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# REFORMULATING THE BATTLE OF IDEAS:

Understanding the Role of Islam  
in Counterterrorism Policy



at BROOKINGS

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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As the National Commission on the September 11, 2001 Terrorist Attacks emphasized, significant progress against terrorism cannot be achieved exclusively through the use of military force. This paper argues that in order to win the “battle of ideas,” the United States government must carefully reformulate its strategy and work with the Muslim world to promote mainstream Islam over terrorist ideology. The global effort to end terrorism must be more effective in utilizing its strongest ally: Islam. There is nothing more persuasive to Muslims than Islam. If the global coalition to stop Al-Qaeda and other terrorists groups is to succeed, it must convince potential terrorists that Islam requires them to reject terrorism. As a part of this effort, this paper recommends the following:

First, rather than characterizing counterterrorism efforts as “freedom and democracy versus terrorist ideology,” policymakers should instead frame the battle of ideas as a conflict between terrorist elements in the Muslim world and Islam.

Second, policymakers should reject the use of language that provides a religious legitimization of terrorism such as “Islamic terrorism” and “Islamic extremist.” They should replace such terminology with more specific and descriptive terms such as “Al-Qaeda terrorism.”

Third, the United States should seek to build a broad and diverse coalition of partners, not limited to those who advocate Western-style democracy, and avoid creating a dichotomy between freedom and Islamic society. Such a coalition should incorporate those who may have political differences, so long as they reject terrorism.

Fourth, the United States should enlist the assistance of scholars of Islam and the Muslim world to determine how best to frame the mission of the global counterterrorism mission. Rather than framing the conflict as “pro-freedom” or “anti-Jihadist,” these scholars should analyze the most persuasive methods for applying Islamic law to reject terrorism.

Fifth, the United States should incorporate the Muslim community as well as scholars of Islam and of the Muslim world in the policymaking process to help craft policies that reflect a more nuanced understanding of those targeted.

Sixth, the United States should promote and distribute scholarship such as the North American Muslims Scholars’ Fatwa against Terrorism and the Aal al-Bayt Institute’s anti-terrorism rulings, which carefully analyze issues such as the use of force in Islam and conclude that terrorism must be rejected unequivocally.

Seventh, recognizing the benefit of strengthening the authoritative voices of mainstream Islam, the United States should welcome and encourage the further development of mainstream Muslim organizations and moderate institutions.

Finally, the United States should continue to promote effective economic and social reforms and to work with allies in crafting fair and peaceful resolutions to conflicts in the Middle East and in other parts of the Muslim world, as these conflicts are often the preeminent grievances fueling extremist violence.

# INTRODUCTION

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Implementing a more effective national security strategy in the coming decades will require the deployment of perhaps the most potent tool for combating terrorism: Islam. Since September 11, 2001, policymakers have recognized that a multifaceted approach will be necessary not just to stop the execution of terrorism, but also to prevent the creation of terrorists. Such an approach generally consists of a three-stage strategy: (1) working with the international community to undermine recruitment by discrediting the terrorist platform and ideology; (2) gathering intelligence and disrupting terrorist planning and financing; and (3) stopping attacks before they are executed. This paper will address stage one—what the 9/11 Commission has characterized as the “battle of ideas”—and will argue that winning this battle will require a more effective strategy for interacting with the Muslim world. Stage one victories are crucial, because if terrorist recruitment and ideology are not undermined, winning stages two and three will require the international community to overcome increasingly insurmountable obstacles.

Although any attempt to categorize the beliefs of 1.3 billion people would necessarily entail gross generalization, policymakers must attempt to analyze how the West’s understanding of Islam can both positively and negatively influence interactions with the Muslim world in the coming decades. As Western nations seek to promote reforms, we must

assess how traditional Islamic theological doctrine can be used to advance the objectives of counterterrorism, and how misunderstanding such concepts can hinder our efforts, alienate the Muslim world, and undermine international security.

Specifically, as American policymakers and some of our European allies have begun to recognize, attempting to counter what some governmental and non-governmental officials have characterized as “Islamic” or “jihadist” terrorism by promoting freedom and democracy will require a careful analysis of how Muslims understand such concepts. For example, because the vast majority of Muslims view Islam as fundamentally opposed to terror and many Muslims associate American freedom and democracy with immorality and impermissible secularism, does it make sense to advertise our efforts as anti-“Islamic terrorism,” “pro-freedom,” and “pro-democracy?” Or, might it be more effective, to focus on the notion that terrorism is antithetical to the teachings of Islam? Understanding such concepts and addressing such questions will be critical in better understanding doctrinal motivations, discrediting misinformation, building consensus on shared beliefs, and formulating strategy more effectively.

The Cold War resulted in a proliferation of scholarship on the former Soviet Union and the Russian language—fueled by substantial federal government

as well as non-governmental funding<sup>1</sup>—and scholars in these fields were both routinely consulted and placed in the highest echelons of government. Indeed, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Secretary of Defense Robert Gates benefited from such programs and entered government as trained Kremlinologists. As new international security threats have emerged, however, our political, diplomatic, and even military efforts have proceeded without similarly ensuring that policymakers have

a sophisticated cultural, religious, or linguistic understanding of the regions we engage.

As the 9/11 Commission emphasized, significant progress against terrorism cannot be achieved exclusively through the use of military force. This paper argues that in order to win the “battle of ideas,” the United States government must carefully reformulate its strategy and work with the Muslim world to promote mainstream Islam over terrorist ideology.

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<sup>1</sup> William H. Honan, Sovietologists, “Years After the Collapse, Cope with a New Reality,” *New York Times*, March 13, 1996; Ellie McGrath, “Wanted: More Kremlinologists,” *Time*, November 29, 1982.

# REFORMULATING THE “BATTLE OF IDEAS”

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## DEFINING THE TASK

The concept of incorporating the message of mainstream Islam in combating terrorism is not a new idea. American leaders have frequently invoked slogans such as “Islam is a religion of peace” to emphasize that the United States does not seek to wage a war on Islam. Until now, however, there has been no comprehensive strategy for incorporating mainstream Islam or Islamic scholarship as a counterterrorism tool.

In some notable cases, Islam has actually been exploited and misused as a tool by counterterrorism interrogators and law enforcement officials. For example, a number of reports have documented tactics used to intimidate, humiliate, and threaten Muslim detainees by violating Islamic principles through impermissible exposure to nudity, improper physical contact with others, and mistreatment of the Qur’an.<sup>2</sup> Some have argued that these methods were authorized by high-level policymakers.<sup>3</sup> Needless to say, such tactics are not what this paper envisions when it seeks to deploy Islam as a counterterrorism

tool. Instead, it seeks to explain how the theology of mainstream Islam, as it is understood by the vast majority of Muslims, can be used to condemn and counter the use of terrorism to address economic, social, and political grievances.

Before outlining a plan for winning the battle of ideas and prescribing the role of Islamic scholarship in this effort, however, it is important to define carefully “the battle of ideas” and whom this battle will target. The 9/11 Commission cast the battle of ideas in broad terms—as a battle between an extremist ideology and concepts such as freedom and democracy:

The small percentage of Muslims who are fully committed to Usama Bin Ladin’s version of Islam are impervious to persuasion. It is among the large majority of Arabs and Muslims that we must encourage reform, freedom, democracy, and opportunity, even though our own promotion of these messages is limited in its effectiveness

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<sup>2</sup> Jane Lampman, “Islam an Interrogation Tool: Need for Limits?” *Christian Science Monitor*, May 16, 2005, citing Erik Saar and Viveca Novak, *Inside the Wire: A Military Intelligence Soldier’s Eyewitness Account of Life at Guantanamo*, New York: Penguin (2005) (describing Guantanamo Bay in a book cleared by the U.S. Army prior to publication as having “a tumultuous atmosphere” in which “US personnel . . . routinely tempted detainees to look at pornographic magazines and videos, [and used] [f]emale interrogators, sometimes dressed provocatively, [to] violate[] Islamic strictures by rubbing against detainees and even leading one to believe he was being wiped with menstrual blood.”). See also Captain James Yee, *For God and Country: Faith and Patriotism Under Fire*, New York: Perseus Books, pp. 110-126 (2005) (“[B]ecause religion was the most important issue for nearly all the prisoners in Camp Delta, it became the most important weapon used against them.”)

