

SHAPING THE SPREAD OF IDEAS:
THE MECHANICS OF RADICALIZATION, CONSTRUCTION OF STRATEGIC
NARRATIVES, AND INTRINSICNESS OF STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS TO
COUNTER RADICALIZATION STRATEGY

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ABSTRACT

WALTER EDWARD BROWNLOW: Shaping The Spread Of Ideas:
The Mechanics of Radicalization, Construction of Strategic Narratives, and
Intrinsicness of Strategic Communications to Counter Radicalization Strategies
(Under the direction of Dr. Holger Moroff)

This essay examines preventative counter radicalization efforts as a response to violent extremism in Islamic cultures. It argues for the prudence of a counter radicalization strategy and explores the means through which it may be implemented most effectively. It emphasizes the accuracy and appropriateness of messaging when communicating with target audiences. The latter half of the essay attempts to clarify the concept of strategic communications and analyzes their role in successful efforts to counter radical narratives and provide credible alternate narratives. A primary focus is the importance of a strategic communications framework to a) developing and maintaining policy cohesion – i.e. how communications affect the government networks that formulate and implement policies, and b) effective signaling and response to target audiences when constructing or countering narratives. During the course of its arguments, the essay examines the process of radicalization and analyzes recommended policy responses from Western governments, specifically the United States.

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List Of Abbreviations

WMD – Weapons of Mass Destruction

CBRN – Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear weapons

SC – Strategic Communications

CSCC – Center For Strategic Counterterrorism Communications

JICG – Joint Interagency Coordination Groups

NGO – Non-governmental Organization

SCIPC – Strategic Communications Interagency Policy Committee

BBG – Board of Broadcast Governors

VOA – Voice of America radio network

FATA – Free Autonomous Tribal Area

Introduction

A rise in extremist political violence following the Cold War has produced a new set of challenges for strategists seeking to ensure security and stability for Western liberal democracies. In particular, the growing number and popularity of extremist groups within the larger subset of political Islam poses a significant threat to economic, social, and political stability in many parts the world, including the United States and Europe. Characterized by both violent radicalism and a common narrative that serves to unite often-disparate individuals under the common cause of global jihad, these groups have created transnational networks seeking to force political change on local, regional, and international levels. Although hard security threats may require kinetic responses from governments to meet short-term and often mid-term security concerns (responses including combat operations, suppression, detection, prosecution, etc), addressing the threat posed by violent radicalism is increasingly thought to require a balance of kinetic force and nuanced, cognitive approaches focused on sustainable, long-term solutions. Towards that end, the work of many social scientists and security strategists is focused on counter measures aimed at preventing radicalization – nipping the threat in the bud, so to speak.

Other researchers and strategists have argued against focusing counter terrorism efforts on counter radicalization. One reason for this argument is a belief

that violent extremists transcend contemporary ideologies. In effect this argument states that extremists existed before radical Islam and will continue to exist afterwards; focusing on Islamic radicalization will not prevent political terrorists from proliferating or acting. Other analysts conclude the only forces that can effectively reverse the spread of radical Islamic ideologies are moderate forces within the faith. A third argument against counter radicalization strategy states that most radical groups are non-violent, and resources will be more efficiently spent combatting specific groups known to engage in terrorist activities.

This essay argues counter radicalization is a prudent strategy for the following reasons: there are differences between “old” and “new” terrorism, and convincing arguments can be made that modern jihad and the unique threats it poses require original and specific policy responses from contemporary governments. There also is concern because the ideologies of many non-violent radical Islamic groups share several narrative precepts with violent extremist groups, and thus may serve to create violent actors from the larger population and feed terrorist groups, functioning as somewhat of a “conveyor belt.” If this is the case, effective counter strategy must confront the meta-narrative that drives the ideologies of both types of group. In addition, preventative policy recommendations focusing solely on groups known to be violent are generally consistent with larger counter radicalization policy recommendations, differing mainly in the size and specificity of the audience with which the policies seek to communicate. Pursuing a comprehensive counter radicalization strategy does not contradict the recommendations of more focused strategies and simultaneously addresses

concerns from both sides of the debate on threats posed by violent vs. non-violent groups. Implementing a counter radicalization strategy addresses long-term security concerns, and by requiring greater cohesiveness between rhetoric and policy also may serve grander U.S. foreign policy goals for greater economic integration and interdependence between the West and states in the developing world.

