. Bluntly put, the more independent the former is designed to be, the less accountable it will be to the government, which is intended to be the major consumer of its research and beneficiary of its operational activities. The issue is more than hypothetical. Although the NED sees itself as promoting the long-term interests of the United States, its operational activities sometimes cause heartburn in Foggy Bottom. And because its research is not done on a contract basis, it generates intellectual capital for democracy promotion rather than responding to the specific research needs of departments and agencies.

We cannot wish away the tension between independence and responsiveness. At best, we can decide the rough balance we prefer and design the institutions to suit. Because the CCR is designed to conduct long-term research, and because its operational activities will be hampered absent the reality and perception of independence, there is little choice but to lean toward independence. There would of course be a constant flow of information between the CCR and the CTIC, and the CCR would no doubt be called upon to advise the CTIC on a regular basis. Moreover, there is nothing to prevent one or more representatives of the latter from sitting on the former's board of directors. Indeed, the CCR's charter

could set aside a certain number of seats for both the CTIC and members of Congress.

But the steps should not go so far as to erode the CCR's independence. The majority of its board should be appointed internally, on a self-perpetuating basis. And even if the legal obstacles were manageable (a bold assumption at best), it would still be a mistake to give the CTIC formal authority over the CCR's budget, research agenda, or grant-making activities. Establishing a CCR means betting on a long-term return from activities conducted in parallel with, but in the main not answerable to, daily directives from government officials. If the bet were to go bad, Congress would no doubt pull the plug.

Third Recommendation: A Strong Presidential Executive Order

Beyond the CTIC and the CCR, the capability to counter hostile ideologies requires strong backing from the Oval Office. At the same time that the president is signing the legislation establishing the CTIC, he or she should issue a directive on this matter. That document should contain a statement of presidential policy to which the DAPNSA could point. It would make clear that the DAPNSA would chair not only the CTIC but also all other relevant interagency committees. It would reinforce the DAPNSA's lead role in working with the Office of Management and Budget on the government's budget for countering Islamist extremism. It would require the CTIC to produce a biannual strategy report, which the DAPNSA would be empowered to draft in conjunction with the relevant departments and agencies. Finally, it would instruct ambassadors and combatant commanders to work with the DAPNSA on efforts to counter Islamist extremism.

To make this last point effective, the president would have to assert personal leadership with his national security team, especially with the secretaries of state and defense, and ensure they know that the campaign to counter Islamist extremism is a high priority and requires that their departments cooperate with the DAPNSA. If either secretary opposes the effort or allows the DAPNSA to be ignored by country teams or combatant commanders, there cannot be a successful administration-wide strategic effort. There are no organizational devices that will permit such an effort to succeed if the president seems uninterested and the cabinet secretaries are uncooperative.

Fourth Recommendation: Strengthening State, Defense, and the BBG

The government's capacity to counter hostile ideologies requires a strong, visible commitment by the president—but that is not sufficient. Attitudinal and structural problems in the State Department, the Defense Department, and the BBG will need to be addressed, either through the legislation establishing the CTIC or in some separate effort.

As we mentioned earlier, ever since USIA's dissolution, public diplomacy has been a State Department stepchild. Numerous reports have proposed strengthening the position of the under secretary of state for public diplomacy and public affairs, known as State/R. We agree. More resources not precommitted to activities such as cultural exchanges would be helpful, as would increased power for the under secretary to review the performance of public affairs officers, including those serving in embassies. To influence the powerful regional bureaus, it would make sense for each to contain a public diplomacy deputy assistant secretary or senior advisor to the bureau head.

State/R's biggest problem is that public diplomacy assignments are now seen as the reverse of career enhancing, a perception unlikely to change as long as public diplomacy remains a second-class track within the overall personnel system. Although we expect it would be highly controversial, we propose the creation, over time, of a separate public-diplomacy personnel system. This would increase State/R's ability to recruit and retain promising young officers and to build the skilled, committed cadre the field needs.

It is also important that State's office of public diplomacy broaden its concept of public diplomacy. If State is to play a proper, large role in an administration-wide effort to counter Islamist extremism, State's idea of public diplomacy should extend beyond messaging—that is, beyond suggestions about what communications State officials should make to Muslim audiences. Public diplomacy should be understood to encompass not just communications but also the operations required to amplify Muslim voices that are conveying useful ideas, and more generally to counter the extremists. These operations may include providing resources, running interference with local authorities, helping to provide security, promoting networking among constructive individuals and institutions within countries and across national borders, and other activities. All such operations can be important elements of an ideas campaign, so the concept of public diplomacy at State should be expanded to encompass them.

The institutional problem at Defense can be stated simply. In the language of a recent survey report, "Currently, DoD's strategic communication coordinating structure involves three organizations: the Office of the Under Secretary of

Defense for Policy, the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, and the Joint Staff. If any of these organizations attempts to exercise strong leadership, it risks offending the prerogatives of the other two.”³⁹ To address this situation, it would be useful to create an office corresponding to that of the under secretary of state for public diplomacy and public affairs. Given the Defense Department's size and structure, the new office should not be headed by an under secretary. A deputy assistant secretary of defense (DASD), a rank equivalent to a two-star general, should be adequate.

Given the important role and assets of the Defense Department in any strategic, administration-wide ideas campaign, it would be advisable to have a single focal point there to coordinate activities across the combatant commands and to connect with the interagency process headed by the new CTIC. It is a problem inherent in the Defense Department's structure that operational assets belong to the combatant commands while the interagency coordination function resides in the Office of the Secretary of Defense and, to a lesser extent, in the Joint Staff.

The key to making Defense Department activity in this area as effective as possible would be ensuring robust horizontal communication among the staffs of all these organizations. The combatant commands operate with a great deal of autonomy, and it is sometimes a challenge to tie them tightly to policy guidance developed within the NSC (i.e., through an interagency process), where the Defense Department is represented by the Office of the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Staff. The key to making this arrangement work is leadership by the secretary of defense, who is both a member of the NSC and the only civilian in the Defense Department who has statutory authority to give orders to the combatant commands. If the secretary does not make it clear to his commanders that countering Islamist extremism is a priority and that the DASD for this purpose is his point person for this mission, the horizontal coordination function will likely fail.

The DASD-headed office serving as the focal point for the ideas campaign should work closely with a counterpart office in the Joint Staff, which would be headed at the two-star level.⁴⁰ Ideally, the two offices should be colocated to make it easier for personnel to work together, although each would report to the Secretary of Defense via its own chain of command (through the under secretary of defense for policy and the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, respectively).

³⁹ RAND report, p. 5.

⁴⁰ As noted, the position of DASD has the same precedence as that of a two-star officer, i.e., a major general or rear admiral (upper half).

Each combatant commander should assign an appropriate two-star officer to act as liaison with the Office of the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Staff. Placing this essential horizontal communication at the two-star level is intended to ensure that the coordination occurs at a high enough level to be effective, but not at so high a level that it compromises or appears to compromise the official chain of command (by which combatant commanders report directly to the secretary of defense).

It bears repeating that, to fulfill their function, these colocated offices would require the secretary of defense to express his intent that the combatant commands work closely with them regarding Military Information Support Operations and outreach efforts (such as command-sponsored websites).

As for the BBG, it currently suffers from two key weaknesses. First of all, it lacks a full-time CEO. Instead, the mostly unpaid, part-time board meets once a month. Board members are experienced and patriotic, but a recent Heritage Foundation report concludes that this “is no way to run a complex media organization with over \$750 million worth of broadcasting entities paid for by U.S. taxpayers.”⁴¹ In particular, the current arrangement makes it difficult to formulate and execute comprehensive broadcasting strategy and leaves too much power in the hands of various fiefdoms under the board’s nominal direction. Heritage recommends the appointment of a “non-partisan, paid, full-time president and CEO with the resources and time to engage in long-term planning and implementation strategies for U.S. international broadcasting.” We agree.

The second problem is not structural as much as conceptual and ideological. The 1994 International Broadcasting Act that established the BBG includes language pointing both to the “highest professional standards of broadcast journalism,” such as objectivity, reliability, and balance, and to the “broad foreign policy objectives of the United States.” These objectives include not only supporting the presentation of the U.S. government's views (and responsible discussion of them, including dissenting opinions) but also providing “a surge capacity to support United States foreign policy objectives during crises abroad.” In the absence of strong central leadership, however, the broadcasting services' day-to-day operation tilts toward one of these objectives at the expense of the other—that is, toward journalism conducted without reference to U.S. foreign policy goals.

We recognize that without credibility as a source of reliable information, U.S. broadcasting can achieve none of its stated objectives. At the same time, the

⁴¹ Helle C. Dale and Nick Zahn, “Time to Rethink the Broadcasting Board of Governors,” Heritage Foundation Web Memo no. 3192, Heritage Foundation, Washington, DC, March 16, 2011, p. 1, available at http://thf_media.s3.amazonaws.com/2011/pdf/wm3192.pdf.

BBG board should make it clear to the various broadcasting services that they are in the public sector and are part of the U.S. foreign policy team. A full-time CEO should be able to translate this principle into practice—and the CEO should be selected with this objective in mind. It takes both the right personnel and properly designed structures to sustain sound public policy.

Doctrinal Statement

Regardless of which option is chosen, any new or remodeled organization will require an understanding of how it should proceed. To show how this requirement could be met, the team has prepared the attached doctrinal statement. Designed to be used by the U.S. government or a U.S. government-funded organization with the mission to counter hostile ideologies, it lays out requirements for a serious ideas campaign. Though it has broad applicability to efforts to counter hostile ideologies in general, the doctrine concentrates on extremist Islamism.

One of the strategic principles of this account is that, to be effective, the counterextremist message should arise, as much as possible, from within the Muslim world. That message should reflect aspirations, and be expressed in terms, that resonate within Muslim communities. Thus the essential issue for U.S. officials is *not* what messages they should be transmitting into the Muslim world; rather, it is how they can *stimulate* and *shape* a debate among Muslims about the extremist ideologies promoted by al Qaeda, Hezbollah, and other terrorist organizations. Bringing about this debate is an operational challenge for U.S. officials, and not simply a matter of messaging or public diplomacy or strategic communications.

Given that, as we have already noted, the dialogue among Muslims, not that between Muslims and non-Muslims, is of central importance, the involvement of private organizations (e.g., universities, think tanks, foundations, religious organizations) in a national U.S. strategic ideas effort is crucial.

Conclusion and Next Steps

If it is to counter the hostile ideology of radical Islamism, the United States needs to be able to wage a strategic ideas campaign. At present, the U.S. government is not organized properly for this task. No official or agency has the responsibility for directing and conducting a strategic effort to counter Islamist extremism and for devising ways to encourage and influence the activities of private organizations; and there is no common understanding of what such an effort should comprise.

While the steps we have outlined are not perfect, our research and consultation have persuaded us that they would represent a significant improvement over current arrangements. The next key question is whether the political will exists—or can be created—to move in this direction.

At present, this question would have to be answered in the negative. But we can imagine two events, neither improbable, that could shift opinion in the direction of action. First, continuing strife in countries such as Somalia could offer opportunities for radical Islamists to ramp up their activities and spread them to other countries. (Africa provides them a particularly fertile breeding ground.) Should radical Islamism spread into Africa, the United States would look for ways to respond other than through military or financial means, and an ideological counteroffensive might be seen as the vehicle of choice.

Second, as the continuing turmoil in Egypt makes clear, the outcome of the Arab Spring remains in doubt. Instability through the Middle East and the Mahgreb are giving rise to conditions in which radical Islamists may flourish, dashing nascent democratic hopes. In the worst case, extremists could extend their sway well beyond beachheads in Gaza and southern Lebanon, threatening the security of the United States and its allies. Such events could persuade U.S. legislators and officials of the urgency of serious U.S. efforts to combat extremist Islamism in the doctrinal arena.

