A Proposed Strategy to Fight Religious Fundamentalism

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Abstract

Religiously based terrorism has been at the center of the United States' counter-terrorism efforts for more than twenty years. What follows is an analysis of the role played by radical Islamist ideology in the perpetuation of jihadist violence and a discussion of what can be done to combat this ideology from a policy standpoint. In a strategy designed to prevent and mitigate the threat of jihadist violence, preempting the initial radicalization to jihadist ideology should be a primary focus. The goal of this strategy would be to deprive the militant jihadist movement of new recruits by attacking its sources of ideological proliferation while bolstering more desirable alternative perspectives.

Keywords: ISIS, intelligence, counter-terrorism, jihad, radicalization, online

Introduction

Terrorism is a tactic that has been employed throughout history by different groups with different agendas. It is a tactic that involves violence or the threat of violence for the purposes of achieving a political, social or religious objective. Terrorism seeks to obtain its objective by instilling fear on a large-scale fear that anyone can attack any target anywhere at any time. "Terrorism is where violence and politics intersect in the hope of delivering power. All terrorism involves the quest for power: power to dominate and coerce; to intimidate and control" (Saavedra, 2003: 14). Terrorism is designed to create power where there is none.

Religious terrorism has been at the center of the United States' counter-terrorism efforts for more than twenty years. Starting with the 1993 WTC bombing, attacks against the United States embassies

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in Africa, the bombing of USS Cole in Yemen and finally the tragedy on 9/11 put the Muslim fundamentalists on the radar. More specifically, what follows is an analysis of the role played by radical Islamist ideology in the perpetuation of jihadist violence and a discussion of what can be done combat this ideology from a policy standpoint. Of the 144 home-grown jihadist plots against the United States in the 15 years since 9/11, approximately 33% have taken place in the last year alone (House Homeland Security Committee, 2016). Not only has this threat persisted since 9/11, its magnitude has grown exponentially in recent years especially with the emergence of conflicts in Iraq, Syria and Nigeria. While 10,000 to 20,000 jihadists were trained in Al Qaeda camps in Afghanistan between 1996 and 2001 (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks, 2004), the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) currently features an army of 20,000 to 30,000 jihadists who have consolidated control in areas of Iraq, Syria, and Libya. Thousands of ISIS members hold Western passports, enabling them to travel freely between and within Europe and the United States (Flournoy and Fontaine, 2015). More than 250 Americans have traveled to Syria to join ISIS, which the terrorist group has inspired over 100 attacks against the West since 2014; 40% of the attacks were directed against the United States, easily making it the most frequently targeted nation; 81 ISIS-linked individuals have been arrested in the United States (House Homeland Security Committee, 2016). Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) enjoys more freedom to maneuver in Yemen, where civil war continues to destabilize the country. Indeed, according to Imam Abu al-Harith Omar bin Salem Bawazeer, head of an Islamic institute for Koranic and Sharia studies based in Mukalla, Yemen, "the military-heavy tactics of the U.S.-backed government in Sanaa are pushing people into the arms of militancy" (Iona, 2009).

The United States has cycled through multiple strategies in its search to counter the Islamic State's massive propaganda output and has generally lacked meaningful attention and requisite resources (Miller and Mekhennet, 2015). The only mention of Islam within the 2015 National Security Strategy reads as follows: "We reject the lie that America and its allies are at war with Islam" (The White House, 2015: 9). While this statement is certainly true, the strategy ultimately fails to accurately define the security landscape we currently find ourselves in — the same mistake made by the

Bush administration in the wake of 9/11. If anything, it has become a cliché statement in discussions of national security. Therefore, shortly after 9/11, the Office of Strategic Influence (OSI) was created for the purpose of combating the Jihadist ideology. Sabotaged by bureaucratic turf wars, however, the OSI was disbanded before any of its initiatives could be set into motion (Gough, 2003). The United States government has yet to effectively re-establish the agenda of the OSI which helps to explain why radical jihadism has only grown stronger since 9/11 despite over a decade of costly wars. There is, therefore, the need for the resurrection of the OSI with a renewed mission along with a comprehensive strategic plan. According to former U.S. Director of National Intelligence, Dennis C. Blair, "We are an adaptive, learning organization. We can and must outthink, outwork and defeat the enemy's new ideas" (2010, January 05). Specifically, the goal of this strategy is to deprive the militant jihadist movement of new recruits by attacking its sources of ideological proliferation while bolstering more desirable alternative ideologies. The examination that follows is devoted to offering a comprehensive strategy designed to mitigate and defeat radical jihadism.