<sup>3</sup> Jan C. Greenburg, Howard L. Rosenberg & Ariane de Vogue, Source: Top Bush Advisors Approved ‘Enhanced Interrogation’, ABC News Online, April, 9, 2008, avail. at <http://abcnews.go.com/story?id=4583256>.



simply because we are its carriers. Muslims themselves will have to reflect upon such basic issues as the concept of jihad, the position of women, and the place of non-Muslim minorities. The United States can promote moderation, but cannot ensure its ascendancy. Only Muslims can do this.... In short, the United States has to help defeat an ideology, not just a group of people, and we must do so under difficult circumstances.<sup>4</sup>

As the 9/11 Commission understood, Western efforts to promote freedom and democracy may lack credibility due to their source. Yet what the Commission failed to recognize is that while Muslims generally support freedom, democracy, and opportunity, they may resist what they interpret to be the American and Western definitions of these concepts.

For many Muslims, concepts such as “American freedom” conjure up pop-culture images and a way of life inconsistent with the teachings of Islam. While these Muslims do not hate American freedom, as it is sometimes advertised, they are often put off by what they consider Western immorality and the potential for these aspects of Western life to spread to the Muslim world. A 2006 Pew survey, for example, found that 64 percent of Egyptians, 60 percent of Indonesians, 62 percent of Jordanians, 45 percent of Pakistanis, and 59 percent of Turks believe that Americans are “immoral.”<sup>5</sup>

Muslim perceptions are also shaped by what they view as hypocrisy in freedom promotion that turns a blind eye toward human rights abuses in Guantanamo Bay, Abu Ghuraib, and other parts of the Muslim world.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, many Muslims view “American democracy” as pro-secular, anti-religion, and anti-Islamic law. Another 2007 survey of Muslims in Morocco, Egypt, Pakistan, and India found that about three out of four agree with efforts to “require Islamic countries to impose a strict application of shariah,” and to “keep Western values out of Islamic countries.”<sup>7</sup> According to recently published Gallup polling based on a sample representing 90 percent of the world’s Muslim population, John L. Esposito and Dalia Mogahed found that although Muslims “acknowledg[e] and admir[e] many aspects of Western democracy,” they “do not favor wholesale adoption of Western models of democracy, and “few respondents associate ‘adopting Western values’ with Muslim political and economic progress.”<sup>8</sup> Their study also found that there are “no systemic differences in many [Muslim] countries between males and females in their support for Sharia as the only source of legislation.”<sup>9</sup> Some in the Muslim world even view democracy as “synonymous with Western political hegemony and domination” and as “a manipulative tool wielded by Western powers to intervene in Arab/Muslim internal affairs and to divide and conquer.”<sup>10</sup>

Policymakers have recognized that the Islamic faith rejects terrorism and only a fringe minority of Muslims is committed to what the 9/11 Commission termed “Usama Bin Ladin’s version of Islam.”<sup>11</sup> A

<sup>4</sup> Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, July 22, 2004, pp. 375-76, avail. at <http://govinfo.library.unt.edu/911/report/index.htm>.

<sup>5</sup> America’s Image in the World: Findings from the Pew Global Attitudes Project, June 2006, avail. at <http://pewglobal.org/reports/display.php?ReportID=253>. The five countries listed were the only Muslim nations surveyed.

<sup>6</sup> Pew Global Attitudes Project, “America’s Image Slips, But Allies Share U.S. Concerns Over Iran, Hamas,” June 2006, avail. at <http://pewglobal.org/reports/display.php?ReportID=252>.

<sup>7</sup> World Public Opinion.org, “Muslims Believe US Seeks to Undermine Islam,” April 24, 2007, avail. at [http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/articles/home\\_page/346.php?nid=](http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/articles/home_page/346.php?nid=)

<sup>8</sup> John L. Esposito and Dalia Mogahed, “Who Speaks for Islam? What a Billion Muslims Really Think,” (Gallup Press 2008) p. 110.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. at 48.

<sup>10</sup> Fawaz Gerges, “Is Democracy in the Middle East a Pipedream?” *Yale Global*, April 25, 2005, avail. at <http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/display.article?id=5622>.

<sup>11</sup> Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, p. 375.

larger number of Muslims, however, are resistant to efforts to promote what is advertised as “Western freedom and democracy” as the antidote to terrorism. These same groups, on the other hand, may actually generally support democratic reforms, and these reforms, such as increasing public influence in policymaking, may be both consistent with Islamic law,<sup>12</sup> and effective in fighting terrorism. In other words, democratic reforms may resonate among Muslims, but it is important that such reforms are not promoted in exclusively “Western terms” by a homogeneous coalition, without the input of Islamic scholars, and through the use of rhetoric that is offensive to many Muslims. Rather, they should be advanced by a broader coalition that rejects offensive rhetoric and incorporates mainstream Islamic scholarship into policymaking as a part of a comprehensive counterterrorism strategy.

Counterterrorism policymakers might therefore be more effective by redefining the battle of ideas, not as a “battle between terrorism and freedom and democracy,” but as a “battle between terrorist elements in the Muslim world and Islam.” The objective of the “battle of ideas” should not ostensibly center around the 9/11 Commission’s invocation for the U.S. to “encourage reform, freedom, democracy,” but should focus on mainstream Islam’s rejection of terrorism. Simply put, it will be much easier to promote Islam in the Muslim world than to promote American freedom and democracy in the Muslim world. Democracy promotion may well be a part of the solution, but it should not be the primary focus of the battle of ideas. While democracy promotion may be helpful in addressing many issues the 9/11 Commission cited, including the

position of women and the treatment of non-Muslim minorities, solutions in these areas are unlikely to materialize through the on-going use of freedom and democracy efforts alone. Rather, improvements in these areas will more likely be realized through an approach that emphasizes the importance of education and discourse within Muslim societies regarding the mandates of Islamic law concerning religious tolerance and respect of women.

## IDENTIFYING THE AUDIENCE

It would be dangerously simplistic to conclude that because much of the terrorist violence that the United States faces has been conducted in the name of Islam, the U.S. should engage in an effort to undermine the influence of this religious faith in the Muslim world. Such an approach would be a mistake and would risk losing the battle of ideas before it begins by alienating the very same audiences that we seek to persuade. Indeed, the United States has rejected this notion and President Bush has stated, “Ours is a war not against a religion, not against the Muslim faith. But ours is a war against individuals who absolutely hate what America stands for.”<sup>13</sup> President Bush perhaps best described the groups the United States targets as a “radical network of terrorists.”<sup>14</sup>

Rather than defining the conflict as a battle against Islam, Muslim, or “Islamic extremism,” it is critical that policymakers are as clear and as specific as possible in describing the groups we target. Policymakers have rejected a war against Islam because they believe, as President Bush has stated, “The face of terror is not the true faith of Islam. That’s not what Islam is all about. Islam is peace. These terrorists

<sup>12</sup> Although a comprehensive assessment of the compatibility of democracy and Islamic law is beyond the scope of this paper, numerous scholars have written extensively on this topic. See e.g., Khaled Abou el Fadl, “Islam and the Challenge of Democracy,” *Boston Review*, April/May 2003, avail. at <http://bostonreview.net/BR28.2/abou.html>; Reza Aslan, *No God But God*, Random House, 2005. Mohammad H. Fadel, “Too Far from Tradition,” *Boston Review*, April/May 2003, avail. at <http://www.bostonreview.net/BR28.2/fadel.html>; Fawaz Gerges, “Is Democracy in the Middle East a Pipe Dream?” *Yale Global*, April 25, 2005, avail. at <http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/display.article?id=5622>

<sup>13</sup> George W. Bush and President Havel of Czech Republic, Prague Castle, Prague, Czech Republic, November 20, 2002

<sup>14</sup> George W. Bush, Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People, United States Capitol, Washington, D.C., September 20, 2001

don't represent peace."<sup>15</sup> In defining Islam as "anti-terrorism" and as "peaceful," it is nonsensical and perhaps dangerous to use terms such as "Islamic terrorism" or "Islamic extremism." By simple syllogism, given the manner we have defined Islam, terms such as "Islamic terrorism" and "Islamic extremism" would therefore connote "anti-terrorism extremism" or "peaceful extremism."