We cannot predict when conditions inside the U.S. government and political system will be ripe for a new institution responsible for countering hostile ideologies. It is our hope that this report will provide both a clear argument and a way ahead for the structural and doctrinal change we are convinced our country needs.

Appendix: Ideas Campaigns and Liberal Democratic Theory

Some of the issues of democratic theory raised by the notion of an “ideas campaign” are discussed at greater length in the accompanying draft doctrine statement. In discussions of ideas campaigns, there are at least three concerns that tend to arise and reflect discomfort with carrying out such an effort. It is hard to assess whether these concerns have had the practical effect of impeding U.S. government efforts to combat hostile ideologies. Nevertheless, the report authors, all of whom have served in government, have come across these reservations in the course of interagency discussions. The concerns are these:

1. The U.S. government should not be in the business of directing ideological campaigns at its own population, so it must prevent campaigns directed at foreigners from influencing domestic U.S. opinion. (This is sometimes referred to as the “blowback” problem.)
2. The U.S. government should stay out of religious disputes. (This may be called the “separation of church and state” problem.)
3. Though duty bound to maintain and protect the “marketplace of ideas,” the U.S. government should not function as a purveyor of ideas in that marketplace. (This may be called the “freedom of speech” problem.)

“Blowback”

The traditional view was that any U.S. government information efforts should be directed overseas. Whatever “propaganda” may be appropriate when directed at foreign populations, it is not acceptable domestically.

This view was codified in statutes, beginning with the Smith-Mundt Act of 1948 and strengthened by the Zorinsky Amendment of 1985;⁴² recent legislation deals with Defense Department efforts.⁴³ Understandably, the Congress has wanted to keep the U.S. government out of the business of trying to convince Americans what to think.

⁴² This legislation specifically prohibited the United States Information Agency (USIA, since abolished and absorbed into the State Department) from disseminating within the United States the information prepared for foreign audiences, and from influencing public opinion within the United States.

⁴³ The Duncan Hunter National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2009, PL 110-417, provides that “No part of any funds authorized to be appropriated in this or any other Act shall be used by the Department of Defense for publicity or propaganda purposes within the United States not otherwise specifically authorized by law.” (sec. 1065(a))

Isolating domestic audiences from attempts to influence foreign opinion, however, is impossible when information activities are carried out over the Internet. Given the importance of this medium for radical Islamism, there is no way a U.S. government ideological effort could ignore it. Similarly, television is more globalized now than in past decades. A prime venue for discussion of issues related to Islamist extremism would be such Arabic language channels as Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya. Those channels are available worldwide, and, in any case, other media often report what they are saying. Again, there would be no way of isolating U.S. audiences.

Ultimately, then, the case for having the U.S. government involved in an ideological fight has to be robust enough that Americans accept the possibility of such activities having an influence at home as well as abroad.

Government Involvement in Religious Issues

Even more fundamental is the question of the government's involvement in religious debate. The principle of maintaining a separation of church and state is deeply ingrained; many officials are uncomfortable with the idea of the U.S. government's involving itself in religious issues.⁴⁴

In this connection, it is important to note that extremist Islamism should be seen as more than simply a religious school of thought. It is an ideology and a comprehensive political program—that is, one aiming at the fundamental reconstruction of society. Extremist Islamism is based on ideas promulgated and enforced by a vanguard that understands them better than does the population at large and that is more committed to them. In this way, extremist Islamism resembles the totalitarian ideologies of the 20th century. Its slogan—"Islam is the solution"—means that Islam is the answer not just to an individual's striving for meaning, but rather to society's political, economic, and social problems.

Among Muslims, debates about extremist Islamism necessarily center on whether it is in fact the correct interpretation of Islam. Although for reasons of effectiveness and credibility, U.S. officials can intervene in such a debate only indirectly, the outcome is of the greatest interest to the United States. If the U.S. government is to conduct a strategic ideas campaign to counter Islamist extremism, U.S. officials will have to accept that opposing the ideology of Islamism does not mean opposing the religion of Islam.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Former U.S. government officials emphasized the enormous practical importance of this concern, a reality that project team members can confirm through their own government experience.

⁴⁵ See, for example, the testimony of assistant secretary of defense for homeland defense and Americas' security affairs, Paul Stockton, in which he debates with Representative Dan Lungren (R-California)

Government Participation in the Ideological “Marketplace of Ideas”

The U.S. government's proper posture regarding religious matters is part of the broader question of the government's relationship to philosophical beliefs generally. One view is that the government should maintain and protect the “marketplace of ideas,” but should not enter into that marketplace as a participant. Rather, as Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote in his dissent in *Gitlow v. New York*, “If in the long run the beliefs expressed in proletarian dictatorship are destined to be accepted by the dominant forces of the community, the only meaning of free speech is that they should be given their chance and have their way.”⁴⁶

Holmes's implication is that, in the interest of freedom of speech, or perhaps of freedom generally, the government should stay out of the ideological arena, allowing all beliefs—those compatible with liberal democracy and those advocating dictatorship or other alternatives to liberal democracy—to compete on a level playing field within the “marketplace of ideas.”⁴⁷

Under ordinary circumstances, Holmes's position has obvious merits. A liberal democratic government should, as a rule, accept that philosophical battles are best contested without government involvement. Thomas Jefferson stated the quintessentially American optimistic view when he wrote, in *Notes on Virginia*,

whether the United States is at war with “violent Islamist extremism.” The debate includes the following exchange:

LUNGREN: Al Qaeda—how does al Qaeda define itself? Are they dedicated to violent Islamist extremism?

STOCKTON: Al Qaeda would love to convince Muslims around the world that the United States is at war with Islam.

LUNGREN: I didn't say that.

STOCKTON: That is a prime propaganda tool. And I'm not going to aid and abet that effort to advance their propaganda goals.

LUNGREN: Is there a difference between Islam and violent Islamist extremism?

STOCKTON: Sir, with great respect, I don't believe it's helpful to frame our adversary as Islamic with any set of qualifiers that we might add, because we are not at war with Islam.

LUNGREN: I understand that. I never said we were at war with Islam. One of the questions we're trying to deal with is the radicalization of Islam, is the radicalization of Islamic youth. And if we can't distinguish between violent Islamist extremism and Islam, then all of this stuff about behavioral indicators doesn't mean anything.

House Committee on Homeland Security and Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, *Joint Hearing on Homegrown Terrorism Threat to U.S. Military Communities* (panel 1), December 7, 2011, available at <http://homeland.house.gov/hearing/joint-hearing-homegrown-terrorism-threat-military-communities-inside-united-states>.

⁴⁶ (1925) 268 U. S. 652, 673.

⁴⁷ It is important to note that the last sentence quoted goes well beyond the usual “freedom of speech” jurisprudence, which addresses only whether or not utterances are punishable. Thus, *Brandenburg v. Ohio* (1969) 395 U.S. 444, according to which “abstract” advocacy of the violent overthrow of the government is protected speech, does not address the question of whether the government, using means other than the criminal law, may try to dissuade the population from embracing such a doctrine.

that “it is error alone which needs the support of government. Truth can stand by itself.”⁴⁸ But Jefferson’s hopeful conviction may not always be correct. Could Jefferson have imagined that a liberal democratic state like Weimar Germany, with a wide-open and very free marketplace of ideas, could have brought Hitler to power through democratic mechanisms?

The question for us is whether the security threats posed by extremist Islamism require the government itself to move beyond its basic role as the guardian of America’s marketplace of ideas and to enter the world’s ideological marketplace as a substantive defender of liberal democratic principles.

In this regard, a speech by United Kingdom prime minister David Cameron is of interest. In February 2011, at the Munich *Wehrkunde* meetings, he called for a “muscular liberalism” that would defend its beliefs:

We need a lot less of the passive tolerance [of extremist Islamism] of recent years and a much more active, muscular liberalism. A passively tolerant society says to its citizens, as long as you obey the law we will just leave you alone. It stands neutral between different values. But I believe a genuinely liberal country does much more; it believes in certain values and actively promotes them. Freedom of speech, freedom of worship, democracy, the rule of law, equal rights regardless of race, sex or sexuality. It says to its citizens, this is what defines us as a society: to belong here is to believe in these things.⁴⁹

While the multiculturalism that Prime Minister Cameron rejected in this speech is more extreme than anything that is familiar in the United States, his notion of “muscular liberalism” is relevant for any liberal democracy. It need not prohibit illiberal speech (although in the UK, and in Europe generally, there is a greater readiness to prohibit certain types of speech than there is in the United States with our history of respect for the First Amendment). For any liberal democracy, such legal prohibition is an extreme step. But that shouldn’t prevent liberal democratic governments from using other methods—not necessarily involving criminal penalties—to promote and protect the principles on which their system of government stands.

⁴⁸ Question 17.

⁴⁹ “PM’s speech at Munich Security Conference,” February 5, 2011, available at <http://www.number10.gov.uk/news/speeches-and-transcripts/2011/02/pms-speech-at-munich-security-conference-60293>, accessed February 7, 2011.

Doctrine — Countering Hostile Ideologies

This document can serve as the doctrinal statement of an organization with the mission to counter hostile ideologies. (A hostile ideology is one that motivates individuals or groups to act inimically to U.S. national security.) Its purpose is make more concrete the proposals contained in the accompanying report on countering hostile ideologies.

This doctrinal statement is meant to be independent of the precise structure of the organization assigned the task of countering hostile ideologies, regardless of whether it is part of the U.S. government or private (even if largely funded by the U.S. government.) Instead it deals with issues that any such organization would face, regardless of how structured or where located bureaucratically.

The doctrinal statement covers a great deal of territory. Among other things, it presents the fundamental reasons for the organization's existence, offers a historical review of the ideology the organization would seek to counter, develops the organization's basic strategic approach to its mission, and provides examples of activities that might be undertaken by it.

While such an organization might have a general mandate, its primary function, at this time, would be to counter the extremist Islamist ideology that motivates terrorist actions directed against the United States and its allies and friends.

Preliminary Consideration: Taking Ideology Seriously in a National Security Context

Before we discuss how a new government or government-funded organization might carry out its mission of countering hostile ideologies, it is necessary to justify the mission itself. That organization's doctrine should show why ideology is important in determining the behavior of individuals, groups, or countries; and it needs to make clear why the U.S. government should be concerned with what people (including U.S. citizens) believe, as opposed to what they do.

The Importance of Ideology in State Behavior

In thinking about national security, we traditionally focus on the threats that other nations could pose to our security and interests. In analyzing potential threats, we look at other nations' intentions and capabilities in order to determine whether we should act to counter or mitigate them. We need not deal in this paper with the question of assessing other nations' capabilities—primarily their military

forces, but also their geographic position and economic and diplomatic strengths and weaknesses. In any case, assessments of capabilities are generally rather straightforward.

It is a nation's intentions that are often hard to ascertain. One can try to determine intentions by analyzing what the nation might require to safeguard its security and further its material interests. A particularly clear statement of this approach may be found in Sherman Kent's *Strategic Intelligence for American Foreign Policy*:

If you have knowledge of [a country's] strategic stature [Kent's term for the totality of a nation's capabilities—military, political, and economic—to act on the international scene], knowledge of her specific vulnerabilities, and how she may view these, and knowledge of the stature and vulnerabilities of other states party to the situation, you are in a fair way to be able to predict her *probable course of action*.

Kent goes on to say that analyses of intentions are stronger when they take into account how a country's leaders assess its stature, and how the country has acted in the past.⁵⁰

Kent's view reflects the doctrine of *realism*, which posits that nations act on the basis of material interests and that the ideological statements they make explaining their actions (e.g., the defense or promotion of socialism or of democracy) are *ex post facto* rationalizations.⁵¹ This approach, which tends to imply that U.S. actions likewise should be determined by "hard" interests rather than values or ideology, has commonly been favored by foreign policy professionals, including those who staff the State Department's Foreign Service.