Statement of the Problem: Radicalization in Islam

As the principal stakeholders in this urgent national security issue, the American people have voiced their growing concerns. According to the Pew Research Center, as of 2016, 40% of Americans believe terrorists' ability to launch another major attack in the United States is greater than it was on 9/11. In stark contrast, only 22% of Americans felt this way in 2002 (Pew Research Center, 2016). Not only do these statistics speak to the existence and severity of the jihadist threat, but to America's ineptitude at defeating, or even mitigating it in the years that followed 9/11. Since we cannot usefully isolate factors leading to terrorism with a ground-up perspective, it is more instructive to examine this from a top-down viewpoint. Terrorist organizations must be able to maintain a collective belief system and control the flow of information (Borum, 2004). Although all individuals that become radicalized do not ultimately become terrorists, all terrorists have become radicalized (Clutterbuck, 2015). Indeed, contemporary trends in terrorist violence suggest that organizational membership

is itself unnecessary for attacks to take place. In this regard, the collective belief system and flow of communication, or the ideology and its proliferation, has become the sine qua non, the centripetal force that binds an otherwise unaffiliated group of people.

The term 'jihad' is one of the most misinterpreted concepts both within the Muslim and the Western world. There is no single, universally accepted doctrine of jihad in Islam. Jihad is actually a misnomer to explain the suicide attacks as well, because the word in Islamic texts refers to one's inner struggle. By mid-1990s, this notion had been frequently used within the context of fighting for the sake of Allah, rather than one's fight against his/her desires. Over the years, "the word jihad has lost its holiness and retained only its military connotation" (Lewis, 2003: 37). One of the first modern proponents of such an interpretation was an Egyptian theorist named Sayyid Qutb, who was a Salafist, a practitioner of the Saudi brand of Islam known as Wahhabism — a puritanical 18th century doctrine that preaches strict adherence to Islamic values (Gendron, 2006). Qutb shunned those Muslims who narrowly conceived the idea of jihad in terms of national defense and he was adamant about the absence of geographic limitations on jihad — that "its sphere of action is the whole earth" (Qutb, 1964: 45). In addition to financial assistance, the Saudi monarchy supplied Mujahedeen training camps and affiliated madrassas with textbooks and religious scholars that promoted its Wahhabi doctrine (Fair and Rabasa, 2004), thereby injecting an aggressive jihadist ideology into a generation of militant Muslims. Indeed, during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Saudi mujahedeen battled alongside cadres inspired by Egyptian Muslims. In a way, the two dynamic forces came in to fill the vacuum caused in-fighting by merging their powers as well as with a new interpretation of Jihad (Van Biema and Crumley, 2003). Most importantly, by defeating the Soviet superpower, jihad was equipped with a "heady sense of power and self-confidence over what had been achieved and a driving desire to move on to other victories" (Rashid, 2002: 51).

Attempts to identify predictive factors for individuals who become jihadist militants have failed to reveal many actionable concrete patterns. Radical Islamist terrorists come from all walks of life. There is no "terrorist personality," nor is there any accurate profile – psychologically or otherwise – of the terrorist. People

become terrorists in different ways, in different roles, and for different reasons (Borum, 2004). However, most studies of terror groups have concluded that the groups' members are composed of people who are wealthier and better educated than the average member of the societies from which they come (Lee, 2011). Furthermore, most terrorists have been determined to be generally mentally stable individuals.

For the past three centuries, Islam has been on the defensive. The Christian, post-Christian civilization of Europe, and its subsequent colonial empires have "brought the whole world, including Islam, within its orbit" (Lewis, 2002). For those Muslim fundamentalists, this historic role reversal in power in world politics was seen as unacceptable and served as the foundation upon which modern jihadism bases its rage. In the following years, the ideas of combative jihad and anti-Americanism would soon converge because jihadists had characterized the United States as the modern-day crusader for the Western civilization.