Such terms are not only confusing, but are also dangerous. The terms "Islamic terrorism" and "Islamic extremism" validate the terrorist claim that their ideology is, in fact, rooted in Islam. These labels affirm their contention that their extremism is somehow "Islamic" and therefore religiously permissible and even encouraged. As a report by the Department of Homeland Security recently warned, "We must carefully avoid giving bin Laden and other al-Qaida leaders the legitimacy they crave, but do not possess, by characterizing them as religious figures, or in terms that may make them seem to be noble in the eyes of some."<sup>16</sup>

By the same token, the use of these terms also threatens to alienate the Muslim world by implying that the use of violence against innocent populations is somehow an "extreme" interpretation of something found in Islam. Such language further undermines the trust of those who already suspect that the "war on terrorism" is a war on Islam and Muslims. Indeed, a 2007 World Public Opinion poll found that 78 percent of Moroccans, 92 percent of Egyptians, and 73 percent of Pakistanis and Indonesians believe that America's goal in the war on terrorism is to "weaken and divide Islam."<sup>17</sup> These numbers are undoubtedly driven not just by American coun-

terterrorism rhetoric, but also by grievances with American policy toward the Muslim world.

So how should the United States define the terrorists it targets? President Bush's designation of these groups as a "radical network of terrorists" just nine days after the September 11, 2001 attacks seems appropriate. Because some may argue that such a label is not specific enough to clearly identify the specific ideology the U.S. seeks to target, the use of specific terms such as "Al Qaeda terrorists," " Hamas terrorists," or even "Binladinists" would appear to achieve the goal of specificity without using the "Islamic" label.

British Prime Minister Gordon Brown has taken this approach one step further by declaring that the term "Muslim" should no longer be used in describing terrorists and terrorist attacks.<sup>18</sup> Realizing that the religious label might actually legitimize the use of terrorist violence in the eyes of its perpetrators, Brown has sought to reject and de-glorify any theological value associated with terrorism. Brown came to this conclusion after consulting with experts on Islam and the Muslim community in the United Kingdom. Unlike the United States, the U.K. faces a significant threat of "homegrown" terrorism. The British Government has thus convened a "Working Group on Tackling Extremism" that has enlisted the support of the Muslim community in identifying strategies that can be used to discredit terrorism.<sup>19</sup>

Similarly, the United States should continue to reassess its official policy regarding the use of terms such as "Islamic terrorism" and "Islamic extremism," as well as other terms such as "jihadists" and "jihadist

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<sup>15</sup> Remarks by the President at Islamic Center of Washington, D.C. Washington, D.C., September 17, 2001

<sup>16</sup> Matthew Lee, "'Jihadist' Booted from Government Lexicon," Associated Press, April 24, 2008, citing April 2008 Department of Homeland Security Report: "Terminology to Define the Terrorists: Recommendations from American Muslims."

<sup>17</sup> World Public Opinion.org, "Muslims Believe US Seeks to Undermine Islam," April 24, 2007, avail. at [http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/articles/home\\_page/346.php?nid=](http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/articles/home_page/346.php?nid=)

<sup>18</sup> David Rieff, "Brown Drops 'War on Terror,' Redefining the Fight," *International Herald Tribune*, July 22, 2007.

<sup>19</sup> Home Office Press Release, "Tackling Extremism Together: Ministers Welcome Working Groups Report," Nov. 10, 2005, avail. at <http://press.homeoffice.gov.uk/press-releases/Tackling-extremism-together-mini>.

terrorism.” Some federal agencies such as the State Department have taken important steps by ending the use of terms such as “jihadist” and “Islamofascism,” which may “unintentionally portray” terrorists, who lack moral and religious legitimacy, as brave fighters, legitimate soldiers or spokesmen for ordinary Muslim.<sup>20</sup> This decision to end the use of these terms was the result of significant deliberation and discourse at the highest level of government between officials in the Department of Homeland Security, the State Department, the White House, the intelligence community, and the American-Muslim community. The resolution is particularly important because it indicates that the deep and extended dialogue and high-level discussions regarding these terms were not merely political, but intended to result in a more sophisticated discussion of these topics. With this change in vocabulary, the counterterrorism field will be able to move forward beyond the use of non-specific, loaded terms and more intelligently address the important security challenges the country faces. This shift also sends a clear signal to the international Muslim community that the American policymakers are, in fact, serious in their attempts to achieve a better understanding of Islam and Muslims. The continued assessment of these and similar terms will require a proper analysis of the definition and role of concepts such as “jihad” in Islamic theology, and Islamic scholars should be enlisted to determine whether these and other labels might also legitimize terrorist violence and alienate Muslims around the world.

The danger of eroding the trust and support both of the Muslim world and of Muslim communities

within countries such as the U.S. and Britain should not be understated. Former Deputy Attorney General Larry Thompson stressed the importance of working with these communities in September 2002 while describing the arrest of five suspected Al-Qaeda operatives in Lackawanna, New York.<sup>21</sup> Thompson stated that the Muslim community provided “extraordinary cooperation” and that “the assistance of Muslim-Americans in this case has helped to make the Buffalo community and our nation safer.”<sup>22</sup> Law enforcement officials have also successfully recruited members of immigrant communities to serve as translators for the CIA and other intelligence agencies.<sup>23</sup> In the summer of 2006, tips from the Muslim community uncovered a plot to blow up transatlantic airliners traveling from Europe to the United States.<sup>24</sup> A recent study confirmed the intelligence gathering benefits of working with immigrant communities:

[N]early all . . . FBI respondents (14 of 16) indicated that outreach and relationship-building with Arab American communities were valuable intelligence gathering efforts. As a head of a local Joint Terrorism Task Force (JTTF) stated, “[T]he natural by-product of [developing relationships] is intelligence building.” “[Relationship building] allows us to get a better grasp of potential threats,” said a special agent in charge.<sup>25</sup>

The full cooperation of all communities will continue to be integral to future counterterrorism efforts; eliminating rhetoric and tactics that alienate particular groups will only aid these efforts.

<sup>20</sup> Matthew Lee, “Jihadist’ Booted from Government Lexicon,” Associated Press, April 24, 2008, citing April 2008 Department of Homeland Security Report: “Terminology to Define the Terrorists: Recommendations from American Muslims.”

<sup>21</sup> News Conference of Larry Thompson, Robert Mueller, & George Pataki (Sept. 14, 2002), LEXIS, News Library, FDCH Political Transcripts File (remarks of Larry Thompson, Deputy Attorney General).

<sup>22</sup> Id.

<sup>23</sup> David Johnston, “F.B.I. Is Accused of Bias by Arab-American Agent” *N.Y. Times*, July 20, 2003, at 16; David Shepardson, “Feds Boost Michigan Terror Fight,” *Detroit News*, May 29, 2002, at A1.

<sup>24</sup> “Terror Plot Leaves Britain on Highest Alert,” CNN, Aug. 11, 2006, <http://www.cnn.com/2006/WORLD/europe/08/11/terror.plot/index.html> (“The original information about the plan came from the Muslim community in Britain, according to a British intelligence official.”).

<sup>25</sup> Nicole J. Henderson et al., “Law Enforcement and Arab American Community Relations After September 11, 2001: Engagement in a Time of Uncertainty” Vera Institute of Justice (2006), p.18, avail. at [http://www.vera.org/publication\\_pdf/353\\_636.pdf](http://www.vera.org/publication_pdf/353_636.pdf) (alteration in original).

## IDENTIFYING OUR COALITION OF ALLIES

Perhaps just as crucial as defining the groups that the United States seeks to target in winning the battle of ideas will be the task of identifying U.S. allies and partners. Because the terrorist ideology is advocated by small, fringe groups and rejected by a vast majority of Muslims, the Islamic world is one of the United States's most important counterterrorism partners. And because, as American policymakers and leaders have recognized, Islam rejects terrorism, Islam is perhaps the most important counterterrorism ally.