This essay, divided into four sections, argues for the prudence of preventative counter radicalization strategy and explores the means through which it may be implemented most effectively. It places emphasis on the accuracy and appropriateness of messaging when communicating with target audiences. The latter half of the essay seeks to clarify the concept of strategic communications and analyzes their role in the development and implementation of successful counter radicalization efforts. A primary focus is the importance of a strategic communications framework to a) developing and maintaining policy cohesion – i.e. how communications affect the government networks that formulate and implement policies, and b) effective signaling and response to target audiences when constructing or countering narratives. During the course of its arguments, the essay examines the process of radicalization and analyzes recommended policy responses from Western governments, specifically the United States.

Structure of Essay

Following a definition of terms, the first section of the essay provides historical and political context for Islamic radicalization. It begins by examining

underlying causes of Jihad in relation to earlier radical movements and argues that while they are similar social and political phenomenon, the scope and methods of the global Jihadist movement create security concerns that require pro-active and preventative counter measures. The second part of the section examines the distinction between radicalism and violent extremism and the implications the difference has on counter strategies. It concludes by arguing that a wider counter radicalization strategy is preferable to a focus on violent extremists because the policy requirements of both are similar, but counter radicalization strategies also address “conveyor-belt” groups that may be steering at-risk individuals towards violent extremism. Compared to a more narrow focus on violent extremism, counter radicalization strategies also may provide greater utility to the long-standing U.S. grand strategy of expanding liberal peace through economic integration and complex interdependence.

The second section explores the cognitive processes of radicalization. In order to formulate and implement effective counter measures to radicalization and extremism, it is first necessary to understand the social mechanics that allow widespread radicalization to occur and in turn violent extremists to proliferate. This section draws on the work of behavioral scientists, political scientists, and anthropologists, and includes models for norm creation, group dynamics, and social order and hierarchy within radical and violent groups. This section emphasizes the three aspects of radicalization most analysts find necessary for producing terrorist actions: grievance, ideology, and mobilization. It concludes by focusing on the importance of narrative as a means through which political and religious leaders

contextualize individual experience within a group identity, specifically how individual grievances are coalesced into a shared and constructed ideology.

The third section examines counter radicalization policies as they apply to combatting the Jihadist meta-narrative. It begins by addressing grievances and the question of theological legitimacy – specifically the lack of theological legitimacy possessed by secular Western governments and the need for moderate Islamic partners and stakeholders. The focus then narrows on two primary and complementary strategies available to Western governments seeking to combat Jihadist narratives: 1) the creation and communication of credible *alternate* narratives, and 2) *countering* Jihadist narratives by discrediting their logic and leaders. This section identifies a key difficulty to U.S. attempts to construct a credible alternate narrative as the communication of conflicting messages to the target audience. The section concludes by focusing on the deconstruction of the Jihadist narrative through existing and potential counter narrative operations.

The fourth and final section of the essay provides analysis of strategic communications in both the construction of a credible alternate narrative and effective countering of the Jihadist narrative. The first half of the section examines how strategic communications may be best applied internally as a conceptual framework through which to generate, receive, and share feedback among government agencies and their partners. It begins with an explanation of how a well-conceived communications framework can minimize the transmission of conflicting messages, thus increasing cohesion and credibility of the narrative the messages are attempting to construct. The latter half of the section focuses on

strategic communications in counter narrative operations. This includes public diplomacy, direct engagement, and also less traditional, subtler, even clandestine methods of messaging Islamic populations. Methods examined include commercial marketing strategies and the manipulation of pop-culture and public discourse via radio, TV, and Internet. The section concludes by analyzing the effectiveness and risks associated with counter narrative operations.

The essay concludes by revisiting the utility counter radicalization strategy can provide both preventative counter terrorism efforts and foreign policies intended to deepen liberal integration and economic interdependence with the developing world. It reviews the strategic goals, situational analysis, and policy recommendations discussed earlier in the essay, and re-emphasizes the need for a better conception and application of strategic communications if counter radicalization efforts are to achieve sustainable long-term success in both their security and political dimensions.