By framing the 'War on Terror' as a 'war' on 'terror,' this was the expectation the United States created for itself — a decidedly unrealistic one. It set out to decisively conquer a tactic when it should have set out to defeat an ideology. Instead of defining its objectives with precision and accuracy, then-President Bush chose to frame American policy in the broadest of terms as a "crusade against evil" (Howard, 2001: 9). While such Manichean outlooks have been a staple of American rhetoric since the days of Woodrow Wilson, a poorer choice of words could hardly be imagined for this particular conflict; for it gave our enemy exactly what it sought: a chance to engage in a clash of civilization reminiscent of ancient times. In an abstract sense, it gave the terrorists the power they so desired. Eventually, the global radical Salafi jihad, for which Osama bin Laden's Al Qaeda once assumed the guardianship, became a worldwide religious revivalist movement, which sought to re-establish past Muslim glory in a great Islamic state stretching from Morocco to the Philippines. While Al Qaeda's status has been reduced in recent years, Salafi ideology has not. As a result, ISIS now carries the jihadist torch formerly held by Bin Laden's network. It adheres even more closely to Salafi teachings than did Al Qaeda.

Jihad through American Eyes

For decades, the United States Government was blissfully unaware of radical Islam's true nature. In 1957, President Eisenhower wanted to promote the idea of an Islamic jihad as a means to combat godless communism in the Middle East. In a national security meeting, Eisonhower told the Joint Chiefs of Staff and others that "(w)e should do everything possible to stress the 'holy war' aspect" (Weiner, 2007: 156). The spirit of this strategy was continued by the Reagan Administration via its support for the Mujahedeen in Afghanistan following the Soviet invasion in 1979. The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) committed support to a Pakistani initiative to recruit radical Muslims from around the world to come fight the Russians. Eventually thousands of jihadists were to have direct contact with Pakistan and Afghanistan, where, they established a lasting legacy of expert and experienced fighters, training camps and logistical facilities, and an elaborate trans-Islamic network of personal and organization relationships. Content to see the Soviets stumble, America was blissfully unconcerned with, if not unaware of what was transpiring — what it had helped create.

During the course of America's ill-defined War on Terror, countless Islamic extremists have been captured or killed. However, jihadist ideology, the ideas that attacked us on 9/11, has not been proportionally diminished. On the contrary, jihad is alive and well, perhaps stronger now than it was on the morning of September 11, 2001. This is not merely a statement of fact but an indictment on United States foreign policy in the years that followed 9/11. In a war of ideology, the enemy exists more in the hearts and minds of people than on the battlefield (Gough, 2003). America has failed to develop and put to use the tools necessary to adequately address the challenge of winning hearts and minds. America's over-reliance on military force calls to mind Maslow's Law of the Instrument: "if all you have is a hammer; everything looks like a nail." America has hammered away at the symptoms of jihadism with armed confrontation, and lacked the precision necessary to treat the root cause of the ideological disease — it has not attacked Salafi-jihadism at its source. To do this requires the use of different tools in support of a different approach.

Proposal for a New Strategy Combating against Jihadists

The strategy that follows rests on a fundamental truth: radical jihadism is a perversion of the Islamic faith. Though a tiny minority, radical jihadists exert a disproportionately large influence in the Muslim world because of the extensive networks they have established. The Muslim majority possess no such networks. They are largely isolated, their voices fractured or silenced (Fair and Rabasa, 2004). The religion of many has been hijacked by a few. The strategy that follows aims to rectify this dynamic. The United States needs to "be prepared to challenge the claim of Islamic extremists to speak for the larger Muslim community. This requires that it not shy away from addressing substantive religious issues" (Lord, 2004: 231). Therefore, in a strategy designed to prevent and mitigate the threat of jihadist violence, preempting radicalization to jihadist ideology should be a primary focus.

One of the objectives of this strategy is to shut off the wellspring of radical jihadism by attacking the sources of radicalization: radical madrassas, Internet propaganda/social media, radical clerics at local mosques, jihadist audio/video tapes and rhetoric circulating at study centers, schools and universities (Gendron, 2006). It aims to facilitate the production, dissemination of anti-jihadist publications and the development of anti-jihadist networks from within the Muslim community. As a nation, we must simultaneously work to silence the voices that promote violence and increase the voices that promote peace or, at the very least, a rejection of violence. Therefore, the main task is to promote the national security of the United States by strategically influencing the hearts and minds of a globally-positioned target audience. Consequently, it is proposed here that the 'new' Office of Strategic Influence (OSI) will be an inter-agency government body, coordinating and directing specific activities within elements of five government agencies: The Department of Defense (DoD), Department of State (DoS), Department of Justice (DoJ), Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). This new agency will develop an effective online strategy against the jihadist propaganda campaigns while adopting the following principles below, which were agreed by participant nations at the United Nations Leaders' Summit on Countering ISIL and Violent Extremism on September 29, 2015:

- "better understanding the drivers of violent extremism at the local and regional level
- countering the narratives of violent extremists who glorify violence and attempt to recruit and radicalize young men and women"

In late 2013, the United States and Turkey had agreed to create a $200 million fund to counter jihadist propaganda by "providing resources to offer vocational training in areas where youth are recruited into jihadist groups, and counter propoganda through educational programmes in schools and on the Internet" (International Business Times, 2013, September 27). Radical madrassas scattered throughout the Middle East and Central Asia imbue their students with fanatical interpretations of Islam and predispose them to joining militant organizations/causes if not recruiting them outright (PBS Frontline, 2001). In sum, this strategy targets specific objectives that the United States had failed to identify before 9/11 and has failed to effectively prioritize since.

Threat / Security Analysis

The information environment is comprised of three dimensions: the cognitive dimension, informational dimension, and physical dimension (Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2014). Jihadist ideology currently penetrates and threatens each of these dimensions in unique ways. Diverse information environment intelligence requirements demand the utilization of all collection methods. Table 1 below summarizes the data collection process as it relates to jihadist ideology and the points at which it threatens the information environment.

Table 1: Intelligence Gathering Methods on Jihadist Ideology

IE Dimension	Jihadist Threat	Type of Intelligence
Physical	Command and Control propaganda facilities	Human Intelligence (HUMINT) Open-Source Intelligence (OSINT) Signal Intelligence (SIGINT) Imagery Intelligence (IMINT)
	Strategic jihadist ideologues – radical clerics, imams, propaganda specialists, etc.	Human Intelligence (HUMINT) Open-Source Intelligence (OSINT)
	Jihadist print media	Human Intelligence (HUMINT) Open-Source Intelligence (OSINT)

	Jihadist Internet content	Open-Source Intelligence (OSINT)
Informational	Jihadist media structure	Human Intelligence (HUMINT) Open-Source Intelligence (OSINT) Signal Intelligence (SIGINT)
Cognitive	Public perceptions/decision-making ("hearts and minds")	Human Intelligence (HUMINT) Open-Source Intelligence (OSINT)
	Radical Religious/educational institutions	Human Intelligence (HUMINT) Open-Source Intelligence (OSINT)

Physical Dimension

The physical dimension is composed of command and control (C2) systems, key decision makers, and supporting infrastructure that enable individuals and organizations to create effects. The physical dimension includes, but is not limited to, human beings, C2 facilities, newspapers, books, microwave towers, computer processing units, laptops, smart phones, tablet computers, or any other objects that are subject to empirical measurement (Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2014). Jihadist threats within this dimension include:

- Islamic State Media Bureaus (Milton, 2016)
- Human propagandists, media specialists, radical clerics/imams
- Jihadist print media (books, pamphlets, magazines)

Informational Dimension

The informational dimension encompasses where and how information is collected, processed, stored, disseminated, and protected. Actions in this dimension affect the content and flow of information (Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2014). Jihadist threats in the informational dimension include:

- Jihadist Internet content (Social media accounts, blogs, forums, online magazines)
- Islamic State (IS) organizational media structure (Milton, 2016)

Cognitive Dimension

The cognitive dimension encompasses the minds of those who transmit, receive, and respond to or act on information. It refers to individuals' or groups' information processing, perception, judgment, and decision making. These elements are influenced by many factors, to include individual and cultural beliefs, norms, vulnerabilities, motivations, emotions, experiences, morals, education, mental health, identities, and ideologies (Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2014). Jihadist threats in the cognitive dimension include:

- The individual decision process for radicalization ("hearts and

minds")
- Promotion of radical interpretations of Islam in religious/educational institutions

Intelligence Gathering Aspect

Extracting data from the information environment will be accomplished using a variety of intelligence gathering disciplines. This process, known as "collection synergy" (Lahneman, 2008), will be directed towards identifying specific threats posed by jihadist ideology within each dimension of the information environment.