Winning the battle of ideas will require working with partners in the Muslim world to convince potential terrorists that true Islam requires the rejection—rather than the promotion—of terrorist ideology. According to the Esposito and Mogahed study, while over nine in ten Muslims worldwide reject the use of terrorism, still seven percent believe that the attacks of September 11 were justified.<sup>26</sup> Other polling has revealed more acceptance of terrorism, particularly in the Palestinian context, although available data indicates support for terrorism generally is on the decline. A 2007 Pew study, for example, found that support for suicide bombings declined sharply in seven of eight Muslim countries surveyed.<sup>27</sup> However large or small in number, it is this group that the global counterterrorism coalition must target and convince, first and

foremost, that they hold beliefs that are antithetical to Islam. This minority is much more likely to be persuaded by appeals to their own religious faith, than by calls to Western freedom and democracy.

As many experts have noted, the solution to the problem of terrorism must be addressed by the Muslim world itself. Often already suspicious of Western intervention in the Muslim world, it is unlikely that Muslims will react positively to hegemonic orders to “clean up” their societies by implementing Western-style democratic reforms. Policymakers should understand that those attracted to terrorist ideologies will be less persuaded by calls to Western-style freedom and democracy and more influenced by calls to Islam. Winning the battle of ideas will therefore require the U.S. to work with Muslim governments, religious leaders, counterterrorism policymakers, and anti-extremism program directors on the ground in the Muslim world to ensure that the peaceful and civically engaged message of Islam is effectively communicated and promoted to young Muslims around the world. To this end, as we will describe in the next section of this paper, broad coalitions of both American and international scholars have issued unequivocal anti-terror *fatwas* such as the North American Muslim Edict against Terror<sup>28</sup> and the Amman Message.<sup>29</sup> Policymakers must ensure that these rulings are distributed and advertised throughout policymaking realms and in the Muslim world.

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<sup>26</sup> Esposito and Mogahed, 69-70.

<sup>27</sup> A 2007 Pew study, for example, found that support for suicide bombings declined sharply in seven of eight Muslim countries surveyed. The seven countries were: Bangladesh, Jordan, Indonesia, Lebanon, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Tanzania. In the eighth country, Turkey, support rose slightly from thirteen to sixteen percent. Pew Global Attitudes Project: A Rising Tide Lifts Mood in the Developing World, “Sharp Decline in Support for Suicide Bombings in Muslim Countries.” Avail. at <http://pewglobal.org/reports/display.php?ReportID=257>.

<sup>28</sup> Jason DeRose, U.S. Muslim Scholars Issue Edict Against Terrorism, July 28, 2005, avail. at <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4775588>.

<sup>29</sup> The Amman Message was commissioned by H.M. King Abdullah II bin Al-Hussein in 2005 to seek the consensus of Islamic Scholars on a number of issues, including the role of violence in Islam. Avail. at <http://www.ammanmessage.com/>. For a comprehensive list of Muslim condemnations of terrorism, see Islamic Statements Against Terrorism at <http://www.unc.edu/~kurzman/terror.htm>.



# WINNING THE BATTLE OF IDEAS – EXECUTING THE STAGE ONE STRATEGY

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## DISCREDITING THE TERRORIST IDEOLOGY

The most effective long-term solution to the problem of terrorism is preventing the creation and recruitment of terrorists. In a world in which increasingly dangerous weapons are available to increasingly smaller groups, once individuals acquire the will to engage in terrorist violence, having a 100 percent success rate against terrorism at the stage two and stage three levels—disrupting terrorist planning and financing and stopping attacks—becomes extremely difficult.

What is the best way, then, to discredit the terrorist ideology? The most paramount task for the global counterterrorism coalition is to emphasize that engaging in terrorism is antithetical to the *shari'ah*, or Islamic law. As much as some policymakers believe that we must sell freedom and democracy as supreme alternatives to terrorism, the first and foremost task is not the explicit promotion of freedom and democracy per se, but the promotion of mainstream Islam, which policymakers as notable as President Bush have stated constitutes the promotion of peace.

To understand the potential interest in detaching the counterterrorism message from the rhetoric of freedom and democracy, the United States should turn to scholars of Islam and of the Muslim world and learn how such religious concepts are received by Muslims. If, for example, the promotion of

freedom by the West is interpreted in the Muslim world as the promotion of extramarital sexual relations, the freedom to dress however one desires, and the freedom to engage in other activities deemed immoral by a large percentage of Muslims, many will reject this concept of “freedom” and may be more attracted to those who characterize the west as immoral. Similarly, if the promotion of constitutional democracy by the west is interpreted as a mandate for secularism, hostility to Islamic law, and the promotion of freedoms such as the right to negatively depict holy figures, then winning the battle of ideas will become nearly impossible.

It is the job of the global counterterrorism coalition to articulate the idea that Islam requires those dissatisfied with Western foreign policy and the perceived spread of immorality, as well as other political and non-political grievances, to reject terrorism as a means of addressing their concerns. This task will require the coalition to enlist the assistance of Islamic scholars, such as those we will describe who have authored anti-terror rulings. Such scholars and religious leaders that speak with more credibility than most policymakers who have been characterized as hostile toward the Muslim world by charismatic figures such as Usama bin Ladin.

Such an approach has already proven to be effective. In Singapore, the government funded “Religious Rehabilitation Group” (RRG) has successfully used

Islamic scholars to perform counseling for detained militants.<sup>30</sup> Similar “de-programming” efforts have been implemented in Malaysia, Indonesia, and in Saudi Arabia, where 700 of 2,000 prisoners who completed a religious counseling program have been released by the government.<sup>31</sup> The U.S. military has recognized the success of these efforts and recently used the Singapore and Saudi model to introduce religious education programs for a “few hundred” militants detained in Iraq.<sup>32</sup>

Under a Yemeni counterterrorism program, a group of Muslim judges and scholars has persuaded groups of terrorists to reject the terrorist ideology by presenting evidence that Islam’s holy texts prohibit terrorism.<sup>33</sup> Some of the ex-militants then disclosed the locations of hidden weapons caches, advised the Yemeni government on tackling militancy, and provided a tip that led Americans to Al-Qaeda’s top commander in Yemen.<sup>34</sup>

The global counterterrorism coalition can achieve similar results by becoming better versed in speaking in the language of the Qur’an and of other Islamic holy texts than terrorists who selectively draw from these teachings to advance their agenda. The following section provides a description of how Islamic religious teachings can be used to reject terrorism.

#### AFFIRMING AND ARTICULATING THE NEAR-UNANIMOUS ISLAMIC VIEWS CONCERNING JIHAD, TERRORISM, AND TAKFIR

Before describing the various legal rulings concerning the use of force in Islam, it is important to

understand the sources and methodology that are used in establishing Islamic law. A legal ruling (*fatwa*) in Islam is based on four major sources: (1) the Qur’an, the religious text that Muslims believe was revealed to Prophet Muhammad; (2) the *Sunnah*, the meticulously recorded sayings and actions of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions; (3) *Ijma’*, the consensus of the Prophet’s *sahaba* (companions) and the *ulama* (Islamic legal scholars); and (4) *Qiyas*, reasoning by analogy based on centuries of debate. Formal and informal institutions of Islamic authority certify that individuals have authority to issue legal rulings based on mastery of the subjects affiliated with these sources. In advancing their justifications for terrorism, terrorists lacking the requisite training in these fields generally focus only on a few verses from the Qur’an, taking them out of context to advance their agendas.

There are a number of methodologically sound Islamic rulings to cite in countering these arguments and articulating the position that terrorists have misinterpreted the doctrines of jihad and *takfir* in advocating the use of violence against civilians to address their grievances. Jihad, which literally means struggle, is the Islamic concept of striving for the sake of God. The term is often used to denote one’s self-struggle to do good and avoid evil (*jihad al-nafs*),<sup>35</sup> but in certain circumstances and under certain conditions, it describes the religious obligation to defend, militarily if necessary, Islam and Islamic lands. Jihad should not be mistranslated as “holy war,” a term which would be translated into Arabic as “*al-harb al-muqaddasa*.” No such term or concept exists in the *shari’ah*.

<sup>30</sup> Simon Montlake, “U.S. Tries Rehab for Religious Extremists,” *Christian Science Monitor*, October 9, 2007, avail. at <http://www.csmonitor.com/2007/1009/p01s04-woap.html>. See also “Singapore Religious Rehabilitation Group,” avail. at [http://www.rrg.sg/subindex.asp?id=A033\\_07](http://www.rrg.sg/subindex.asp?id=A033_07).