Definition of Terms

- A) **Islamism** – The belief that the religion of Islam should guide political and social life in addition to spiritual life. Islamists are not radicals by definition, and simply believe politics should be guided by and adhere to Islamic law and principles.
- B) **Radicalism** – Political radicalism denotes “political principles focused on altering social structures through revolutionary means and changing value

systems in fundamental ways.”¹ It is helpful to remember that “radical” is a relative term dependent on established social norms, and often radicalization occurs in both sides of a conflict.² In the context of this essay radicalism can be defined as a form of Islamism that employs revolutionary rhetoric (although not necessarily violence) as a means to alter social structures and change value systems in ways consistent with a fundamentalist Islamic theology.

C) Jihad – An Islamic religious duty that technically means to ‘struggle.’ Many past and present scholars interpret this struggle as a battle within one’s self to live a better life according to the will of Allah. Within radical ideologies, Jihad as seen as a struggle against non-believers, particularly the people, governments, and political forces represented by the ‘West.’ Radical ideologies may preach spiritual, political, or militant Jihad, but all employ revolutionary rhetoric and advocate resistance to Western political and cultural influence. Militant Jihad includes violent actions taken against Western people and interests, including terrorism.

D) Violent Extremism – A Western term for words and actions that either support, enable, or engage in acts of violence to further the goals and ideology of the most radicalized segments of society. The British Crown Prosecution Service defines violent extremism as the “demonstration of unacceptable behavior by using any means or medium to express views which foment, justify

¹ Wikipedia (undated) Online. Retrieved 04/05/13 from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_radicalism

² Schmidt, Alex. (2013). *Radicalization, Counter Radicalization, and De-Radicalization: A conceptual discussion and literature review*. ICCT Research Paper for the International Center for Counter Terrorism – The Hague [Online] Retrieved 04/02/13 from <http://www.icct.nl/download/file/ICCT-Schmid-Radicalisation-De-Radicalisation-Counter-Radicalisation-March-2013.pdf>

or glorify terrorist violence in furtherance of particular beliefs”³ Laurie Fenstermaker points out in a 2011 strategic assessment of counter terrorism strategy that this definition includes not only those who engage in or provide material support for terrorist actions, but also those who use words to incite terrorist violence.⁴

- E) Terrorism** – Frequently defined as a form of political expression in which radicalized extremists communicate a message through violent action. Modern terrorism often involves the indiscriminate killing of civilians in order to create a psychological response within a target audience for the purposes of weakening political and military resistance to the political objectives pursued by those executing the act. It should be noted that there are multiple definitions and conceptions of terrorism, partly because it is a complex action, and partly because terrorism, like radicalism, is a relative term. As many scholars are fond of pointing out, “One man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter.”
- F) Narrative (specifically Jihadist narrative)** – A story or account of events that connects and places them in context with one another, often in an attempt to ascribe or explain causality. Narratives can take many forms – non-fiction, fiction, and fictionalized history are all different types of narratives presented in books, but the distinction between fiction and non-fiction becomes less clear

³ Violent Extremism and Related Criminal Offences. (2006). Crown Prosecution Service, UK. Online. Retrieved on 03/14/2013 from:
http://www.cps.gov.uk/publications/prosecution/violent_extremism.html (Cited by Fenstermaker, pg. 5 – see below)

⁴Fenstermaker, Laurie (2011). Executive Summary. In Fenstermaker, Laurie, and Todd Leventhal Fenstermaker, L., and Leventhal, T., (Eds.), *Countering Violent Extremism: Scientific Methods and Strategies*. TOPICAL STRATEGIC MULTI-LAYER ASSESSMENT AND AIR FORCE RESEARCH LABORATORY MULTI-DISCIPLINARY WHITE PAPER IN SUPPORT OF COUNTER-TERRORISM AND COUNTER-WMD. (p. 6) Retrieved online on 03/26/13 from:
http://www.nsiteam.com/pubs/U_Counter%20Violent%20Extremism%20Final_Approved%20for%20Public%20Release_28Oct11v3.pdf

when examining political communications. This is because narratives shape reality by providing the frame in which it is perceived, organized, and understood. There are many narratives that support violent political acts carried out in the name of Islam, but almost all share four characteristics. Together they provide an over-arching Jihadist meta-narrative: 1) Islam is under unjust attack from the West, 2) It is the duty of Muslims to defend Islam against this attack, 3) Terrorist actions constitute a just defense of Islam and are religiously sanctioned, and 4) It is the duty of Muslims who do not engage in militant Jihad to support those who do.