Nevertheless, even in the realist understanding, it is acknowledged that ideological factors play a significant role under some circumstances. For example, traditional realist theory has typically made an exception for "revolutionary" states, which—contrary to the precepts of *Realpolitik*—allow ideological motivations to override the pursuit of their material interests. To be sure, realist theory tends to insist that such "revolutionary" episodes are transitory, and that these states ineluctably adapt themselves to the existing international system and, accordingly, pursue their national interests in a more or less traditional form.

⁵⁰ Sherman Kent, *Strategic Intelligence for American Foreign Policy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1949; reprint 1966), pp. 58–59.

⁵¹ For example, Hans J. Morgenthau, one of the most eminent realist theorists of international relations, wrote that "while all politics is necessarily pursuit of power, ideologies render involvement in that contest for power psychologically and morally acceptable to the actors and their audiences." *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 3rd ed. (New York: Knopf, 1961), pp. 87–88. In this, Morgenthau follows Karl Mannheim's view that ideology is essentially a rationalization that covers over one's real motives for action.

However, the “revolutionary” phase may last for decades, as in the case of the French Revolution and Napoleonic era, and thus can play a major role in determining the course of international politics for a generation.

In addition, even a realist thinker like Hans Morgenthau saw ideology as an important link between a government and its citizens. He noted, for example that the emergence of the concept of “total war” would have been impossible but for the existence of ideologies that gave the average citizen a strong emotional stake in the conflict, something that the average person wouldn’t have had in the dynastic wars of the eighteenth century:

. . . War had to be just on one’s own side and unjust on the side of the enemy in order to evoke moral enthusiasm in support of one’s own cause and hostile passion against the enemy.⁵²

Furthermore, the appeal of ideology need not be, and typically is not, limited to the revolutionary state itself. Rather, such a state is often able to appeal to individuals in other countries on the basis of its ideology and solicit support from them. The revolutionary state may make significant efforts to spread and facilitate this type of support, as for instance the Soviet Union did by means of the Comintern in the 1930s.⁵³

This sort of activity can benefit the revolutionary state in various ways; foreign adherents of the ideology can provide political support for the revolutionary state’s objectives; they may even be willing to engage in espionage and treason on its behalf. Thus, even if the revolutionary faith is waning domestically, a revolutionary state’s leaders may see appealing to foreigners on the basis of it as a useful method for gaining support abroad in pursuit of the state’s *Realpolitik* objectives.

Accordingly, it may be difficult to disentangle the *Realpolitik* and ideological motivations in a state’s international behavior. Determining the extent to which a potential adversary’s motives reflect either *Realpolitik* or ideological considerations is a major task in formulating a nation’s policy toward that adversary, and is often the subject of heated debate.

Ideology and Nonstate Actors

In dealing with nonstate actors, the role of ideology is even more crucial. Whereas a state can levy taxes and obtain recruits by means of conscription, a

⁵² Ibid., p. 368.

⁵³ Thus, as Morgenthau notes, “The struggle for power on the international scene is today not only a struggle for military supremacy and political domination, but in a specific sense a struggle for the minds of men.” Ibid., pp. 147–48.

terrorist group like al Qaeda depends on its ideological appeal for its ability to recruit individuals, raise funds, and attract other forms of support. This is also generally true in the case of an insurgent group like the Afghan or Pakistani Taliban, although in some geographic areas, where such a group exercises physical control, it may be able to use statelike compulsion.

Leaders of terrorist or insurgent groups may, from time to time, make specific judgments based on *Realpolitik* rather than ideological factors. (For example, al Qaeda might choose to ignore or downplay Chinese mistreatment of Muslims in Xinjiang because it doesn't want Beijing to become fully engaged alongside the West in fighting radical Islamism.) Nevertheless, it is crucial for the leadership to maintain the group's ideological appeal, and any deviation from the ideology risks diminishing this appeal or spawning disunity.

Although ideological appeal is the key means by which a nonstate actor such as a terrorist group can recruit individuals and obtain material and other support, not every act of joining a terrorist group or committing a terrorist act can be explained solely by ideology. Human behavior is rarely if ever explainable by reference to a single variable. However, while various idiosyncratic psychological or social factors may make one individual more prone to recruitment into a movement than another, they do not explain why the individual becomes, say, a radical Islamist rather than a communist, a fascist, or a member of a religious cult. Of key importance appears to be the process by which an alienated individual forms a close bond with other individuals and finds an "identity" within this small group. But without the ideology, this small group could as easily become a bunch of soccer fanatics or petty criminals.

According to forensic psychiatrist Marc Sageman, ideology plays "a central role" in "sustaining commitment" to radical Islamism:

Ideology also played a central role in sustaining commitment to this version of Islam. Although affiliation is a social phenomenon, intensification of faith and beliefs is a stage characterized by active personal learning about the new faith . . . The seekers . . . progressively accept the new faith because it makes sense in their new interpretation of the world and their role in it . . . This discovery of a strong fit of past events with the new interpretation is critical to the acceptance of and fosters long-term commitment to the new faith.⁵⁴

In short, whether a hostile ideology is held by a state or by a nonstate group, it has an effect on national security, and it therefore cannot be a matter of indifference to the U.S. government.

⁵⁴ *Understanding Terror Networks* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), p. 117.

Countering Hostile Ideologies: Some Previous Efforts

It is not merely that the U.S. *should be* concerned with hostile ideologies as a matter of national security. In fact it *has been* concerned with such ideologies in the past, most notably during the Cold War. Indeed, the current situation of the U.S. government has some similarities to its situation at the beginning of the Cold War.

After World War II, as the U.S. government openly propagated the values of liberty, it faced the objection that doing so constituted interference in other countries' internal affairs. Efforts to spread American values became a major issue in some parts of the world, particularly in the Western European countries where communism's ideological appeal was great. Compounding the discomfort of many Western Europeans was the association of the United States with free-market capitalism, which in the aftermath of the Great Depression was not held in high esteem.

Thus, in cases such as the 1948 Italian election, in which strong Communist Party gains were feared, much of the U.S. effort to influence the election's outcome was conducted covertly, via the newly created CIA Office of Policy Coordination.⁵⁵

Of particular relevance to the current situation is the fact that, in World War II's aftermath, there was an important European debate in which the U.S. government couldn't intervene directly—a clash in leftist circles between communists and democratic socialists. It was very much in the American interest that the latter hold their own in that debate. Meanwhile the Soviet Union was funding the communists. (Soviet aid to European communists was provided covertly and through various “front groups” to maintain the fiction that it did not constitute Soviet involvement in European nations' internal affairs.) Nevertheless, open U.S. government involvement could have “tainted” the democratic forces and made them less effective.

This led to a CIA covert action effort to enable the democratic socialists to wage an “ideological struggle” against communism. For example, the CIA

⁵⁵ Similarly, the CIA's Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty—designed to serve as “surrogate” domestic broadcasting services for populations living under communist governments—were set up and operated as ostensibly nongovernment organizations. Cord Meyer explains the motivation for creating Radio Free Europe, which broadcast to Communist-controlled Eastern Europe, as follows: “It was thought important to keep intact the cadre of democratic leaders who had escaped [from their Communist-controlled homelands] and to provide them with some way of communicating with their own people in order to keep alive the hope of eventual freedom.” *Facing Reality: From World Federalism to the CIA* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980), p. 111. At the same time, given U.S. recognition of the Communist regimes in Eastern Europe, the State Department did not want to deal directly with these exiles.

provided them with resources for conferences and publications. This support facilitated the establishment of such organizations as the Congress of Cultural Freedom and the publication of journals such as *Encounter*. Various U.S. organizations—most notably the National Students Association—were also supported so that they could confront Soviet-backed groups in international meetings.⁵⁶

In the 1960s and 1970s, the CIA's covert involvement in these activities became public knowledge and was forced to an end. The U.S. government then began providing open support to some institutions, such as Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty; congressional appropriations for them came first through the Board for International Broadcasting (BIB) and then, after 1995, through the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG).

During the Reagan years, private sector actors promoted the idea of a private foundation that would foster democratic values abroad. The Reagan administration adopted and developed the idea, and Congress then passed the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) Act.⁵⁷ The NED is not an executive branch agency; it is a private, not-for-profit foundation, though it does receive government appropriations. It does not conduct programs itself but rather funds projects to promote democratic ideas and institutions abroad. The recipients of NED funds often find it advantageous that their support does not come directly from the U.S. government. NED's success demonstrates that a private organization can play a significant role in exerting ideological influence on behalf of American principles.

Survey of Islamism

This section is intended as a brief introduction to the complex phenomenon of Islamism, the radical manifestations of which are to be countered. The task of

⁵⁶ Cord Meyer (Ibid., p. 89) notes that, like the European organizations the CIA supported, most of these groups “were on the left of the political spectrum and were liberal and internationalist in outlook.” The support of, for example, the left-leaning National Students Association rather than more conservative student groups was based on the strategic approach we discuss here. The liberal Americans for Democratic Action, in the course of denouncing CIA support for private American groups, was nevertheless forced to admit that “the activities [the CIA supported] were in many cases positive advances over the declared foreign policy of the U.S.” Ibid., p. 90, citing *ADA World*, September–October 1968, p. 23.

⁵⁷ Title V of the State Department Authorization Act, FY 1984 and 1985 (P.L. 98-164), signed November 22, 1983. It is interesting to note that, in the aftermath of the public revelation in 1967 of CIA support for the National Students Association and other private organizations, the Johnson administration formed a committee to investigate ways to replace CIA funding to enable these organizations to continue their international work. The committee, headed by Under Secretary of State Nicholas Katzenbach, proposed “a public-private mechanism to provide public funds openly for overseas activities of organizations which are adjudged deserving, in the national interest, of public support.” Meyer, *Facing Reality*, p. 105 This recommendation was not implemented at the time; however, the National Endowment for Democracy, created during the Reagan administration, reflected the same general idea.

understanding this phenomenon and keeping current as to its development is far from trivial, and any organization tasked with countering hostile ideologies should include a research division for this purpose.

Although it claims to be the proper interpretation of the religion of Islam, Islamism is in fact a political ideology. As such, it can be understood in the light of other ideologies of the 20th century (such as fascism and communism) that oppose liberal democratic beliefs.⁵⁸ It is a set of ideas about the source of political legitimacy, the proper means of governing society, and the proper conduct of domestic and international politics.

The term “Islamism” is now in flux, especially as recent political upheavals in the Arab world and Turkey's new international assertiveness have moved the phenomenon increasingly out of the realm of theory and into that of practical affairs. Leaders of Islamist parties in Tunisia, Egypt, and elsewhere have repeatedly told Western journalists that they favor moderation, tolerance, peace, and democracy—practices and goals that the Islamist movement's foundational writings sharply repudiate.

There has been much speculation among scholars and commentators about whether Islamism will retain the extremist, hostile, violent traits that have generally characterized the movement since its founding in the early 20th century, or whether it will evolve toward something more benign as its adherents exercise top-level political power in a growing number of states. A key question is whether the Islamist movement will split into mutually antagonistic moderate and extremist factions—and whether the West can cooperate with the former to undermine the influence of the latter.

There are good reasons to be skeptical about the potential of the Islamist parties to evolve into moderate, democratic forces in their respective countries. The founding documents of major Islamist movements are replete with antidemocratic and theocratic themes. And in Turkey, often held up as the model for reconciling Islamism and democracy, the ruling AK Party has moved to hamstring its political opponents and limit press freedom. Nevertheless, given the current tumult in Middle Eastern politics and some signs of emerging splits within Islamism, it goes beyond the evidence to assert that all Islamist parties are inherently and irremediably extremist.

⁵⁸ As French scholar Olivier Roy has explained, “Islamists see Islam not as a mere religion, but as a political ideology that should reshape all aspects of society (politics, law, economy, social justice, foreign policy, and so on). The traditional idea of Islam as an all-encompassing religion is extended to the complexity of modern society and recast in terms of modern social sciences . . . This ideologisation [sic] of Islam is explicit among Islamist actors.” *Globalized Islam: The Search for a new Ummah* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), p. 58.