<sup>31</sup> Montlake, *Ibid*.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>33</sup> James Brandon, “Koranic Duels Ease Terror,” *Christian Science Monitor*, Feb. 4, 2005, avail. at <http://www.csmonitor.com/2005/0204/p01s04-wome.html>.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>35</sup> According to *hadith*, “The best struggle (*jihad*) is to speak the truth before a tyrannical ruler,” and, “The best struggle is to struggle against your soul and your passions in the way of God Most High.” Narrated by Daylami, with a similar *hadith* narrated by Tirmidhi in his *Sunan*, *Kitab Fada’il al-Jihad*. See Muhammad Sa’id Ramadan al-Buti, *al-Jihad fi’l-Islam* (Damascus: Dar al-Fikr, 2005) p.21. Upon returning from battle, the Prophet Muhammad is reported to have told his followers, “You have returned from the lesser jihad to the greater jihad...the struggle against one’s self (*jihad al-nafs*).” Al-Tasharruf, Part I, p. 70.

The concept of *takfir* in the *shari'ah* is the practice of declaring individuals or groups to be non-Muslims because they hold beliefs or commit acts that take them outside the scope of Islam. Terrorists sometimes use the concept of *takfir* to declare that certain groups are non-Muslim or that they have left Islam and are subject to death under their understanding of the penalty for apostasy in Islamic law. Refuting such fringe interpretations, which are often offered by terrorists without the requisite religious training to issue Islamic edicts, will require policymakers to consult with Islamic scholars and the Muslim community to ensure that most persuasive arguments from within the *shari'ah* are clearly articulated to denounce terrorism and the weak argumentation put forth by terrorists.

### **Misinterpretation of *jihad* to support terrorism**

Analyzing how terrorists interpret the concepts of *jihad* is critical in understanding how they reach the conclusion that terrorism is justified in Islam. In invoking the support of the Muslim community, figures such as Usama bin Ladin argue essentially that (1) Western powers are pursuing an imperialist foreign policy and oppressing Muslims in various parts of the world, (2) they are spreading immorality in the name of freedom and democracy, (3) corrupt Muslim leaders are complicit in their efforts, and (4) good Muslims are required to resist these forces, with violence and terrorism, if necessary.<sup>36</sup>

As is the case when other religious faiths are manipulated to advance particular agendas, in making these claims terrorists cite passages from religious texts, such as the Qur'an, to support their claims. Often they take such verses out of context, purposefully twist their meaning to advance their own agendas. Islamic scholars around the globe have repeatedly emphasized that the *shari'ah* explicitly

rejects the terrorists' attempts to mischaracterize religious guidelines concerning war.

In the United States, the Fiqh Council of North America, which is the most broadly conceived leadership body of Muslim scholars and clerics in North America, issued a *fatwa* declaring terrorism to be a prohibited practice, stating:

We have consistently condemned terrorism and extremism in all forms and under all circumstances, and we reiterate this unequivocal position. Islam strictly condemns religious extremism and the use of violence against innocent lives. There is no justification in Islam for extremism or terrorism. Targeting civilians' life and property through suicide bombings or any other method of attack is haram—prohibited in Islam—and those who commit these barbaric acts are criminals, not 'martyrs.'

In the light of the teachings of the Qur'an and Sunnah we clearly and strongly state:

All acts of terrorism targeting the civilians are haram (forbidden) in Islam. It is haram for a Muslim to cooperate or associate with any individual or group that is involved in any act of terrorism or violence. It is the duty of Muslims to cooperate with the law enforcement authorities to protect the lives of all civilians.<sup>37</sup>

A *fatwa* signed by 500 British Islamic scholars, imams, and clerics, similarly declared:

"Islam strictly, strongly and severely condemns the use of violence and the destruction of innocent lives. There is neither place

<sup>36</sup> Usama bin Ladin, "Declaration of War against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places," first published in London-based *Al Quds al Arabi*, 1996

<sup>37</sup> "Fatwa by U.S. Muslims Against Religious Extremism," July 25, 2005, avail. at [http://www.cfr.org/publication/15808/fatwa\\_against\\_terrorism.html](http://www.cfr.org/publication/15808/fatwa_against_terrorism.html)



nor justification in Islam for extremism, fanaticism or terrorism. Suicide bombings, which killed and injured innocent people in London, are haram—vehemently prohibited in Islam, and those who committed these barbaric acts in London [on July 7, 2005] are criminals not martyrs. Such acts, as perpetrated in London, are crimes against all of humanity and contrary to the teachings of Islam. ... The Holy Quran declares: ‘Whoever kills a human being... then it is as though he has killed all mankind; and whoever saves a human life, it is as though he had saved all mankind.’ (Quran, Surah al-Maidah (5), verse 32) Islam’s position is clear and unequivocal: Murder of one soul is the murder of the whole of humanity; he who shows no respect for human life is an enemy of humanity.”<sup>38</sup>

The Council of Saudi Ulama’s fatwa against terrorism states:

What is happening in some countries from the shedding of the innocent blood and the bombing of buildings and ships and the destruction of public and private installations is a criminal act against Islam. . . . Those who carry out such acts have the deviant beliefs and misleading ideologies and are responsible for the crime. Islam and Muslims should not be held responsible for such actions.”<sup>39</sup>

‘Abdulaziz bin ‘Abdallah Al-Ashaykh, the chief mufti of Saudi Arabia has also declared:

Firstly: the recent developments in the United States including hijacking planes,

terrorizing innocent people and shedding blood, constitute a form of injustice that cannot be tolerated by Islam, which views them as gross crimes and sinful acts. Secondly: any Muslim who is aware of the teachings of his religion and who adheres to the directives of the Holy Qur’an and the sunnah (the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad) will never involve himself in such acts, because they will invoke the anger of God Almighty and lead to harm and corruption on earth.”<sup>40</sup>

And Shaykh Muhammad Afifi al-Atiki, a renowned Oxford-based Malaysian jurist, has offered the following landmark ruling in English, rejecting the use of force against civilians:

It is truly sad that despite our sophisticated and elaborate set of rules of engagement and in spite of the strict codes of warfare and the chivalrous disciplines which our soldiers are expected to observe, all having been thoroughly worked out and codified by the orthodox jurists of the Umma from among the generations of the Salaf, there are today in our midst those who are not ashamed to depart from these sacred conventions in favour of opinions espoused by persons who are not even trained in the Sacred Law at all let alone enough to be a *Qadi* or a *Faqih*—the rightful heir and source from which they should receive practical guidance in the first place. Instead they rely on engineers or scientists and on those who are not among its *ahl* yet speak in the name of our Law. With these “reformist” preachers and *da’i* comes a departure from the traditional ideas about the rules of

<sup>38</sup> British Muslim Forum, press release of July 18, 2005, avail. at [http://www.britishmuslimforum.org/view\\_press\\_release.php?id=26](http://www.britishmuslimforum.org/view_press_release.php?id=26).

<sup>39</sup> “Public Statements by Senior Saudi Officials Condemning Extremism and Promoting Moderation,” May 2004, [http://www.saudiembassy.net/ReportLink/Report\\_Extremism\\_May04.pdf](http://www.saudiembassy.net/ReportLink/Report_Extremism_May04.pdf), page 10

<sup>40</sup> Mufti ‘Abdulaziz bin ‘Abdallah Al-Ashaykh, Statement of September 15, 2001, avail. at [http://saudiembassy.net/press\\_release/01-spa/09-15-Islam.htm](http://saudiembassy.net/press_release/01-spa/09-15-Islam.htm).

*Siyar/Jihad/Qital*, i.e., warfare. Do they not realise that by doing so and by following them they will be ignoring the limitations and restrictions cherished and protected by our pious forefathers and that they will be turning their backs on the *Jama'a* and *Ijma'* and that they will be engaging in an act for which there is no accepted legal precedent among the orthodoxy in our entire history? Have they forgotten that part of the original *maqsad* of warfare/*jihad* was to limit warfare itself and that warfare for Muslims is not total war, so that women, children and innocent bystanders are not to be killed and property not to be needlessly destroyed?