- G) Counter Terrorism** – Efforts to combat terrorism employed by the governments it targets. Traditional methods of counter terrorism are typically kinetic operations undertaken by military, intelligence, and police agencies designed to detect, suppress, prosecute, and eliminate extant terrorist activity.
- H) Counter Radicalization** – A preventative approach to counter terrorism aimed at “nipping it in the bud” through identifying, addressing, and alleviating the factors that create, drive, and enable radicalization to occur. The financial and political costs of traditional counter terrorism efforts, combined with their seeming ineffectiveness in terms of preventing the spread of radical and violent extremist ideology (in many cases actually contributing significantly to its growth) have created a demand for research related to counter radicalization strategies.
- I) Strategic Communications** – Traditionally associated with military or police activity. Words and actions constituting messages communicated with the

purpose of signaling and explaining intent to allies and adversaries. This essay echoes the evolving opinion that strategic communications require synchronization between messages sent by words and those sent through actions. They also may be better utilized and understood as including an internal element – “a more complex, cross-governmental activity; as the means for presenting and explaining ‘comprehensive’ or ‘integrated’ policies.”⁵

⁵ Cornish, P., Lindley-Franch, J., Yorke, C. (2011) *Strategic Communications and National Strategy*. (p. V – Preface and Acknowledgments) Retrieved online from 03/12/13 from <http://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/public/Research/International%20Security/r0911stratcomms.pdf>

Section I – The Case for Counter Radicalization

Part I – The Political Context and “Old” vs. “New” Terrorism

The end of the Cold War and rapid globalization that followed produced a massive expansion of liberal values and interests into parts of the world in which the two did not always complement one another, much less interact symbiotically with the local status quo. In his 2005 book ‘Globalization and Terrorism,’ Jamal Nassar provides an explanation for the causes of modern terrorist campaigns against the west by combining “balance of power” rationale with what he refers to as an expectations gap between the promise of liberal values propagated by the West and the reality experienced by those on the ground in traditionally Muslim countries. He defines terrorism as a fundamentally political act, and conceives it as the result of a struggle for power on both a geopolitical and personal level.⁶

In Nassar’s conception, the end of the Cold War produced a liberal hegemony that approached American empire. In this sense resistance to the expansion of Western, and particularly American, influence is a completely rational expectation in which terrorism is merely the most effective means of resistance available to asymmetrically matched adversaries. Nassar describes the leadership of the Al

⁶ Nassar, Jamal. (2005) *Globalization and Terrorism: The Migration of Dreams and Nightmares*. Rowman and Littlefield: Oxford, UK. (pp. 23-35)

Queda network in classically Realist terms in which the Islamists' goal is defined not by "altruistic intentions of fighting an 'evil empire' and fulfilling the orders of Allah on Earth," but rather an interest in achieving absolute power over a territorial area in which they can implement their political and social agendas.⁷ Nassar also identifies terrorism as a desperation response by individuals to oppression and injustices that the West is perceived as creating, committing, or enabling. In this sense there are two types of terrorist actors: the political actors taking part in a geopolitical struggle against hegemony, and those engaged in terrorism as "a response of desperation" to the struggle for power. This second category of terrorists, "have certain basic wishes, needs, or instincts that, if frustrated, contribute to aggressive behavior that may give rise to violence and revolution."⁸ Nassar's explanation highlights the fact that terrorists can have both overtly political and psychologically reactionary motives for their actions, in addition to whatever religious and ideological fervor they may experience.

In this sense modern Islamic terrorism is similar to terrorism employed by earlier political and ideological movements – 19th century anarchists, 20th century anti-colonial nationalists, and Cold War-era leftists were all movements characterized by radical opposition to the status quo, and all contained violent factions that utilized terrorism in the pursuit of their political objectives. In America, the Ku Klux Klan (specifically anti-civil rights bombings in the 1960s), Black Liberation Army (militant post-Black Panther Party activists in the 1970s), Anti-

⁷ Nassar, Jamal (2005) pp. 23-35

⁸ Nassar, Jamal (2005) p. 35

government extremists (Timothy McVeigh), and Christian fundamentalists (Eric Rudolph) have all utilized terrorism to protest perceived injustices and government complicity.^{9,10} Their uses of violence against civilians were attempts to force change on the social and political order of the day. It is a safe assumption that there will always be disenfranchised individuals who are unsatisfied with the status quo and willing to commit violent acts in order to create change by destabilizing the presiding political order. As *The Economist* surmised in 2005, “The Jihadists will go, but others will take the stage.”¹¹ The relevant debate for security strategists is whether modern Islamic terrorism poses new or unique threats that require innovative policy responses, or whether today’s terrorism is simply the continuation of a political and social reality that will persist regardless of policies enacted to prevent people from becoming terrorists.