In this document, therefore, we are concerned specifically with extremist Islamism. The most important feature of this ideology, from a national security point of view, is that it assumes an inherent hostility between Islam and the West, based on the notion that Western ideas and Western power are the key obstacles to the implementation of Islamism's program.

Islamism appeals to religious sensibilities, (including the example of the Prophet Mohammed and his companions in the 7th century), as the various versions of fascism appealed to nationalist sensibilities.⁵⁹ But, just as fascism was a modern ideology in aiming to remake society according to a theoretically based program, so is Islamism.⁶⁰ As French scholar Olivier Roy has written, “the illusion held by the Islamic radicals is that they represent tradition, when in fact they express a negative form of westernization.”⁶¹

What is Islamism?

In its most general sense, Islamism may be understood as a political reaction by Muslims to the sense of their political, economic, and military weakness vis-à-vis the Christian West. During its first thousand years, Islam had enjoyed spectacular worldly (that is, political, military, cultural, and economic) success. As Bernard Lewis has observed:

For many centuries the world of Islam was in the forefront of human civilization and achievement. In the Muslims' own perception, Islam itself was indeed coterminous with civilization, and beyond its borders were only barbarians and infidels . . . In the era between the decline of antiquity and the dawn of modernity . . . the Islamic claim was not without justification.⁶²

In military terms, the 1453 Ottoman conquest of Constantinople, which had regarded itself as the Roman Empire's capital and which symbolized Christendom for most medieval Muslims, represented a particularly significant victory in the almost-thousand-year off-and-on battle between Islam and Christendom. After an initial attempt in the first third of the 16th century to extend its control from the Balkans into Austria, the Ottoman Empire's armies besieged Vienna in 1683 and came close to conquering it.

⁵⁹ Examples of nationalist appeals are Mussolini's emphasis on the glories of ancient Rome and Nazism's references to pre-Christian German mythology.

⁶⁰ Communism differs from fascism in that it explicitly vaunted its modern and “scientific” character, although, when the chips were down during World War II, it appealed to an older Russian patriotism and Russian Orthodox sensibilities.

⁶¹ Olivier Roy, *Globalized Islam*, p. 20.

⁶² Bernard Lewis, *What Went Wrong: Western Impact and Middle Eastern Response* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 3.

After that high point, however, the Ottomans' fortunes and self-confidence diminished quickly, and the loss of Hungary in the early 18th century created a sense that something had gone wrong. At the same time, the Mughal Empire in India was beginning its descent into powerlessness and oblivion.

These military and political setbacks naturally had effects in the intellectual realm:

With the onslaught of colonialism and the gradual dissemination of Westernization as a cultural phenomenon in the traditional milieu of Islam, Muslim thinkers were alerted to a multitude of ruptures in their societies that were political, social, economic, and even linguistic.⁶³

The Islamist Reaction

The predominant response to this recognition of the difficulties confronting Muslim societies was to understand them as the result of Muslims' falling away from true religious belief and practice. Thus the view arose that "Islam is the solution," i.e., a return to the true Islam, as evidenced by the lives of the Prophet Mohammed and his companions, was the solution to the Muslim world's political, economic, and cultural problems and the way to rectify its backwardness compared to the rising West. In this way, religion ceased to be simply a way of life that was in and of itself mandatory or worthy of being chosen, and became of interest mainly as part of a political program.

This political program's specific import depended, of course, on one's understanding of the true Islam of the seventh century. "Going back to the source" could be confining or liberating, depending on how one interpreted the religion's original form. Nevertheless,

what makes Islamist politics distinctive (if not *sui generis*) is the claim to recuperate an 'authentic Islam' comprised of self-evident truths purged of alien and corrupting influences, along with an insistence on remaking the foundations of the state in its image.⁶⁴

In the case of some 19th-century thinkers, this approach was seen as compatible with notions of "reform," i.e., Islam's adaptation to the realities of the time. These thinkers held that by stripping away the accretions of the centuries (that is, the interpretations and understandings of the various legal and other

⁶³ Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi', *Intellectual Origins of Islamic Resurgence in the Modern Arab World* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), pp. 7–8.

⁶⁴ Roxanne L. Euben and Muhammed Qasim Zaman, introduction to *Princeton Readings in Islamist Thought: Texts and Contexts from al-Banna to Bin Laden*, ed. Roxanne L. Euben and Muhammed Qasim Zaman (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), p. 27.

religious authorities), one could return to the “pristine” religious doctrine which, it was believed, would be immediately applicable to the demands of the time.

These influential thinkers were part of a movement of “rebirth” or “renaissance” (*nahdah* in Arabic) that notably did not see everything Western as antithetical to Islam. *Nahdah* has been described as:

a vast political and cultural movement that dominate[d] the period of 1850 to 1914. The *nahdah* sought through translation and vulgarization to assimilate the great achievements of modern European civilization, while reviving the classical Arab culture that antedate[d] the centuries of decadence and foreign domination.⁶⁵

Of the 19th-century Islamist writers associated with this movement, one historian has written:

Muslim *nahdah* [renaissance] thinkers – most notably Rifa’ah R. al-Tahtawi, Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, and Muhammad ‘Abdu – basically postulated that a regeneration of Islam and an acceptance of the ‘positive’ features of the West [i.e., those responsible for Western political and economic success] were not at all incompatible.⁶⁶

The source of this confidence that Western civilization's politically and economically useful features could be absorbed without danger to the essence of Islam is not clear; it is similar, however, to trends in the thought of other non-Western societies which, in the course of the 19th century, faced the problem of having to confront Western political-military power while trying to stay true to their cultural traditions.

For example, in Japan, the technologist Sakuma Shozan (1811–1864), “in an effort to justify the technological changes that he realized were necessary, coined the slogan ‘Eastern ethics and Western science,’ a concept which, like its counterpart developed in China, was to prove comforting to a whole generation of modernizers.”⁶⁷ However, as Japan expert Edwin Reischauer has noted, “in practice, . . . no clear line could be drawn between the external aspects of Western civilization and its internal value system.”⁶⁸

⁶⁵ A. Laroui, *The Crisis of the Arab Intelligentsia: Traditionalism or Historicism?* (Berkeley: University of California, 1976), p. vii; cited in Abu-Rabi’, *Intellectual Origins of Islamic Resurgence in the Modern Arab World*, p. 6.

⁶⁶ Abu-Rabi’, *Intellectual Origins of Islamic Resurgence in the Modern Arab World*, p. 6.

⁶⁷ John K. Fairbank, Edwin O. Reischauer, and Albert M. Craig, *East Asia: Tradition and Transformation* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1973), p. 486.

⁶⁸ “Modernization in Meiji Japan,” (chapter attributed to Reischauer) in *ibid.*, p. 528.

Unfortunately, the Muslim world was not as successful as Japan (and China) in striking this balance and in assimilating Western knowledge. Instead, there was a greater emphasis on the differences between Islam and the West, and on the need to recreate political life on an Islamic basis.

The results of this failure to come to terms with modernity had its effect in the major early-20th-century effort to recreate political life on an Islamic basis, i.e., to posit Islam as the solution to the political, military, economic, and social ills of Muslim states and populations. The effort was centered in two areas: repartition India, where the journalist and public intellectual Mawlana Mawdudi advocated an Islamic state; and Egypt, where in the 1920s Hassan al-Banna founded the Muslim Brotherhood.

Mawdudi was a major figure in the Islamists' wholesale rejection of modernity and specifically the possibility of some sort of reconciliation between modernity and traditional Islam. He developed the theory that modernity as such represented a return to the pre-Islamic era of ignorance and idolatry, known in Arabic as *jahiliyya*:

... the theory of “Modern Jahiliyya” (that is, modernity as the New Barbarity) developed in India since 1939 by Maulana Maudoodi. He was the first Muslim thinker to arrive at a sweeping condemnation of modernity and its incompatibility with Islam,... The conclusion toward which Rashid Rida and other fundamentalists were slowly and hesitantly moving during the 1930s—that a compromise between modernity and Islam, vaguely hoped for till then, could not occur—was stated forcefully by Maudoodi.⁶⁹

Egypt saw the creation of the Muslim Brotherhood, the Islamist movement's oldest organization based on Salafist principles, i.e., the view that the guide to the political reconstruction of Muslim life should be the example of the *Salaf*, the Prophet's pious companions. Although earlier thinkers (such as the “reformer” Muhammad Abduh) had spoken of the necessity of going back to the *Salaf* (and in the process jettisoning centuries of learned commentary and tradition), they concentrated on intellectual argumentation and had not formed mass organizations to promote this view. According to Islamic scholar Hillel Fradkin, the Brotherhood was the first “formal and organized expression of Islamism or Salafism. It is certainly the oldest conceived of as a mass and ultimately worldwide movement . . . It is today an impressively widespread

⁶⁹ Emmanuel Sivan, *Radical Islam: Medieval Theology and Modern Politics*, enlarged edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), pp. 22–23.

movement, having at this point, many branches in both Muslim countries and Muslim minority communities in other countries.”⁷⁰

Indeed, recent attempts to base politics on Islamic principles have grown out of Muslim Brotherhood efforts. In 2006, the Muslim Brotherhood's Palestinian branch, Hamas, won the legislative elections under the Palestinian Authority, although the Palestinian Authority's president, Mahmoud Abbas, came from the rival Fatah group. In 2007, through a *coup de main*, Hamas took over control of Gaza, becoming the first Muslim Brotherhood organization to govern a territory and its population.

A corollary of the Mawdudi view of modernity as the new *jahiliyya* is that the modern, postcolonial states in the Muslim world are not in fact authentically Islamic. As long as the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood could unite with other Egyptians in the fight against the remnants of British imperialism that infected the Egyptian monarchy, this issue did not come to the fore; but once the anti-imperialist Nasser came to power, preaching pan-Arabism rather than Islam, it had to be faced.

Some within the Brotherhood accepted Nasser's Egypt as Islamic; they followed a Muslim tradition that cautions against judging another's faith:

It is not given to man, who does not see to the heart, to judge the veracity of another Muslim's faith, nor to declare him to be an apostate unless he had openly reneged on the credo.⁷¹

However, others judged freely and found Egypt wanting. The influential writer Sayyid Qutb, who became the Muslim Brotherhood's chief ideologist, promulgated a view similar to that of Mawdudi: the ostensibly Muslim society of Egypt, as well of as other Muslim countries, must be seen as un-Islamic. These countries were *jahili*, i.e., characterized by ignorance and idolatry similar to that of pre-Mohammed Arabia.

Qutb's rejection of this un-Islamic society was absolute. The task of true Muslims was to create a Muslim society in the place of the *jahiliyya* that reigned throughout the ostensibly Muslim world. The only question was how to bring a true Muslim society into existence. For Qutb, violence was, in principle, a legitimate method; a failure to choose violence would be due solely to prudential considerations.

⁷⁰ Hillel Fradkin, "The History and Unwritten Future of Salafism," *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology* 6 (2008): 6

⁷¹ Sivan, *Radical Islam*, p. 109; the passage gives the view of Hasan Hidaybi, the administrative leader of the Muslim Brotherhood in the 1950s and 1960s.