To put it plainly, there is simply no legal precedent in the history of Sunni Islam for the tactic of attacking civilians and overtly non-military targets.<sup>41</sup>

Muslim scholars have noted that the obligation to issue such rulings stems from the Qur'an itself, which commands:

*O you who believe! Stand out firmly for justice, as witnesses to God, even as against yourselves, or your parents, or your kin, and whether it be [against] rich or poor: for God can best protect both. Follow not the lusts [of your hearts], lest you swerve, and if you distort [justice] or decline to do justice, verily God is well acquainted with all that you do. (Al-Nisaa' 4:135)*

Despite the proliferation of edicts from Islamic religious scholars based on the Qur'an and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad, and the complete absence of rulings condoning the actions of organizations of al-Qaeda, terrorists lacking the requisite

religious training necessary and certification from any religious authority to issue legal rulings, have taken Qur'anic verses out of context to justify their interpretations. Specifically, they often cite the following passages to argue that Islam authorizes their tactics.

*Fight in the way of God against those who fight against you, but begin not hostilities. Lo! God loveth not aggressors. / And slay them wherever you find them, and drive them out of the places whence they drove you out, for tribulation is worse than slaughter. And fight not with them at the Inviolable Place of Worship until they first attack you there, but if they attack you (there) then slay them. Such is the recompense of disbelievers. / But if they desist, then lo! God is Forgiving, Merciful. / And fight them until tribulation is no more, and religion is for God. But if they desist, then let there be no hostility except against wrong-doers. / The forbidden month for the forbidden month, and forbidden things in retaliation. And one who attacketh you, attack him in like manner as he attacked you. Observe your duty to God, and know that God is with the pious. (Al-Baqarah 2:190-194)*

*When the sacred months have passed, kill the polytheists wherever you find them, capture them and besiege them, and lie in wait for them at every ambush. But if they repent, and perform the Prayer and give Alms, then let them alone. Indeed God is forgiving, merciful. If any of the polytheists seeks asylum from you, grant him asylum until he hears the Word of God. Then convey him to his place of safety. That is because they are a people who do not know. (Al-Tawbah 9:5-6).*

*Fight those who believe not in God nor the Last Day, nor hold that forbidden which has*

<sup>41</sup> "Defending the Civilians: Mudafi' al-Mazlum, Shaykh Muhammad Afifi al-Akiti's Fatwa on Suicide Bombings," avail. at [http://www.masud.co.uk/ISLAM/misc/defending\\_civilians.htm](http://www.masud.co.uk/ISLAM/misc/defending_civilians.htm).

*been forbidden by God and His Messenger, nor acknowledge the Religion of Truth, from among the People of the Book, until they pay the Jizya with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued. (Al-Tauba 9:29)*

As Islamic scholars have noted in issuing their edicts against terrorism, the use of these passages to justify terrorism by those untrained in the Islamic sciences is antithetical to Islamic law for a number of reasons. It is important to note that our objective herein is not to engage in the science of *tafsir* (Quranic exegesis), which carefully considers, among other things, (1) the textual context of the verse within the Qur'an; (2) the historical context of the revelation; and (3) the manner in which the Prophet Muhammad implemented the verses. Rather, our objective is to simply highlight the flaws in the terrorists' reasoning.

First, fighting is authorized in these verses only to the extent that Muslims are being attacked, their rights and dignity are being violated, they are being driven from their homes, or are being prevented from practicing their faith. The very purpose of Islamic law (*maqasid al-shari'ah*) is to protect five basic rights: (1) religion, (2) life, (3) mind, (4) honor, (5) and property, and the law of war is designed to protect these rights as well. As the first passage states, "Fight in the way of God against *those who fight against you*, but begin not hostilities" and "[O]ne who attacketh you, *attack him in like manner as he attacked you*." Often terrorists fail to mention these parts of the passage, and quote only the portion which states, "And slay them wherever you find them, and drive them out of the places whence they drove you out, for tribulation is worse than slaughter," or verse 9:29, which states "fight those who believe not in God nor the Last Day, nor hold that forbidden which has been forbidden by God and His Messenger, nor acknowledge the Religion of Truth." Muslims believe that this verse in Surah Tauba was revealed when the Muslims in Mecca were under constant attack from the pagans of the

city and when the Persian and Roman armies were preparing for war with the new Islamic state. This verse also mentions the *jizya*, which was not a tool used to oppress non-Muslims, but was the tax the Muslim state required of non-Muslims in place of the zakat tax which was a religious obligation on all Muslims.

A later verse in the Qur'an also explicitly qualifies the scope of the command for fighting:

*Permission is given to those who are fought because they have been wronged. Surely, God is able to give them victory—those who have been expelled from their homes unjustly only because they said: "Our Lord is God." And if it were not that God repelled some people by means of others, then monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques, wherein the Name of God is mentioned much would surely have been pulled down. Verily, God will help those who help Him. Truly, God is powerful and mighty—those who, if We give them power in the land, establish worship and pay the poor-due and enjoin kindness and forbid iniquity. And to God belongs the outcome of [all] affairs. (Al-Hajj 22:38-41)*

The Qur'an, in fact, orders the defense of all those – Muslim or non-Muslim – who are oppressed:

*And why should you not fight in the way of God for those who are weak, ill-treated, and oppressed? Men, women, and children, whose only cry is, "Oh our Lord! Rescue us from this town whose people are tyrants, and raise for us from you one who will protect us; and raise for us from you one who will help!" (An-Nisaa' 4:135)*

Second, warfare is only permitted against combatants and only after the formal declaration of war against these combatants. There is nothing in these verses to suggest that killing innocent individuals

is ever justified. In fact, numerous other verses and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad emphasize that such killing is prohibited. Chapter five, Surah Maida, underscoring the sanctity of life and the evil of murder, states:

*We decreed for the Children of Israel that whosoever killeth a human being for other than manslaughter or spreading murderous sedition on earth, it shall be as if he had killed all mankind, and who so saveth the life of one, it shall be as if he had saved the life of all mankind. (Al-Maida 5:32).*

Numerous hadith (narrations) of the Prophet Muhammad prohibit the killing of civilians, women, children, and the elderly. Upon dispatching armies, he instructed, “Go in the name of God. Fight in the way of God [against] the ones who disbelieve in God. Do not act brutally. Do not exceed the proper bounds. Do not mutilate. Do not kill children or hermits.”<sup>42</sup> In other narrations, the Prophet Muhammad stated, “Do not kill old men, children, or women,”<sup>43</sup> “Do not kill the monks in monasteries,” “Do not kill the people who are sitting in places of worship,”<sup>44</sup> and “Do not cut down date and other trees, and *do not tear down buildings.*”<sup>45</sup> The first Islamic Caliph, Abu Bakr al-Siddiq admonished his army with the following:

I instruct you in ten matters: Do not kill women, children, the old, or the infirm; do not cut down fruit-bearing trees; do not destroy any town; do not kill sheep or camels except for the purposes of eating; do not burn date-trees or submerge them; do not steal from the booty and do not be cowardly.<sup>46</sup>

These verses and the narrations of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions are the most explicit commands concerning the treatment not only of civilians in war, but also animals and the environment. It is based on these sources that Islamic scholars have rejected the terrorists’ misrepresentation of the Qur’an and have established the following principles regarding the law of warfare:

- War is to be waged only with those who encourage and engage in it.
- Priests in churches, mosques, and synagogues, and children, women, and the elderly must never be harmed.
- Sown fields must not be damaged.
- Treaties and agreements must not be broken.
- Animals must not be harmed.
- There must be no cruelty and torture.
- Towns must not be destroyed.

The third major flaw in the terrorists’ approach is that no textual or theological basis exists for forcing non-Muslims to accept Islam. Verse 9:6, which terrorists fail to mention after they cite verse 9:5, orders Muslims to “grant . . . asylum,” “preach the Word of God,” and then “convey . . . to . . . [a] place of safety” those that no longer seek to fight against the Muslims. Accepting Islam is not mentioned as a condition of asylum. Three other verses scattered throughout the Qur’an further clarify that coerced conversion is not permissible: “There is no compulsion in religion. The right way has become distinct from error.” (Al-Baqarah 2:256). “[I]f they are averse, We have not sent thee as a warder over them. Thine is only to convey (the message). (Al-Shura 42:48). Finally, there is no compulsion in religion and God forbids you not, with regard to those who fight you not for (your) religion nor

<sup>42</sup> Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir al-Qur’an al-Azim* (Riyadh 1998) pp.308-9.