In his book “Old and New Terrorism” (2009), Peter Nuemann argues that terrorism evolved following the Cold War. Despite their political similarities, he characterizes “new” terrorism as differing from “old” in 3 distinct and important ways – structurally, ideologically, and methodologically. He first describes a structural shift away from vertical and army-like hierarchies into horizontally oriented networks. The networks are less vulnerable than the rigid structure of “old” terrorism, and are formed mostly by independently operating cells. Organizational

⁹ Gupta, Dipak (2006) *Who Are the Terrorists? (The Roots of Terrorism)*. Chelsea House: New York, NY. (pp. 14-24)

¹⁰ Black Liberation Army. (2010). START (National consortium for the Study of Terrorism And Responses to Terrorism) website. Retrieved online 07/02/2013 from: http://www.start.umd.edu/start/data_collections/tops/terrorist_organization_profile.asp?id=3708

¹¹ Lessons from Anarchy: Today’s jihadists, like yesterday’s anarchists, will fade. Terrorism Won’t. (Aug. 18th, 2005) *The Economist*. Retrieved online 06/01/2013 from: <http://www.economist.com/node/4293225>

structure is well hidden within the networks, and cells are connected principally by ideology rather than function.¹²

Nuemann also argues the character of fundamentalist ideologies that drive modern Islamic terrorism is unique in that it seeks to subvert the overtly political into a pre-dominantly religious narrative (although he also notes that religious extremism was present in some “old” terrorist movements).¹³ Although some radical movements in the past were de-radicalized through negotiation and inclusion in the political process (the Irish Republican Army is a good example of this process), theologically based ideologies pose difficulties in this regard.¹⁴ As conservative U.S. politician Barry Goldwater noted in a much-referenced 1981 speech to the U.S. senate, “There is no position on which people are so immovable as their religious beliefs... [theologically-drive political actors] believe they are acting in the name of God, so they can't and won't compromise.”¹⁵ The application of this assertion to violent extremists can be challenged in a number of ways – this essay does so by identifying motivating factors other than ideology – but the assertion does provide accurate insight into the difficulties of de-radicalizing Jihadist groups through political inclusion.

While structural and ideological changes are important for understanding modern terrorism, perhaps the most important and impactful aspect of the

¹² Nuemann, Peter. (2009). *Old Terrorism and New Terrorism: Late Modernity, Globalisation and the Transformation of Political Violence*. Polity Press: Malden, Ma. (pp. 14-49)

¹³ Nuemann, Peter. (2009). pp. 14-49

¹⁴ Dochartaigh, Naill. (2010). “Negotiated Deradicalization in the Irish Peace Process.” Unpublished draft for the School of Political Science and Sociology, National University of Ireland. Retrieved 07/10/2013 from: http://academia.edu/1203175/Negotiated_deradicalization_in_the_Irish_peace_process

¹⁵ Goldwater, Barry. (1981, Sept 16) Speech made on the floor of the U.S. senate. Text retrieved online on July 02, 2013 from: <http://www.addictinginfo.org/2012/05/13/barry-goldwaters-war-against-the-religious-right/>

evolution from “old” to “new” is a change in methods. Terrorist groups in the past adhered to certain codes of conduct or norms regarding the selection of targets (targeting political figures, avoiding civilian targets, etc), but modern terrorism frequently targets large numbers of civilians. It chooses its targets based on the effect an attack might create in the collective psyche of its target audience, an effect enhanced tremendously if it can saturate global media coverage.¹⁶ In one sense this evolution of method can be understood as simply using the available technological resources to amplify the message the act is meant to send, but Nuemann argues “media overload and emotional desensitization” play a significant role in the planning of attacks, and drive a cycle of increasing violence and “mass-casualty terrorism.”¹⁷ In this cycle, the grisly or spectacular nature of an attack makes it more attractive to a global media culture that thrives on sensationalism. Because media coverage is of primary importance to the attack’s effectiveness, operational planners are led to create spectacles more dramatic, horrific, and spectacular than preceding attacks in order to ensure their effects do not diminish over time.¹⁸