The Islamists' general turn towards violence was a result of various factors, most notably the severe repression that the Muslim Brotherhood suffered in Egypt under Nasser. At the same time, from the Islamist point of view, the situation was getting worse due to the mass media's increased penetration of society. In particular, the advent of television had a major impact, for it entered the home itself—that is, women and children became subject to cultural influences that it was hard for the father to control—and reached the illiterate part of the population. These factors militated for seeing violence as the only solution. [stop]

Characterizing the emerging view of the Egyptian and Syrian Muslim Brotherhoods in the 1970s, the scholar Emmanuel Sivan writes:

Furthermore, the ubiquitous modern challenge – especially the global village of the media and the pervasive state control – made the withdrawal [into a 'countersociety'] response less and less tenable, at least for all but tiny groups. Long-term educational efforts, designed to convert society segment by segment to 'true Islam,' has [sic] today even less prospect of success than when Sayyid Qutb began to doubt its efficacy as sole means thirty years ago, before the age of transistor radios, television, and the gigantic growth of the higher education system. Seizure of power from the hands of 'Mongol rulers' like Anwar Sadat and Hafez Assad thus came to be perceived as the only answer to the threat.⁷²

More generally, the activist view of Islam held by Muslim Brotherhood theoreticians like Sayyid Qutb argued for violence as a necessary tool:

Indeed, the Qur'an does not open its treasures to any but those who have accepted this spirit—the spirit that comes from awareness that knowledge is for action.⁷³

God's rule is established when His law is enforced and all matters are judged according to His revealed law. ... Nothing [conducting to the establishment of God's rule] is achieved through verbal advocacy of Islam. The problem is that the people in power who have usurped God's authority on earth will not relinquish their power at the mere explanation and advocacy of the true faith.⁷⁴

⁷² Ibid., p. 129.

⁷³ Sayyid Qutb, "Signposts Along the Road," in *Princeton Readings in Islamist Thought: Texts and Contexts from al-Banna to Bin Laden*, ed. Roxanne L. Euben and Muhammed Qasim Zaman (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), p. 141.

⁷⁴ Sayyid Qutb, "In the Shade of the Qu'ran," in *Princeton Readings in Islamist Thought*, ed. Euben and Zaman, p. 147.

Qutb reaches the conclusion that the forces-that-be in the non-Muslim world (meaning, in essence, the West) are inevitably and essentially hostile to Islam:

. . . It is the permanent state of affairs for truth to be unable to coexist with falsehood on earth. Hence, when Islam makes its declaration for the liberation of mankind on earth, so that they may serve only God alone, those who usurp God's authority try to silence it. *They will never tolerate it or leave it in peace.* Islam will not sit idle, either. It will move to deprive them of their power so that people can be freed of their shackles. This is the permanent state of affairs that necessitates the continuity of jihad until all submission is made to God alone.⁷⁵

The Role of the Wahhabis

The Nasserist crackdown on the Egyptian Brotherhood caused many of its leaders and intellectuals to flee to Saudi Arabia, where they were welcomed and incorporated into the kingdom's rapidly growing educational system and began their important interaction with Saudi Arabia's Wahhabi tradition.

Wahhabism arose in the Najd area⁷⁶ of what is now Saudi Arabia in the mid-18th century, and initially gained prominence when its founder, Muhammed ibn Abd al-Wahhab, made a politico-religious alliance with a local tribal leader in the town of al-Dir'iyya⁷⁷ by the name of Muhammed ibn Saud. This alliance served as the religious/ideological basis for conquest of central Arabia (Najd) by the Saudis and for further expansion in the region, including into the Hejaz, the region encompassing Mecca and Medina.

Wahhab was in essence a religious reformer, focused on the purification of Islam from what he regarded as illegitimate accretions over the years. In particular, he focused on the importance of belief in God's absolute unity. In his mind, such practices as building a shrine over the grave of a holy man represented a serious denigration of God's unity, for it implied that the worshipper could become closer to God by means of some quality of the dead holy man.⁷⁸ This was, in Wahhab's mind, the sin of idolatry or "associationism" (*shirk*), that is, regarding something or someone as sharing in God's divinity. Similarly, calling on any being other than God for help constituted

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 152 (emphasis added.)

⁷⁶ Located in central Arabia, the Najd was a poor desert area, isolated from the more cosmopolitan areas of the Hejaz on the Red Sea (where the holy cities of Mecca and Medina are located) and the Persian Gulf. It was never incorporated into the Ottoman Empire, whose sultans evidently saw it as not worth conquering.

⁷⁷ Al-Dir'iyya is near present-day Riyadh.

⁷⁸ For example, one of Wahhab's first public acts was the destruction of a dome over the grave of one of the Prophet's companions. David Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, Library of Modern Middle East Studies 50 (London: I. B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 2006), p. 18.

associationism, for one should rely only on God. According to historian of Wahhabism David Commins, a “large portion of Wahhabi discourse focuses on listing acts that constitute shirk.”⁷⁹

Because of the prevalence of such—to his mind—idolatrous practices in the Muslim world of his time, Wahhab believed that true Islam had become endangered.⁸⁰ He insisted that “proclaiming, understanding and affirming that God is one do not suffice to make one a Muslim”; it is also necessary to “explicitly deny any other object of worship.”⁸¹ In Wahhab’s view, most of his nominally Muslims contemporaries failed the second part of that test.

The crucial *hadith*⁸² for Wahhab goes as follows: “Whoever affirms that there is no god but God and denies all other objects of worship, safeguards his blood, property and fate with God.” From this, Wahhab concluded that merely affirming the unity of God (as in the traditional Muslim affirmation of faith) is insufficient. Hence, the typical Wahhabi negative posture toward any form of Islamic religiosity regarded as insufficiently austere with respect to God’s unity. The Wahhabi reputation for intolerance is rooted here. According to Commins:

It would be only a slight overstatement to assert that most of the animosity between Wahhabis and other Muslims boils down to this single question of what exactly makes one’s life and property inviolable to attack.⁸³

Wahhab’s politico-religious alliance with Muhammed ibn Saud provided the religious justification for the conquest of most of Arabia by ibn Saud and his descendants. After the Saudis conquered the Holy Cities at the beginning of the 19th century, the Ottoman Empire reacted, retaking the Hejaz and destroying the first Saudi regime in 1818.

The Wahhabi-Saudi alliance had various ups and downs; the current Saudi kingdom began in the early 20th century, when Abdulaziz ibn Saud (the father of the current King Abdullah) reconquered his family’s original territories in the

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 13. Wahhab’s understanding of the unity of God made him particularly hostile to the Shi’a sect within Islam. He regarded the Shi’a attribution of special status to Caliph Ali (Mohammed’s son-in-law) and to his descendants (the line of imams, the 12th of whom went into “occultation” in the 10th century, and whose reappearance will usher in an age of justice) as the worst kind of associationism, in this case the attribution to human beings of some sort of divine status.

⁸⁰ In particular, Wahhab believed that the Ottomans had departed grievously from the true faith. While Wahhabism arose at the time when the Ottoman Empire was beginning its period of decline, it is unclear whether this played a role in the development of Wahhabism, i.e., whether Wahhab believed that the political decline was due in any way to the Ottomans’ religious failings.

⁸¹ Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission*, p. 14.

⁸² A *hadith* is an accepted report of something the Prophet said; in terms of authoritativeness, it ranks just below the text of the Qur’an itself.

⁸³ Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission*, p. 14.

Najd and then was able, over the succeeding decades, to spread his rule over the rest of what is now Saudi Arabia.

Despite its theological radicalism, Wahhabism was traditional in one important respect: it retained the longstanding Sunni view that the individual is bound to obey any ruler, no matter how lacking in virtue and piety, as long as he does not prohibit observance of Islam. This view was strengthened by the nature of the Wahhabi-Saudi alliance, in which the Wahhabis pledged political allegiance to the Saud family in return for the latter's political support in spreading their doctrine. As one observer of the Saudi religious scene has noted,

Ignoring Islamic political thought has been a feature of [Wahhabism] since its inception . . . Similar to other eighteenth-century movements, it was concerned above all with religious rather than political reforms.⁸⁴

Arising in central Arabia, an area remote from the major centers of Islamic civilization in such cities as Istanbul, Baghdad, Damascus, and Cairo, Wahhabism might have remained a rather marginal development, except for one important event: the discovery and exploitation of the huge oil fields in Saudi Arabia and the neighboring Gulf states. The resulting revenues enabled the propagation of this doctrine throughout the Muslim world: estimates of the amount of money spent on this effort run as high as \$70 billion for the last decades of the 20th century.⁸⁵

The Interaction of Wahhabism and Islamism

As noted, the repression the Muslim Brotherhood suffered under the pan-Arab Nasserist regime in Egypt (and under the Ba'athist regime in Syria) resulted in the migration of many of its members to Saudi Arabia, which welcomed them as allies in what was seen as a struggle between traditional Islam and newly popular nationalist/secularist/socialist ideas. On the side of traditional Islam there came together two strains of thought—the religious fanaticism and intolerance of Wahhabism and the political vision and ambition of Islamism. There were indeed important points of similarity: for example, Wahhabism and Qutb's Islamism shared the radical belief that today's "Muslims are living in a jahili condition and hence are idolaters,..."⁸⁶

However, there were also important points of difference. The Islamists' political ambition to mobilize the Muslim world against Western political and cultural incursions tended to make them more tolerant of traditional Muslim

⁸⁴ Madawi al-Rasheed, *Contesting the Saudi State: Islamic Voices from a New Generation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 47

⁸⁵ Laurent Murawiec, *Princes of Darkness: The Saudi Assault on the West* (Lanham MD: Rowan & Littlefield, 2005), p. 43.

⁸⁶ Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission*, p. 148.

beliefs and practices: in their view, only an explicit denial of the Muslim faith sufficed to make one an apostate. Furthermore, in building Muslim political strength for this effort, technology and other forms of knowledge could be borrowed freely.

The Wahhabis, on the other hand, traditionally saw the “impure” practices and beliefs of other Muslims (especially the Ottomans) as the chief threat to religious rectitude. And, being less concerned about mobilizing the Muslims against the West, they did not see as great a need to exploit Western technology; indeed, as late as 1965, the introduction of television to Saudi Arabia created a huge controversy, one that led indirectly to the assassination of King Faisal in 1975.

In all events, the official Wahhabi *ulema* (the body of Muslim scholars recognized as having specialist knowledge of Islamic law and theology) has retained its loyalty to the Saudi monarchy, and tends to overlook not only the royal family's deviations from the Islamic behavioral code (for example, its extravagant lifestyle, especially evident during frequent sojourns in Europe and America) but also its willingness to depend on infidel powers (first Britain and then the United States) for its security.

The monarchy's willingness to allow U.S. troops on Saudi soil to protect the kingdom against Iraq, in the aftermath of Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait in August 1990, became the primary catalyst for Usama bin Laden's decision to focus his terrorist activity against the “far enemy,” i.e., the United States, rather than against the (in his view) un-Islamic governments of the Muslim countries. In this, he reflected more the anti-Western animus of the Islamists and their political passions than the Wahhabi concern for doctrinal purity, although both traditions are present in his doctrine.

The stationing of U.S. troops on Saudi territory also crystallized a challenge to the official Wahhabi *ulema* that had arisen in the 1980s from a group of Saudi clerics known as the Sahwa, or Awakening. As Stéphane Lacroix, a French student of Saudi Arabia, explains,

Ideologically, the Sahwa could be described as a hybrid of Wahhabism and the ideology of the Brotherhood. On theological questions connected to creed and on the major aspects of Islamic jurisprudence, the Sahwis adhered to the Wahhabi tradition and considered themselves its faithful heirs. But on political and cultural questions, their view of the world

tended toward that of the Muslim Brotherhood, although it was partly reformulated in terms derived from the Wahhabi tradition.⁸⁷

Although this movement was repressed in the 1990s, its growth seems to reflect a certain lack of moral authority on the part of the traditional Wahhabi *ulema* among the Saudi populace, perhaps as a result of its having become too identified with the political regime. While the 2003–04 al Qaeda terrorist attacks on Saudi soil no doubt dampened the ardor of some of Sahwa’s adherents, they nevertheless suggest that the traditionally apolitical stance of the Wahhabi clerics may be challenged in the future.⁸⁸

Radical Islamism among the Shi’a

The discussion so far has dealt with developments among Sunni Muslims, from the early stirrings of a “revivalism”—directed at dealing with the political-military weakness of the Muslim world—to the rise of al Qaeda. A parallel development has occurred in the Shi’a world, where the key event was the Iranian revolution of 1978–79, which led to the formation of the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI).