<sup>43</sup> The Sunan of Abu Dawud, Kitab al-Jihad.

<sup>44</sup> The Musnad of Ibn Hanbal

<sup>45</sup> Sahih al-Bukhari (emphasis added).

<sup>46</sup> Imam Malik, Muwatta’, Kitab al-Jihad.

drive you out of your homes, from dealing kindly and justly with them (Al-Mumtahanah 60:8). The Qur'an, while instructing the Prophet Muhammad to preach Islam, does not authorize Muslims to force non-Muslims to accept the faith, or to inflict punishment on those who refuse its message.

Finally, it is also important to note that the fringe interpretations used to justify terrorism are overwhelmingly advanced by terrorists without the requisite religious training to issue Islamic edicts. As alluded to earlier, the authority to issue legal rulings in Islamic law is based on mastery of a number of subjects related to the four sources of authority in Islamic law, such as: (1) the study of Qur'an, (2) the study of interpretation of the Qur'an, (3) the study of Hadith; (4) the study of interpretation of Hadith, (5) the study of *'Aqeedah*, or Islamic religious creed, (6) the study of the *Sira*, the analysis of life of the Prophet Muhammad, and (7) the study of *Fiqh*, the interpretive science of understanding Islamic law through all of these sources as well as *Ijma'* (consensus of the scholars) and *Qiyas* (analogy based on and historical Islamic legal precedent). Although a more comprehensive discussion of authority in Islamic law is beyond the scope of this analysis, our purpose in discussing the requisite qualifications for Islamic scholarship in this paper is to highlight that terrorist leaders and the "scholars" who they cite lack the training under any standard of scholarship in these sciences necessary to issue religious edicts. They have not been certified by any recognized formal or informal university-level or traditional Islamic institutions as having the authority to issue religious rulings. As the Jordanian Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought notes: "[T]he terrorists who claim to fight in the name of Islam today are almost entirely men educated in medicine, engineering, mathematics, computer science, etc. . . It is striking how *absent* graduates of recognized *madrasahs* or Islamic

seminaries (such as al-Azhar in Egypt) are among the ranks of the terrorists."<sup>47</sup>

In fact, as terrorism analyst Peter Bergen found, based on a study of the terrorists responsible for the five worst recent anti-Western terrorist attacks (the 1993 and 2001 World Trade Center Attacks, the 1998 Africa embassy bombings, the 2002 Bali nightclub bombing, and the July 2005 London subway attacks), none of the five masterminds of these attacks and only 8 of the 79 terrorists attended *madrasahs*. More surprisingly, 54 percent of the terrorists attended or graduated from college, of whom a shocking 48 percent studied in American universities.<sup>48</sup> Bergen's study further demonstrates that interpretations of Islamic religious texts supporting terror are not a product of rigorous Islamic scholarship, but rather, stem from a lack thereof.

Promoting the mainstream understanding of the Islamic doctrine of war among Islamic scholars will therefore play a crucial role in counterterrorism efforts. As a part of this endeavor, the Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought has put together a set of principles that summarizes the Islamic position regarding the use of violence that can be used as a basis for building consensus in the effort to promote Islam as the primary tool against terrorism:

- Non-combatants are not legitimate targets.
- The religion of a person or persons in no way constitutes a cause for war against them.
- Aggression is prohibited, but the use of force is justified in self-defense, for protection of sovereignty, and in defense of all innocent people.<sup>49</sup>

The global anti-terrorism coalition should support efforts to promote this understanding as well as the near unanimous consensus of religious scholars

47 The Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, "Jihad and the Islamic Law of War," p.66 (2007).

48 Peter Bergen and Swati Pandey, "The Madrasa Scapegoat," *The Washington Quarterly*, Spring 2006.

49 The Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, "Jihad and the Islamic Law of War," p. vi (2007).



rejecting terrorism and the misinterpretation of Qur'anic passages pertaining to jihad.

### **Misuse of *takfir* to support terrorism**

Another tactic terrorists use to justify their actions is the act of *takfir*—declaring individuals or groups to be non-Muslims. In their view, once *takfir* has been declared, Muslims are permitted to use force because they are either fighting against non-Muslims or against Muslims who have committed apostasy.

Countless Islamic scholars have rejected the terrorists' authority to engage in this practice as well. Most recently, King Abdullah of Jordan commissioned a group of twenty-four senior religious scholars representing “all the branches of Islam, schools of thought and religious orientations” to answer the following questions: (1) Who is a Muslim? (2) Who has the right to undertake issuing fatwas (legal rulings)? and (3) Is it permissible to declare someone an apostate (*takfir*)?<sup>50</sup>

Two-hundred Muslim scholars from fifty countries convened in Amman in 2005, and as a part of their “Amman Message” issued a consensus document on *takfir*. The document concluded that:

Whosoever is an adherent to one of the four *Sunni* schools (*Mathahib*) of Islamic jurisprudence (*Hanafi*, *Maliki*, *Shafi'i* and *Hanbali*), the two *Shi'i* schools of Islamic jurisprudence (*Ja'fari* and *Zaydi*), the *Ibadi* school of Islamic jurisprudence and the *Thabiri* school of Islamic jurisprudence, is a Muslim. Declaring that person an apostate is impossible and impermissible. A broad array of Muslim sects fall under the banner of Islam, including all four major *Sunni* schools, both major *Shia* schools, and other smaller jurisprudential schools.<sup>51</sup>

As of July 2006, six international Islamic scholarly assemblies and over 500 leading Muslim scholars representing a cross-section of Islamic thought worldwide had adopted the Amman Message.<sup>52</sup> Affirming and articulating this message in counterterrorism efforts will be critical to rejecting the dehumanizing impact of *takfir* that often forms the basis for violence by terrorist groups. It is also important to note that even if a proper religious authority were to conclude that individuals or groups had committed apostasy and make a declaration of *takfir*, for all the same reasons stated in the previous section, terrorism is still an impermissible response. There is no evidence within Islamic jurisprudence to suggest that apostasy would somehow reverse the prohibition against terrorism.

While the *ulama*, scholars of Islamic law, such as those that authored the Amman Message, are in the best position to debate and discern which of these interpretations are correct, it is important to recognize that there exists a near-unanimous, overwhelmingly accepted view among Islamic scholars rejecting terrorism and the practice of *takfir* to justify terrorism. This recognition will allow policymakers and the global counterterrorism coalition to (1) argue that terrorism violates Islamic law; (2) explicitly discredit terrorists by refusing to legitimize their actions with labels such as “jihad;” and (3) improve relations with the Muslim world by making clear that counterterrorism efforts are consistent with, rather than opposed to, Islam.

If the United States and its allies, however, alienate Muslim communities by defining terrorism as a part of Islam, and if the global counterterrorism coalition does not seek to frame its counterterrorism message within the context of Islam, not only will the battle of ideas be increasingly difficult to win, but the long-term prospects for freedom and

<sup>50</sup> The Amman Message, avail. at <http://www.ammanmessage.com/>.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

democracy, however they are defined, may also become impossible to achieve.

## WINNING THE BATTLE

The global effort to end terrorism must be more effective in utilizing its strongest ally: Islam. There is nothing more persuasive to Muslims than Islam. If the global coalition to stop Al-Qaeda and other terrorists groups is to succeed, it must convince potential terrorists that Islam requires them to reject terrorism. As a part of this effort, we recommend the following:

First, policymakers should redefine the battle of ideas as a battle between terrorist elements in the Muslim world and Islam. Muslims worldwide support the general concepts of freedom and democracy, and democratic reforms may provide a peaceful means of addressing political grievances. But given the Muslim world's skeptical attitudes toward American democracy and freedom promotion, framing the battle of ideas as a battle between terrorism and freedom is no longer productive.

Second, policymakers should reject the use of language that provides a religious legitimization of terrorism such as "Islamic terrorism" and "Islamic extremist." They should replace such terminology with more specific and descriptive terms such as "Al-Qaeda terrorism." Tweaking the rhetoric of the war on terrorism is a simple step that can help delegitimize terrorists, earn the trust of the Muslim world, and increase the precision with which we describe and address terrorism.