Physical Dimension Intelligence Gathering

The Islamic State (IS), currently the organizational vanguard of militant jihad, operates 33 media bureaus in Iraq, Syria, Libya, Yemen, Egypt, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, and the Caucasus region (Milton, 2016). These propaganda facilities are central components in the Islamic State's broad information strategy, as they flood the information environment with jihadist recruitment content intended to attract more adherents and galvanize existing ones. Information on these media bureaus is available via open source intelligence (Milton, 2016). However, the Islamic State's media facilities should be targeted with full-spectrum intelligence gathering methods. Human intelligence can yield detailed information on the inner workings/personnel/activities of these facilities. Imagery intelligence can provide evidence of physical vulnerabilities they may have. Signals intelligence could intercept media products before they would be accessible via Open Source Intelligence (OSINT). Human beings themselves also exist within the physical dimension. Beyond the use of human intelligence as a means to collect information on Islamic State command and control propaganda facilities, Human Intelligence (HUMINT) can be applied far more broadly as a means to identify individuals who, regardless of organizational affiliation with terror groups, threaten the information environment by inciting others buy in to jihadist ideology. Radical clerics, imams, and jihadist propaganda specialists should be identified and tracked via HUMINT collection operations. Moreover, physical content produced by these individuals should be targeted for collection operations including print media, pamphlets, fliers, etc.

Informational Dimension Intelligence Gathering

Extracting jihadist content from the Internet is a prime example of intelligence gathering within the informational dimension. In the modern world, the Internet represents the ultimate domain for information storage and dissemination on a large scale. Jihadist ideologues have taken full advantage of the power the Internet gives them with regards to the proliferation of their propaganda. Much of this content is searchable and available via open source. Indeed, the theory behind using the Internet to spread jihadist ideology is that it is accessible to anyone and everyone – the perfect grassroots mass-marketing tool. Consequently, OSINT methods will be applied during Internet data collection operations. The Internet, however, is not the only relevant target for data collection in the informational dimension. The organizational structure for the Islamic State's propaganda strategy will also be targeted. While the facilities they use are located within the physical dimension (as described in the previous section), the organizational structure has more to do with the flow of communication, thus existing within the informational dimension. While some of this data is available via OSINT [see Table 2 below (Milton, 2016)], there is still much to be learned. Therefore, the organizational structure of the Islamic State's media campaign should be targeted with HUMINT collection and Signal Intelligence (SIGINT) collection disciplines to expand upon what we have gained from OSINT. These combined intelligences gathering methods should yield more detailed descriptions of the IS information strategy and provide insight into how it can be unraveled.

Cognitive Dimension Intelligence Gathering

The cognitive dimension is easily the most intangible dimension of the information environment. However, it is also the most significant in that influencing "hearts and minds" is the ultimate purpose of ideological warfare. Evaluating the state of public opinion/perceptions will be a main focus in the context of cognitive dimension intelligence gathering. This will be accomplished via surveys, polling, and focus groups – human intelligence collection activities. Relevant data is also available via OSINT.

The Information Operations Assessment Framework

The Information Operations Assessment Framework (IOAF), Table 2 below, will serve as the basis for the purposed strategy's evaluation policy.

Table 2: Information Operations Assessment Framework

Step 1	Analyze the information environment
Step 2	Integrate information operations assessment into plans and develop the assessment plan
Step 3	Develop information operations assessment information requirements and collection plans
Step 4	Build/modify information operations assessment baseline
Step 5	Coordinate and Execute Information Operations and Coordinate Intelligence Collection Activities
Step 6	Monitor and collect focused information environment data for information operations assessment
Step 7	Analyze information operations assessment data
Step 8	Report assessment results and make recommendations

Analysis is the most important part of the intelligence gathering process; it transforms raw information into accessible and actionable ideas and propositions. In the context of this threat assessment, there are specific analytical tasks are required in order to fulfill these responsibilities. These tasks include analyses of existing policies and procedures, vulnerabilities, and correlation/assessment of risk acceptability. Although the United States government has neither articulated nor set into motion a comprehensive policy initiative to combat jihadist ideology within the broad construct of the information environment, there are some examples of policies that have been launched with similar aims in mind.