The IRI is based on a major innovation in Shi’a theology, i.e., the theory of the *veleyat e-faqih* (rule of jurispudent), according to which a prominent Shi’a cleric becomes the preeminent power in the society, ruling, in a sense, as a proxy for the absent imam.⁸⁹

The IRI has been arguably the most successful Islamist political enterprise, although the disturbances surrounding the disputed June 2009 presidential election and the current rift between Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei and President Ahmadinejad have called into question its longer-term stability.

⁸⁷ Stéphane Lacroix, *Awakening Islam: The Politics of Religious Dissent in Contemporary Saudi Arabia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), p. 52. Bin Ladenism represents the extreme of the Sahwa tendency.

⁸⁸ “If the prospect of a new ‘Islamist insurrection’ seems improbable in the short term, it cannot be excluded in the medium term. For that reason, [as well as others] the Saudi Islamists—and the Sahwa—will remain central actors on the kingdom’s political stage for years, and possibly decades, to come.” Lacroix, *Awakening Islam*, p. 270.

⁸⁹ According to “mainstream” (“Twelver”) Shi’ism, the 12th Imam, a descendant of Caliph Ali (the son-in-law of the Prophet and, in the Shi’a view, the first rightful ruler following the death of the Prophet), went into “occultation” or hiding a thousand years ago, thus depriving the Islamic world of its rightful ruler. The return of this imam will usher in a period of justice; in the meantime, the traditional Shi’a view had been that all political rule was necessarily defective. Ayatollah Khomeini’s theory of the rule of the jurispudent is a major shift in belief, in that it argues that a fully legitimate political regime is possible even before the return of the Hidden Imam.

In any case, the immediate effect of the Iranian revolution on the Muslim world was great, and the IRI, under its first leader, Ayatollah Khomeini, embarked on a program of “exporting” its revolution. Its major success has been among the Shi’a population of Lebanon, where its creation Hezbollah has evolved into an integrated political and military movement. That organization is now a major (arguably, the preeminent) political force in the country and commands the strongest military force (outclassing the Lebanese army.)

The advent of Islamist governance in Iran set off alarm bells throughout the Muslim Middle East, where autocratic regimes, either monarchic or “republican,” worried that they might face the fate of the former Shah of Iran. Most notably, Saudi Arabia reacted by burnishing its own Islamic credentials by stepping up its efforts to promulgate Wahhabi doctrine among Muslim populations worldwide.

Islamism and the Arab Spring

The electoral victories of Islamist parties in Tunisia and Egypt in the wake of the Arab Spring open a new chapter in Islamism's history. The transition from oppressed opposition to empowerment and responsibility represents a “rendezvous with reality” for Islamism. It is far too early to gauge how effective the Islamist parties will be in exercising political authority and how their experience will affect their ideology. For example, tensions between the Muslim Brotherhood and more hard-line Salafists in Egypt suggest the possibility of fluidity and change in the Brotherhood’s stance toward democracy. American and other Western policymakers will undoubtedly see diplomatic relations with Islamist-led regimes in these countries as opportunities for encouraging Islamists to open avenues for greater cooperation with the United States and for shedding the view that America and the West are inevitably hostile to Islam. It remains to be seen whether such interactions will tend more to soften the Islamists' views of the West or the Westerners' views of Islamism.

National Security Threats Posed by Islamist Extremism

U.S. officials need to concern themselves with the development of Islamism because of the threats Islamist extremism poses to American national security. We can begin with the following statement from the *National Security Strategy* issued in 2010:

. . . There is no greater threat to the American people than weapons of mass destruction, particularly the danger posed *by the pursuit of nuclear weapons by violent extremists* and their proliferation to additional states.⁹⁰

While nuclear terrorism is the most dramatic example of the threat posed by radical Islamism, it is far from the only one. Radical Islamism poses a series of important challenges to U.S. national security interests.

The primary component of the challenge is indeed terrorism. The following judgment, from the Bush administration's *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism*, remains true today:

. . . The principal terrorist enemy confronting the United States is a transnational movement of extremist organizations, networks, and individuals—and their state and non-state supporters—which have in common that they exploit Islam and use terrorism for ideological ends.⁹¹

The notion of a “movement” linking various organizations, both state and nonstate, and individuals is important. The Obama administration’s view that “we are at war with a specific network, al-Qa’ida, and its terrorist affiliates who support efforts to attack the United States, our allies, and partners”⁹² is too narrow to cover the entire terrorist threat posed by radical Islamism.

Consider, for example, the case of Major Nidal Hasan, the Army doctor who murdered thirteen people, including fellow soldiers, at Fort Hood in November 2009. There doesn’t appear to be any evidence to tie Major Hasan *organizationally* to al Qaeda.⁹³ Nevertheless, he is clearly part of the “transnational movement” referred to above.

⁹⁰ *National Security Strategy* (Washington, DC: White House, May 2010), p. 4 (emphasis added). The use of the euphemism “violent extremists” reflects the Obama Administration’s uneasiness with recognizing any link between terrorist actions and the religion on behalf of which the terrorists claim to be acting.

⁹¹ *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism* (Washington, DC: White House, September 2006), p. 5.

⁹² *National Security Strategy*, May 2010, p. 20. The notion of being “at war” with al Qaeda affects issues such as the legitimacy of the use of force and of the detaining without trial of enemy combatants. The term “war,” however, is consistent with a broader definition of the ideological opponent.

⁹³ His spiritual guide was Anwar al-Aulaqi, an American-born Islamic cleric who preached terrorism from his base in Yemen. While Aulaqi was described by the U.S. government as a “leader” of al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, it is not clear how far back this affiliation went. In any case, there does not appear to have been much about his activities that would have required such an organizational connection, as his main activity appeared to be preaching. See the Department of Justice motion “Opposition to Plaintiff’s Motion for Preliminary Injunction and Memorandum in Support of Defendants’ Motion to Dismiss,” September 24, 2010, p. 5, in the case of *Aulaqi v. Obama* (Civ. A. No. 10-cv-1469 (JDB)). On September 30, 2011, Aulaqi was killed in Yemen by a missile fired from an American unmanned aerial vehicle. Peter Finn, “Secret U.S. Memo Sanctioned Killing of Aulaqi,” *Washington Post*, September 30, 2011, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/aulaqi-killing-reignites-debate-on-limits-of-executive-power/2011/09/30/gIQAx1bUAL_story.html (accessed March 12, 2012).

That movement includes not only al Qaeda and associated organizations, but also other Sunni terrorist groups (e.g., Lashkar e Taiba) and Shi'a terrorist groups (e.g., Hezbollah). An extreme Islamist ideology can properly be seen as the movement's *center of gravity*, for it enables the movement to attract recruits and material support and induces its members to mount terrorist attacks even without clear "command and control" ties to other parts of the movement.

A secondary component of the challenge is the potential weakening of existing liberal democratic societies with large Muslim populations, if those populations—influenced by radical Islamism—resist adopting democratic values. This appears to be a greater threat to our Western European allies than to the United States. As such it could seriously weaken the ability of the United States and NATO to partner with the European Union. It could also weaken our ability to cooperate strategically with key players in East and South Asia such as Indonesia and India.

A third component of the challenge is the danger that radical Islamist ideology may influence Muslim-majority countries to follow anti-Western foreign policies. While today the terrorist threat comes primarily from the "transnational movement" as described above, there is the possibility (already realized in the Islamic Republic of Iran) of a radical Islamist state whose paramilitary forces (such as the Qods Force of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps) use asymmetric tactics against us. This threat would be compounded if Iran were to become a nuclear weapons state or if radical Islamists were to gain control of other states (including, possibly, nuclear-weapon states). (While such a state or states would have nonideological assets that we could hold at risk or attack, it would still be necessary to focus on weakening their ideological basis as well.)

These challenges relate to American security interests as well as political interests. And the actions the United States might take in response could include military, law-enforcement, and financial regulatory means. This doctrinal statement concerns itself with countering radical Islamism on the ideological plane. Hence, its definition of the ideology to be countered may be broader than the definition of the enemy threat that the United States may want to combat by means of military action, law enforcement, and financial regulation. We may want to confront certain actors ideologically without any thought of using other means against them.

Strategy for Addressing the Problem

A strategy of countering hostile ideologies differs from public diplomacy and strategic communications. The strategy's objective is to weaken the hostile ideology's appeal. By contrast, the traditional objectives of public diplomacy and of strategic communications are typically understood in terms borrowed from the

advertising industry: improving the American “brand”—that is, promoting understanding of, and increasing support for, American principles and policies and combating anti-Americanism.

In general, the objective of weakening the appeal of Islamist extremism can be pursued in two ways: by increasing the appeal of other (“moderate”) understandings of Islam that compete with it, and by discrediting radical Islamism and its spokesmen.

While Islamism is, as we have discussed, a political ideology, it nevertheless claims to be the correct interpretation of the religion of Islam. Thus, any alternatives to it—whatever political, social, or economic advantages they may offer adherents—must contest its claim to be the correct interpretation of Islam. They have to put forward their own interpretations. Otherwise, the alternative understandings would appear to be opportunistic at best or even impious. They would seem to be in the position of suggesting that believers abandon their faith in return for material rewards—not a winning strategy.

It would be awkward, and could be counterproductive, for the U.S. government to be involved directly in a debate between competing understandings of Islam. An effective ideological challenge to Islamist extremism would have to come from other Muslims. There may be various options for mounting this challenge, and the U.S. government need not choose among them. Rather, the U.S. role would be to support a variety of non-Islamist voices within the Muslim world in order to facilitate their making their arguments effectively. The articulation of these arguments is particularly important because, as we have noted, for at least three decades, Islamism has essentially had the ideological field to itself.

Supporting Alternative Views of the “Way Forward” for Muslim Societies

While the traditional organs of U.S. public diplomacy can continue to propagate a positive message based on U.S. principles, this message may not on its own carry much weight with populations likely to see “Western values” as an affront to their own culture, i.e., as a continuation of the colonial/imperialist project. An organization designed to counter hostile ideologies should focus on helping those Muslims who disagree with the radical Islamist view propagate their own views on how Muslim societies should develop, including what role Islam should play in society and how Islam should be understood.

If this analysis is correct, then weakening the appeal of radical Islamist ideology should be the primary objective of any strategic communications effort. From this perspective, understanding the goal as “improving the American ‘brand’” is an inefficient and perhaps even counterproductive way to proceed.

It is inefficient and counterproductive because convincing Muslims to “like” America isn’t necessary for our national security. What we really want is for them to reject an ideology that makes attacking America permissible and even desirable. We might wish that pious Muslims did not dislike certain features of American life and politics, but whether they change their views isn’t of great importance to us.

Moreover, a strategy that requires convincing people to look favorably on a way of life that seems foreign and even repellent to them creates an uphill struggle. No one wants to be told that a significant part of his own identity should be sacrificed, even for the sake of gaining other things that he recognizes as good.

Instead, a strategic ideas campaign should focus on what is after all its key objective: weakening Islamist extremism, an ideology that justifies and motivates violence against us and seeks to convince Muslim populations that hostility toward us is their religious duty. This can most effectively be done if the counterarguments come from within the Muslim world itself, so that embracing them does not require Muslims to agree to something “foreign” to their tradition and threatening to their identity. The goal should be to help Muslims develop and propagate alternative views concerning the paths Muslim countries should take, and to ensure there is a vigorous debate and that other opinions are well represented. We should be helping to amplify the alternative voices and doing what we can to weaken or discredit the extremist ones.

How such a strategy might be carried out is discussed below.

Discrediting Islamist Extremists

In addition to supporting the propagation of non-Islamist visions of the Muslim future, a strategic ideas campaign should also seek to discredit Islamist extremists themselves. There have been numerous cases in which terrorist actions have harmed Muslim interests and values. Highlighting these cases can make useful points without U.S. officials having to criticize the action directly. For example, efforts to provide assistance to Muslim victims of terrorist acts perpetrated by other Muslims can be publicized, as can examples of Muslim populations turning against Islamist extremist violence.