Third, the United States should seek to build a broad and diverse coalition of partners, not limited to those who advocate Western-style democracy, and avoid creating a dichotomy between freedom and Islamic society. Such a coalition should incorporate

those who may have political differences, so long as they reject terrorism. Creating such a coalition, one that might even be led by Muslim nations, will help eliminate the perception that global counterterrorism efforts are anti-Islamic and are simply a mask for promotion of Western values.

Fourth, the United States should enlist the assistance of scholars of Islam and of the Muslim world to determine how best to frame the mission of the global counterterrorism coalition. Rather than framing the conflict as "pro-freedom" or "anti-Jihadist," these scholars should analyze the most persuasive methods for applying Islamic law to reject terrorism.

Fifth, the United States should incorporate the Muslim community as well as scholars of Islam and of the Muslim world in the policymaking process to help craft policies that reflect a more nuanced understanding of those targeted. The use of such experts is necessary to ensure that policy reflects an understanding of complex theological and political nuances of the Muslim world and avoids the dangerous pitfalls of generalization and oversimplification.

Sixth, the United States should promote and distribute scholarship such as the Amman Message<sup>53</sup> and the North American Muslims Scholars' Fatwa Against Terrorism,<sup>54</sup> which carefully analyze issues such as the use of force in Islam and concludes that terrorism must be rejected unequivocally. It is precisely these types of religious rulings—which by design receive the broadest possible support from Muslim leadership representing nearly all Muslims—that will prove most effective in countering terrorists that mischaracterize Islam in advancing their agendas.

Seventh, recognizing the benefit of strengthening the authoritative voices of mainstream Islam, the U.S. should welcome and encourage the further

<sup>53</sup> The Amman Message, avail. at <http://www.ammanmessage.com/>.

<sup>54</sup> Jason DeRose, U.S. Muslim Scholars Issue Edict against Terrorism, July 28, 2005, avail. at <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4775588>.

development of mainstream Muslim organizations and moderate institutions such as religious seminaries.

Finally, as the Esposito-Mogahed study's Gallup data found, "the primary cause of broad-based anger and anti-Americanism is not a clash of civilizations but the perceived effect of U.S. foreign policy in the Muslim world."<sup>55</sup> While an examination of political and economic problems that are frequently cited as major grievances not just of terrorists but also of large populations of Muslims around the world is beyond the scope of this paper, the U.S. should continue to promote effective economic and social reforms and to work with allies in crafting fair and peaceful resolutions to conflicts in the Middle East and in other parts of the Muslim world.

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<sup>55</sup> Esposito and Mogahed, 156.



## CONCLUSION

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The global coalition against terrorism must continue its efforts on many fronts. This paper has addressed the most fundamental stage of this endeavor: the task of preventing the creation and recruitment of terrorists. While there are many complex social, economic, and political grievances that drive individuals and groups, the de-legitimization of terrorism as a means of addressing these grievances is critical to the counterterrorism effort. Any effort that aims to eliminate the spread of terrorism that improperly invokes Islam as its justification must reject labels that make mainstream Islam a part of the problem and instead implement strategies that involve mainstream Islam as a prominent element of the solution. Such a strategy will require

policymakers to enlist the help of scholars of Islam and the Muslim world in framing counterterrorism efforts in a responsible manner that attracts, rather than threatens potential terrorists and alienates the Muslim world.

As technological sophistication advances internationally and powerful weapons become more readily available to decentralized non-state actors, where there is a will to inflict harm, unfortunately, there will always be a way. Success at the initial, fundamental counterterrorism stage—discrediting the terrorist ideology—will be critical in ensuring that non-violent avenues for addressing political grievances prevail over the use of catastrophic force.

## PROJECT ON U.S. RELATIONS WITH THE ISLAMIC WORLD

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THE PROJECT ON U.S. RELATIONS WITH THE ISLAMIC WORLD is a major research program housed within the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution. The project conducts high-quality public policy research, and convenes policy makers and opinion leaders on the major issues surrounding the relationship between the United States and the Muslim world. The Project seeks to engage and inform policymakers, practitioners, and the broader public on developments in Muslim countries and communities, and the nature of their relationship with the United States. Together with the affiliated Brookings Doha Center in Qatar, it sponsors a range of events, initiatives, research projects, and publications designed to educate, encourage frank dialogue, and build positive partnerships between the United States and the Muslim world. The Project has several interlocking components:

- The U.S.-Islamic World Forum, which brings together key leaders in the fields of politics, business, media, academia, and civil society from across the Muslim world and the United States, for much needed discussion and dialogue;
- A Visiting Fellows program, for scholars and journalists from the Muslim world to spend time researching and writing at Brookings in order to inform U.S. policy makers on key issues facing Muslim states and communities;
- A series of Brookings Analysis Papers and Monographs that provide needed analysis of the vital issues of joint concern between the United States and the Muslim world;
- An Arts and Culture Initiative, which seeks to develop a better understanding of how arts and cultural leaders and organizations can increase understanding between the United States and the global Muslim community;
- A Science and Technology Initiative, which examines the role cooperative science and technology programs involving the United States and the Muslim world can play in responding to regional development and education needs, as well as fostering positive relations;
- A “Bridging the Divide” Initiative which explores the role of Muslim communities in the West;
- A Brookings Institution Press Book Series, which aims to synthesize the project’s findings for public dissemination.

The underlying goal of the Project is to continue the Brookings Institution’s original mandate to serve as a bridge between scholarship and public policy. It seeks to bring new knowledge to the attention of decision-makers and opinion-leaders, as well as afford scholars, analysts, and the public a better insight into policy issues. The Project is supported through the generosity of a range of sponsors including the Government of the State of Qatar, The Ford Foundation, The Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, Lawrence Livermore National Laboratories, and the Institute for Social Policy Understanding. Partners include American University, the USC Center for Public Diplomacy, Unity Productions Foundation, Americans for Informed Democracy, America Abroad Media, and The Gallup Organization.

## THE SABAN CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST POLICY

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THE SABAN CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST POLICY was established on May 13, 2002 with an inaugural address by His Majesty King Abdullah II of Jordan. The creation of the Saban Center reflects the Brookings Institution's commitment to expand dramatically its research and analysis of Middle East policy issues at a time when the region has come to dominate the U.S. foreign policy agenda.

The Saban Center provides Washington policymakers with balanced, objective, in-depth and timely research and policy analysis from experienced and knowledgeable scholars who can bring fresh perspectives to bear on the critical problems of the Middle East. The center upholds the Brookings tradition of being open to a broad range of views. The Saban Center's central objective is to advance understanding of developments in the Middle East through policy-relevant scholarship and debate.

The center's foundation was made possible by a generous grant from Haim and Cheryl Saban of Los Angeles. Ambassador Martin S. Indyk, Senior Fellow in Foreign Policy Studies, is the Director of the Saban Center. Kenneth M. Pollack is the center's Director of Research. Joining them is a core group of Middle East experts who conduct original research and develop innovative programs to promote a better understanding of the policy choices facing American decision makers in the Middle East. They include Tamara Cofman Wittes, a spe-

cialist on political reform in the Arab world who directs the Project on Middle East Democracy and Development; Bruce Riedel, who served as a senior advisor to three Presidents on the Middle East and South Asia at the National Security Council during a twenty-nine year career in the CIA, a specialist on counterterrorism; Suzanne Maloney, a former senior State Department official who focuses on Iran and economic development; Stephen R. Grand, Fellow and Director of the Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World; Hady Amr, Fellow and Director of the Brookings Doha Center; Shibley Telhami, who holds the Sadat Chair at the University of Maryland; and Daniel Byman, a Middle East terrorism expert from Georgetown University. The center is located in the Foreign Policy Studies Program at Brookings, led by Brookings Vice President Carlos Pascual.

The Saban Center is undertaking path breaking research in five areas: the implications of regime change in Iraq, including post-war nation-building and Persian Gulf security; the dynamics of Iranian domestic politics and the threat of nuclear proliferation; mechanisms and requirements for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; policy for the war against terrorism, including the continuing challenge of state-sponsorship of terrorism; and political and economic change in the Arab world, and the methods required to promote democratization.