Various strategies to remove jihadist content from the Internet have been undertaken. One such strategy for combating the proliferation of jihadist messaging in cyberspace has been to remove entire hosting services from the Internet. For example, between June and July 2015, websites like makalem.me and daow.in were removed from the net because they were publishing jihadist content (Milton, 2016).

Although these strategies have displayed some level of effectiveness, there is much room for improvement. An instructive example comes from a study that observed some justpaste.it pages

created by Islamic State followers on Twitter on June 15-16, 2016. "Of those 23 pages, 13 (57 %) had been removed within two days of their posting...most of the visits that come to these pages occur within the first few hours of the page's creation" (Milton, 2016: 44-45). In the effort to remove Islamic State content from the web, both comprehensiveness and speed are important; we have become better at the former, but still have work to do on the latter. Currently, the process is not fast enough to significantly undercut the distribution of Islamic State content. This disparity needs to be addressed by appropriate policymakers. It is worth noting that the goal of this cyber battle is not to completely eliminate jihadists' online propaganda; this is unrealistic. Such efforts to remove accounts "will raise the organizational costs of engaging in such behavior online and presumably force those interested in following the propaganda to work harder to find it" (Milton, 2016: 46).

There is in fact technology in existence that would greatly enhance cyberspace counter-propaganda. Dr. Hany Farid, chairman of the Dartmouth College computer-science laboratory, is considered the founder of the field known as digital forensics. During his postdoctoral research in the late 1990s, he was among the first to recognize the potential of using mathematical and computational techniques to authenticate digital images (Counter Extremism Project, 2017). Through this research vein, Farid developed a tool called Photo DNA that uses a technique known as robust hashing, whereby coded algorithms scan the Internet, deleting illegal or undesirable photographs, audio, and video files. This technology proved tremendously helpful in curtailing the child pornography industry. Now, Dr. Farid has teamed with the Counter Extremism Project to develop eGLYPH, an iteration of robust hashing specifically designed to target online terrorist propaganda. Perhaps the most promising aspect of this capability is that Photo DNA is engineered to work at Internet scale, processing billions of uploads a day in microseconds with a low false-positive rate and little human intervention (Counter Extremism Project, 2017). This kind of processing power is exactly what is needed to combat the vast volume of jihadist propaganda output and the speed at which it reaches/influences audiences.

The abuse of such technology with regards to freedom of speech, however, is not difficult to imagine. This is why tech companies are

hesitant to adopt eGLYPH. Farid understands the skepticism, but points out that this technology can be programmed to contain itself to only the the worst of the worst online contents. The specific criteria used to determine what gets purged can be up to the tech companies to decide for themselves, then a customized cache is built and all content that gets pinged is eliminated from the network.

Existing Countering Violent Extremism Policies

The U.S. Department of State has sought to advance several objectives that reflect the urgent need to exert positive influences within the information environment and combat the negative ones. Under the umbrella of its Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) program located within the Counterterrorism Bureau, the Department of State has set out to:

1. Expand international political will, partnerships, and expertise to better understand the drivers of violent extremism and mobilize effective interventions.
2. Encourage and assist partner governments to adopt more effective policies and approaches to prevent and counter the spread of violent extremism, including changing unhelpful practices where necessary.
3. Employ foreign assistance tools and approaches, including development, to reduce specific political or social and economic factors that contribute to community support for violent extremism in identifiable areas or put particular segments of a population at high risk of violent extremist radicalization and recruitment to violence.
4. Empower and amplify locally credible voices that can change the perception of violent extremist groups and their ideology among key demographic segments.
5. Strengthen the capabilities of government and non-governmental actors to isolate, intervene with, and promote the rehabilitation and reintegration of individuals caught in the cycle of radicalization to violence. Key areas of Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) programming include (US Department of State Programs and Initiatives, 2016):

- Building capacity of government and civil society to design and carry out national CVE dialogues, strategies, and action plans;
- Strengthening CVE efforts by local and municipal actors;

- Enhancing civil society's role in CVE efforts, particularly among youth, women, and religious leaders;
- Counter-messaging and promoting alternative narratives; and
- Addressing radicalization in and through the criminal justice sector, such as police-community engagement, diversion programs, and juvenile justice.