Another way to discredit Islamist extremists is for traditional public diplomacy platforms to offer cultural programming that showcases aspects of traditional Islamic culture under attack by extremists (these include music, Sufi poetry, and even the traditional schools of Islamic law). For example, in March 2009, when the Pakistani Taliban destroyed the shrine of the revered Pashtun poet Rahman Baba, Voice of America and other platforms could have run programs

about his poetry, thus highlighting the extent to which the terrorists are detached from, and a threat to, various traditional aspects of Islamic culture.⁹⁴

Minimizing the “Taint” of U.S. Government Involvement

One implication of the strategy under discussion is that, in many fields, action by the private sector, not the U.S. government, may be more effective. Officials should find ways to make U.S. government involvement as discreet and indirect as possible. The issue goes beyond ordinary sensitivities about “foreign interference;” U.S. officials as such cannot speak with credibility about religious matters, especially with respect to a religion with only a small number of adherents within the United States.

Regardless of the structure of the organization responsible for the strategic ideas campaign, operational activity should be pushed out as far from the U.S. government as possible, and should make use of private organizations and nonpolicy government organizations (such as the United States Institute of Peace, National Endowment for Democracy, or the Wilson Center) where possible. In addition, other private organizations (both federally funded and otherwise) should be encouraged to support programs that would advance the overall strategy, such as holding conferences, supporting publications and broadcast media, providing fellowships, etc.

Top-level U.S. officials have not generally made major efforts to provide such encouragement. Private organizations have the capability to act more effectively and credibly than officials agencies can, and have enormous financial resources at their disposal that can significantly augment the congressionally appropriated funds available for the effort. The challenge for U.S. officials in this area is to spur useful private activity without in any way trying to exercise control that would undermine the private organizations' independence.

In addition, the organization should establish liaison relationships internationally, both with foreign governments and private organizations. The association with foreign groups and governments could help reduce the “taint” of U.S. government involvement, and would bring with it a wealth of experience gained in other countries in the fight against extremist Islamist violence and in the “deradicalization” of former members of terrorist groups.

Specific Methods for Implementing the Strategy

This section examines the types of activities that, being most relevant to the ideological struggle, would constitute the focus of any organization established to

⁹⁴ See Douglas J. Feith and Justin Polin, “Radio-Free Swat Valley,” *New York Times*, March 30, 2009.

counter hostile ideologies. This listing includes activities that are currently being carried out to counter extremist Islamism by governments and nongovernmental organizations, but also includes other possible activities that appear worthy of consideration.

This listing focuses specifically on the problem of countering hostile ideologies. It is not a comprehensive catalog of activities that the U.S. government should undertake in the area of strategic communications. On the contrary, it assumes that other typical “public diplomacy” efforts—such as promoting liberal democracy and countering anti-Americanism by means of exchange programs, cultural events featuring American performers, etc.—would also be ongoing

Any U.S.-based organization, even if not officially part of the U.S. government, would have to overcome various anti-American notions to conduct these activities successfully. Most of the activities to counter the hostile ideology of extremist Islamism would involve supporting nonextremist Muslims, who are better positioned to make the antiextremist arguments to their fellow Muslims. However, some activities could be undertaken by U.S. government agencies as part of their public diplomacy or other strategic communications efforts.

Support for nonextremist Muslims could be conveyed via various mechanisms:

1. **A federally funded private organization.** A federally-funded private organization could be created on the model of the National Endowment for Democracy, a tax-exempt 501(c)(3) organization with a self-perpetuating board of directors, which receives the bulk of its funding from the U.S. Congress via the Department of State.
2. **A private international organization with affiliates in the U.S. and other countries.** Another approach would be the creation of an international organization by a group of prominent U.S. and foreign citizens. Especially if it could obtain funding from foreign governments or other foreign sources as well as from the United States, an international organization might have greater credibility than a U.S. organization would.
3. **Private foundations, universities, or other organizations, acting independently of the U.S. government.** Private foundations, universities, or other similar organizations could be encouraged by U.S. government officials to undertake activities of this type, with the understanding that they would act only on the basis of their own objectives and in accordance with their own procedures. In addition to encouragement, U.S. officials could offer suggestions for possible activities, but the actual decisions would be taken by the organizations independently.

4. **U.S. government entities.** Finally, U.S. government entities with responsibilities in the areas of public diplomacy (primarily the under secretary of state for public diplomacy and public affairs) and strategic communications (primarily the Defense Department's regional and functional commands) could undertake some of these activities as well

The following list of possible activities is meant to illustrate the wide number of approaches that could be adopted. Creative individuals will no doubt develop other methods as well.

Entertainment

Various forms of entertainment can have significant effects on public opinion on a range of social and political issues. In many countries, movies and television are a predominant means of influencing opinion. As a result of the global reach of American entertainment media, American influence is already being felt, but all too often not in a positive manner—for example, many foreigners' view of the United States is distorted by the prevalence of violence and promiscuous sex in the popular culture.

These same entertainment formats, however, could be used to convey positive messages undercutting the Islamist extremist narrative. For example, dramas and soap operas can deal with important themes: women's rights, the negative effects of terrorist violence, the difference between pious and devout religious leaders and preachers of hatred, and so forth.

Programs of this sort already exist in the Middle East. For example, during Ramadan in 2008, the Saudi-owned Middle East Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) aired a soap opera called "Noor," a Turkish program dubbed into colloquial Arabic. The program, which broke many taboos (for example, characters engage in premarital sex and drink wine with dinner), was immensely popular; according to an MBC survey, the finale drew 85 million viewers including, it is estimated, half of the adult women in the Arab world. For our purposes, of greatest interest is that the show portrays the male lead treating his wife as an equal and supporting her pursuit of career goals. Although the Arab world sees many Western TV programs, this one, perhaps because it took place in a Muslim context, appeared to have a greater impact.⁹⁵

⁹⁵ Robert F. Worth, "Arab TV Tests Societies' Limits with Depictions of Sex and Equality," *New York Times*, September 27, 2008; Nahlah Ayed, "A Veritable Soap Opera, Onscreen and Off," *CBCNews*, September 15, 2008, http://www.cbc.ca/news/reportsfromabroad/middleeast/2008/09/a_veritable_soap_opera_onscreen_1.html (accessed March 12, 2012).

Humor and satire can also be effective means of conveying ideas, especially given the possibilities for ridiculing the pomposity, hypocrisy, and incompetence of many radical Islamists.⁹⁶ Self-important people are always good targets for this type of treatment, and the preachers of Islamist extremism are no exception.

The possibilities for comedy may be wider than is typically recognized. For example, a comedy program broadcast in Saudi Arabia during Ramadan, *Tash Ma Tash* (“No Big Deal”), recently produced an episode which parodied polygamist practices in that country by presenting a woman, already married to four husbands, who wants to marry a fifth.⁹⁷

Music also has a role to play in influencing public opinion. Popular music programs can attract audiences to media that can convey other messages as well. This was the premise behind VOA’s Radio Sawa (in Arabic) and Radio Farda (in Farsi).⁹⁸ More importantly, making popular music available can help undermine the authority of versions of Islamism that attempt to ban most or all forms of music on religious grounds, as happened in Taliban-ruled Afghanistan. Despite the existence of traditional forms of music in many Muslim countries, some Islamists regard music as un-Islamic. This tends to be an unpopular view; thus, supporting traditional music and musicians in Muslim countries can help to undermine support for Islamism.

In addition, of course, songs can convey messages through their lyrics. According to the journalist who covers the popular music scene for the French newspaper *Le Monde*, in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 many of the French Muslim rappers rejected al Qaeda’s view of Islam in favor of a more tolerant understanding of the religion.⁹⁹ It is not clear if their views ever affected their music, but rap lyrics would be one way to reach an important population that might not be otherwise accessible.

The development of entertainment programs as described above could be supported directly by the U.S. government, or simply encouraged by it. Two

⁹⁶ See, for example, J. Michael Waller, “Ridicule: An Instrument in the War on Terrorism,” Public Diplomacy White Paper No. 6, Institute of World Politics, Washington, DC, February 9, 2006, http://www.iwp.edu/news_publications/detail/ridicule-an-instrument-in-the-war-on-terrorism (accessed March 12, 2012).

⁹⁷ <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2010/08/26/117678.html> (accessed March 12, 2012).

⁹⁸ These two enterprises have been perceived by some as failing to live up to this premise; that is, not taking advantage of the programs’ popularity to provide significant and relevant content to listeners. In addition, one may wonder whether an audience attracted by popular music may not simply “tune out” other content, much as listeners to radio stations in the U.S. tune out advertisements. Nevertheless, the use of popular music in this manner may be a reasonable strategy.

⁹⁹ Stéphane Davet, “Les rappers musulmans rejettent la radicalisation de l’islam [French rappers reject the radicalization of Islam],” *Le Monde*, September 27, 2001.

television programs supported by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) mission in Kabul and aired on Afghan television demonstrate some of the possibilities, although neither was targeted directly against the Islamist narrative. The first program, which went on the air in 2009, is called “On the Road” and features a host who travels through Afghanistan speaking with ordinary people about development projects in their area. The program's purpose, according to the deputy director of USAID’s Afghanistan infrastructure office from 2004 to 2010, is “to promot[e] national unity and faciliat[e] the central government’s development partnership with the international community and the Afghan public.”¹⁰⁰ The second program, begun in 2010 with USAID support, is “Eagle Four,” a police drama showcasing a (highly successful, but unfortunately fictitious) special Afghan antiterrorist police unit.

These two programs were produced by a local Afghan TV station, itself originally set up with open USAID support, under contract to USAID. In other cases, money could be supplied in the form of grants to domestic or foreign producers or other artists.

Finally, it might be possible for U.S. government officials (or officials of a private federally funded organization set up to counter hostile ideologies) to suggest to private foundations or businessmen that they should seek ways of supporting or investing in the development of this type of media activity. While respecting the independence of the private organizations involved, government officials could encourage them to consider steps of this sort.

Education

In some parts of the Muslim world (for example, rural Pakistan), Islamist groups are the only providers of elementary education for most poor and middle-income children. If such education were available under state auspices, or under the auspices of nonextremist private groups, it could have a significant influence on the ideological outlook of the next generation. Nonextremist education at the secondary and university level, especially if it introduced students to the liberal tradition, could be similarly influential.

A U.S. organization could provide financial and other resources for governments or locally based nongovernmental organizations to improve non-Islamist educational opportunities. Among other things, it could work with U.S. or

¹⁰⁰ Jeremiah Carew, “Brought to You by the U.S. Government . . .” *Foreign Service Journal*, October 2010, pp. 22–25. Mr. Carew notes that, since the program was funded by means of a contract rather than a grant, Embassy Kabul has been able to exercise “significant control over the final production, a great advantage given the number of risks for the program in Afghanistan.” He further notes that, despite some initial concerns, the decision was made “to display a visible USAID tag line at the end of each episode to credit the U.S. government with bringing the show to viewers.”

other universities to provide textbooks and other educational materials, facilitate exchange programs with educational institutions in other Muslim countries and elsewhere, and provide programming materials via satellite television.

Finally, there are educational activities broadly conceived, such as translating and disseminating works of Western literature, including especially those from the liberal political, economic, and religious traditions, that could be undertaken. Online “American libraries” or websites that provide these resources would be efforts within the public diplomacy tradition that could have a positive and broad influence on ideology. The desire of people around the world to learn English could also be leveraged to provide language training that conveys appropriate content.

Creation of Alternative Social Structures

One tactic that some radical Islamist groups (e.g., Hezbollah and Hamas) have used to gain influence is to create a network of grassroots organizations that address various social problems. Somewhat in the manner of mafia dons in poor immigrant neighborhoods or old-time big-city political bosses, these groups gain popular support with well-publicized charitable endeavors.