Countering Violent Extremism Policy Risks/Vulnerabilities

At its core, the State Department's CVE program, outlined above, is aimed at influencing the domestic policies of foreign nations. While this is no easy task, the United States does have some leverage at its disposal. Through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), only in 2016, the United States provided more than $36 billion to support counterterrorism efforts worldwide (foreignassistance.gov, n.d.) which was more foreign aid dollars than any other nation on earth. Far too often, however, this aid comes with no strings attached, meaning the money does not promote a national interest. While the intent is not to demonize charitable donations, it could be proposed that here be a return to a philosophy best articulated by President John F. Kennedy when he wrote in Foreign Affairs magazine that the United States "cannot scatter its assistance on each parched patch of misery and need" (Cronin and Ludes, 2004: 243). Kennedy argued for a strong commitment to sound policies as a precondition for receiving United States foreign aid (Cronin and Ludes, 2004). It is worth mentioning that national interest is traditionally the overriding motive for all international behavior (Spiegel et all, 2012). America does a great disservice to its citizens by departing from this realist reality. A goal should be to see to it that American foreign aid contributions are not a blank check, but an investment in a mutual interest. "Foreign aid and economic tools of power cab used as a carrot (incentive) or a stick (sanction). Both are legitimate uses to support foreign policy" (Cronin and Ludes, 2004: 257).

The statistics on United States foreign aid distribution do not reflect that CVE efforts are a priority for the United States. Aside from the fact that jihadist ideology is not specifically mentioned within the State Department's CVE objectives (reflecting a lack of precise focus), a very small percentage of USAID dollars goes towards education and social services – the institutions that

implement CVE interventions. In fact, education and social services receives the smallest percentage of all USAID funding categories (foreignassistance.gov, n.d.). Even within the context of other counterterrorism programs within the State Department, CVE receives by far the least resources (U.S. Department of State, 2016). If, in its words, the Department of State is trying to portray CVE as a priority, it is certainly not putting its money where its mouth is.

This lack of continuity between rhetoric and concrete policies with regards to the role of foreign aid in countering violent extremism is indicative of a widespread trend that is not isolated to the United States. As many nations and international organizations are beginning to turn their attention to this issue, funding and organizational weaknesses are limiting their ability to act on it. "Reliable funding for CVE programs is hard to come by, and donors have generally failed to coordinate their contributions and embrace the experimentation that experts argue is essential to reaping the full benefits of CVE programs" (Koser and Rosand, 2016). One potential solution to the funding shortage could be to enlist the support of private sector donors. Although companies and foundations tend to keep their distance from nationally-backed CVE programs, an alternative solution may involve the acquisition of less explicit contributions. "A more effective approach would be to encourage them to back programs, such as investments in schools and teachers that promote mainstream interpretations of Islam" (Koser and Rosand, 2016).

Limitations and Conclusion

What is being described in this paper is a strategy predicated upon exerting influence. As such, an effective strategic influence campaign will involve many agencies and departments within the United States government, in addition to non-governmental actors. Strategic influence is not a novel concept. It has, to varying degrees, existed within the United States foreign policy apparatus throughout our history. It is incumbent that the contemporary leaders in the United States and abroad undertake this responsibility effectively and thoroughly.

This strategy is not without challenges, nor is it without limitations. This strategy is not likely to acutely reduce the existing army of militant Islamists. Ideological battles require long-term

efforts. This strategy is designed to work over the course of decades, gradually marginalizing the jihadist threat with each passing generation. "It is fundamentally difficult for non-Muslims to influence the perception of Muslims about their own religion. Only Muslims themselves have the credibility to challenge the misuse of Islam by radicals" (Rabasa, 2004: 4). The United States is obviously in no position to instruct the Muslim community on the true nature of its faith (Lord, 2004). Because of these factors, America will have to go about executing this strategy in a largely covert manner. Thus, acquiring the cooperation of foreign governments is of crucial importance. Finding ways to leverage these governments will be a challenge in itself.

Lack of networking is not the only explanation for the silence of the moderate Islamic majority. One reason for their reluctance to speak out against radical jihadists is an inner conflict of interests brought about by shared values and beliefs. The United States must find ways to coax the moderates into mobilizing against radicals despite these feelings. Indeed, this strategy does view the moderate majority of Muslims as proxies for United States interest. The moderates must be convinced of the truth that their own interests do in fact intersect with those of the United States when it comes to combating radical jihadism. Lastly, establishing effective metrics to gauge the success of this strategy will be another major challenge.

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