To counter this tactic, a private U.S. organization could fund the creation of comparable non-Islamist civil society organizations. Offering an alternative to those of the Islamists, these organizations could build on other activities carried out by U.S. government departments and agencies, such as the pro-development activities of USAID or the disaster relief efforts of USAID and the armed forces. The U.S. armed forces' ability to react swiftly and effectively to such disasters as the Southeast Asian tsunami of 2004 and the Pakistan earthquake of 2005 had a positive, but fleeting, impact on perceptions of the United States. These favorable effects might have been magnified if these efforts had been leveraged to create ongoing civil society organizations that could address continuing problems in the affected areas.

Political Agitation

Another way to undercut radical Islamism would be by influencing the debate on political, social, and economic issues in a county or region. For example, there may be opportunities to give prominence to issues such as women’s rights, freedom of speech and press, and political freedom more generally, which are likely to have resonance with large parts of the population but which undercut the extremist narrative. .

There are numerous organizations throughout the world that would be suitable for undertaking this effort and therefore candidates for financial or other

material support. It may also be feasible to support the establishment of new groups. (The new organization tasked with countering hostile ideologies would presumably not have a role in providing support for pro-democracy and related political groups, as those groups can be supported by the National Endowment for Democracy and its affiliates.)

The new organization should also develop and disseminate information that undercuts the extremists' narrative. It could seek to undermine the credibility of leading radical Islamist figures, for example, by publicizing instances in which their personal lives do not comport with their own religious strictures. In addition, attention can be paid to specific acts of terrorism (for example, the attack on a Palestinian wedding party in Amman, Jordan, in 2007 or the destruction of mosques and Muslim shrines) that provoked widespread outrage at the time and that can provide an opportunity for fostering antiterrorist sentiments, including tolerance. Similarly, it could publicize the many examples of harshness and other negative phenomena (e.g., harsh punishments for trivial matters like listening to music) that occur in Iran, Sudan, Taliban-controlled regions of Afghanistan or Pakistan or in other areas under extremist Islamist rule.

Disseminating such information could be done by various channels, including, where feasible, media sponsored by the U.S. government. For example, following the Taliban's destruction of Rahman Baba's shrine, Voice of America, or another U.S.-sponsored radio or TV stations could have broadcast programs celebrating the poet's life and work and calling attention to the destruction of his shrine as an anti-Muslim act.

In addition, such information could be made available to non-U.S. media for public dissemination (without, however, concealing its origin). This type of activity would be similar to the type of "opposition research" carried out by political campaigns, which often seek to use media not associated with themselves to disseminate negative information about their opponents.

Religious/Theological debate

As important as the above types of activities are, at some point it would be necessary to deal with the religious/theological heart of the problem. Although Islamism is properly categorized as a political ideology, it nevertheless derives its appeal from its claim to be the correct interpretation of Islam. In fact, it deviates from traditional Islam in many important respects. However, in recent decades, it has managed to become a dominant interpretation (perhaps *the* dominant interpretation) of Islam within the Muslim world, in large part because those who

hold other views have been relatively silent, either through fear, lack of resources for carrying on the debate, or other reasons.¹⁰¹

Thus, one set of activities should be directed at invigorating debate within Muslim communities concerning the proper understanding of Islam under current circumstances. A wide range of non-Islamist voices—including traditional ones as well as “modernizing” or liberal ones—should be supported. The objective should be to convince Muslim populations, especially those segments most at risk of radicalization, that nonextremist understandings of Islam are preferable to radical Islamism, both in general but, most importantly, on specifically Islamic grounds.

This effort would involve traditional religious commentary and debate. A wide variety of nonextremist voices could be supported; the objective would not be to promote a given understanding of Islam, but rather to break the quasi-monopoly that the Islamists have held on the public debate. The objective would also be to raise certain important themes in this debate. These would include

- the compatibility of Islam and democracy and the refutation of the idea that democracy is antireligious in substituting the sovereignty of man for the sovereignty of God
- the impermissibility of terrorism, of killing other Muslims, and of killing ordinary people generally
- the appropriate religious qualifications for issuing *fatwas* (to demonstrate that many of the radicals who purport to issue them lack the appropriate clerical education and are hence not qualified to do so)
- the appropriate religious/political qualifications for declaring jihad (to demonstrate that terrorist leaders such as bin Laden are not qualified to do so)
- the correctness in terms of the Shi’a tradition of Ayatollah Sistani-style quietism and the heterodox nature of the Iranian doctrine of “rule of the jurispudent”

Despite the importance of countering the hostile ideology of Islamist extremism, too little progress has been made. What Charles Allen, former under secretary of homeland security for intelligence and analysis, noted in May 2008 is still true today: “Although the United States and other Western countries have

¹⁰¹ In addition, the “official” *ulema* in many Muslim countries have lost influence due to their being perceived as merely “mouthpieces” for unpopular authoritarian regimes.

counter radicalization initiatives underway, no Western state has effectively countered the al Qaeda narrative.”¹⁰²

This is not to say that there have been no significant positive developments. In September 2009 the leadership of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG), which had been affiliated with al Qaeda, issued a vigorous refutation of al Qaeda’s jihadist ideology.¹⁰³ Entitled “Corrective Studies in Understanding Jihad, Accountability and the Judgment of People,” the document “rejects ‘the use of violence in changing political situations’ in Muslim majority countries whose leader is a Muslim.”¹⁰⁴ While far from a complete repudiation of violence,¹⁰⁵ it nevertheless posed an important ideological challenge to which al Qaeda felt compelled to respond. A U.S. organization could have contributed to the effectiveness of this development by, for example, supporting the translation of this document and its wide dissemination among Muslim audiences.¹⁰⁶

More generally, identifying and supporting moderate individuals and organizations in this religious debate would be a major function of any organization dedicated to countering extremism. This support could take a wide variety of forms:

- funding (via grant, fellowship or contract)
- sponsorship of conferences that enable participants to address the wider public and to network among themselves

¹⁰² Charles Allen, speech to the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, May 6, 2008, http://www.dhs.gov/xnews/speeches/sp_1210107524856.shtm (accessed March 12, 2012).

¹⁰³ Frank J. Cillufo and F. Jordan Evert, *Reflections on Jihad: A Former Leader’s Perspective*, Homeland Security Policy Institute, October 16, 2009. <http://www.gwumc.edu/hspi/policy/ReflectionsOnJihad.pdf> (accessed March 12, 2012).

¹⁰⁴ See Quilliam Foundation, “A Selected Translation of LIFG Recantation Document,” trans. Mohammed Ali Musawi, Quilliam Foundation, London, 2009, p. 5, http://www.quilliamfoundation.org/images/a_selected_translation_of_the_lifg.pdf (accessed March 12, 2012).

¹⁰⁵ For example, it recognizes “Palestine, Iraq and Afghanistan [as being] amongst the places of jihad today.” Ibid, p. 18.

¹⁰⁶ Given that the document’s authors were imprisoned in Libya at the time, its authenticity and sincerity would have required careful scrutiny before it could be disseminated. In this case, the authors did not disavow the document after release from prison. According to the *Guardian*: “In February [2011], after the Benghazi uprising, former LIFG members created a new Islamic Movement for Change which expressed support for international intervention to remove Gaddafi. ‘The experiences of the LIFG leaders in armed conflicts in Afghanistan, Libya and Algeria have forced them to mature politically, recalculate strategically, moderate behaviourally, modify their ideological beliefs,’ said Omar Ashour, an expert on jihadi groups at Exeter University.” Ian Black, “The Libyan Islamic Fight Group—From al-Qaida to Arab Spring,” *Guardian*, September 5, 2011, available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/sep/05/libyan-islamic-fighting-group-leaders> (accessed March 12, 2012).

- support for the creation of publications (newspapers and other periodicals) or of TV and radio stations, to give greater visibility to non-Islamist voices
- funding of the translation and dissemination of existing anti-Islamist and anti-terrorist works

In many cases, this type of work could be undertaken in conjunction with efforts by other organizations, including friendly governments.

Training and Doctrine Function

This doctrinal statement is just a beginning. Fully developing and implementing a doctrine for an organization whose mission is the countering of hostile ideologies involves a great deal of effort in three main areas: basic research, current information collection, and training of officers.

Basic Research

The organization must ensure that it has access to and benefits from robust research on all aspects of Islamism and on the problem of countering its radical forms. This research should include the following:

- More precise definitions of categories of Islamist groups and the relationships among them.
 - o Assessments of the precise connection between specific problematic behaviors and the ideological beliefs of their perpetrators.
 - o Assessment of the key determinants of the radicalization process. Who is attracted to which groups, and why?
 - o Criteria for prioritizing groups and ideologies as to effort that should be devoted to countering them.
- Study of approaches and techniques for countering hostile ideologies, including historical research on past cases of successful ideological campaigns. Subjects of such research could include
 - o The ideological struggle against communism in the Cold War.
 - o Examples of the delegitimation of deeply entrenched institutions such as slavery and dueling.
 - o Lessons to be learned from other examples of philosophical “sea changes” such as the Enlightenment, environmentalism, and feminism.

- o Lessons to be learned from other countries' efforts at deradicalization of extremists.¹⁰⁷

This research could be conducted in a variety of locations, including private academic and other organizations with no U.S. government ties. The organization's research branch should make sure that the organization is aware of the results of this research. It should also sponsor relevant research and promote and facilitate interest in relevant questions by hosting conferences, etc. Consideration should be given to sponsoring (overtly) a scholarly publication along the lines of the former *Problems of Communism*, which the United States Information Agency published during the Cold War.

Collection of Current Information

In addition to a program of basic research, the organization will have to ensure that it may conduct adequate "open source" collection from Islamist publications, broadcasts, and websites. The U.S. Intelligence Community's Open Source Center does some of this work, but the organization will likely find that it needs to supplement those efforts with more extensive monitoring of Islamist media, including such specialized media as social networking sites.

While this monitoring capability would have to maintain close ties to the intelligence community, and should be able to receive relevant classified information from it, it should remain part of the organization charged with countering hostile ideologies. Islamists have shown themselves very adaptable in terms of making use of new communications technologies, and the organization will have to be equally flexible. While this flexibility is inherently difficult for any government agency, it can be facilitated by keeping the collection unit as close to its customers as possible.

¹⁰⁷ See, for example, Angel Rabasa, Stacie L. Pettyjohn, Jeremy J. Ghez, and Christopher Bouce, *Deradicalizing Islamist Extremists* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2010) for a discussion of deradicalization programs in various countries in the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and Western Europe.

Training of Officers

The organization, wherever it is located bureaucratically, should accept as one of its missions the creation and development of a corps of specialists in conducting strategic ideas campaigns. This implies providing adequate training opportunities and establishing a career path that enables an officer to specialize in the conduct of strategic ideas campaigns—and that rewards good performance with respect to it. (This latter point would require particular attention if the organization were part of a larger agency in which promotions were based on performance in other areas.)

In addition, the organization could sponsor outside research that would support its effort at planning and implementing strategic ideas campaigns, in the same way that the armed forces use the services of defense-related research organizations.

Conclusion

Islamist extremism is a political ideology related to the religion of Islam but it is not the same as the religion. The ideology propagates the idea that the West is inevitably hostile to Islam, an idea that can in turn serve to justify hatred of and violent struggle against the West.

There is a traditional disinclination on the part of U.S. officials to view national security threats in ideological terms. This disinclination has been especially pronounced in the case of Islamist extremism because of the understandable concern about appearing to oppose a religion. Yet there are compelling national security reasons to recognize Islamist extremism as a serious problem—not least because of the dangers of jihadist terrorism— and to develop strategy and doctrine to counter the ideology.

The most effective means to counter Islamist extremism is not through public diplomacy or strategic communications by U.S. officials. Rather it is through dialogue among Muslims. Americans interested in countering Islamist extremism face the question of how to organize efforts to stimulate and influence debates among Muslims. This is not a matter of “messaging.” Rather, it is an operational challenge, which this doctrine paper can help meet.

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