Whereas “old” terrorism operated by an axiom that its practitioners “would rather have lots of people watching than lots of people dead,” the same does not appear to be the case for “new” terrorism. Mass casualty attacks on civilians and non-combatants have become the norm, and although there has not yet been a successful attack using “weapons of mass destruction” (WMD), chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) weapons are all openly pursued by Al Qaeda and

¹⁶ Nuemann, Peter. (2009). pp. 123-127

¹⁷ Nuemann, Peter. (2009). pp. 25-28

¹⁸ Nuemann, Peter. (2009). pp. 137-146

other terrorist organizations (however, the openness with which they pursue WMDs may also be a means to affect the psyche of their target populations).¹⁹ The evolution of terrorism as a political phenomenon may be debatable, but what is clear is it has become more dangerous and more resistant to political compromise. Its methods have become more deadly at the same time its list of viable targets has expanded. Although suicide bombers and airplane hijackers make their greatest impact in the collective psyche, a successful attack using CBRN could threaten entire populations and destabilize political and economic systems on a global scale.

Part II – Why Counter Radicalization Strategy?

Kinetic actions undertaken in “The War on Terror” have to date prevented another large-scale 9/11-style attack on American soil, but also have proven to be counter-productive at minimizing the long-term threat from Islamic terrorism. The number of radical Islamic groups who advocate or participate in terrorist actions has increased significantly since 2001, and attacks from “homegrown” radicals like the recent Boston Marathon bombings are on the rise. The Rand Database for Worldwide Terrorist Incidents lists 404 attacks occurring in the Middle East and Southeast Asia during the year 2000, but in 2006 that number had jumped to 5,738 – an increase of 1300%.²⁰ Much of the increase can be attributed to resistance to U.S. combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, but the numbers are nonetheless indicative of the fact that traditional counter terrorism efforts have created more

¹⁹ Nuemann, Peter. (2009). pp. 25-28

²⁰ Rand Database of World Terrorist Incidents. Rand website. Retrieved Online on June 02, 2013 from: <http://www.rand.org/nsrd/projects/terrorism-incidents.html>

terrorists than they have eliminated. The percentage of Muslims who sympathize with Jihadists grew rapidly during the same period. In America the number of Muslims who perceived The War on Terror as a war against Islam (the fundamental precept of the Jihadist narrative) rose from 18% in 2001 to 55% in 2007. A 2009 survey found similar results in other countries: the percentage of Muslims who felt 1) Islam is under unjust attack from the West and 2) sympathetic to the Jihadists desire to defend the faith ranged from 62% in Indonesia to 87% in Egypt.²¹ The growing threat to the West from global Jihad appears to be related to growing acceptance of at least part of the Jihadist meta-narrative within the Islamic societies and the spread of radical ideologies that propagate it.

Some analysts researching preventative counter strategies argue against a policy focus on radicalization, and instead advocate focusing solely on those violent extremists who plan, execute, and provide material support for attacks. Marc Sageman (2011) argues that the threat posed by violent extremism can be traced to small, disaffected, and outraged groups who evolve into terrorists through small group dynamics and isolated norm creation. He argues policy responses should focus on countering the creation of these isolated groups, and not the general trend of growing radicalization in Islamic societies.²² This essay however, maintains there are several reasons to maintain a wider focus on radicalization. Sageman's policy

²¹ Leuprecht, C., Hataley, T., Muskalkenko, S., McCauley, C. (2009). "Winning the Battle but Losing the War? Narrative and Counter Narrative Strategy" in *Perspectives on Terrorism* vol. 3, no. 2. Found online on 03/02/2013 at <http://terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/68/140>

²² Sageman, Marc. (2011). Countering Extremist Violence. In Fenstermaker, Laurie, and Todd Leventhal Fenstermaker, L., and Leventhal, T., (Eds.), *Countering Violent Extremism: Scientific Methods and Strategies*. TOPICAL STRATEGIC MULTI-LAYER ASSESSMENT AND AIR FORCE RESEARCH LABORATORY MULTI-DISCIPLINARY WHITE PAPER IN SUPPORT OF COUNTER-TERRORISM AND COUNTER-WMD. (pp. 29-35) Retrieved online on 03/26/13 from: http://www.nsiteam.com/pubs/U_Counter%20Violent%20Extremism%20Final_Approved%20for%20Public%20Release_28Oct11v3.pdf

recommendations for avoiding the creation of violent groups – namely to a) avoid repression, b) address discrimination, c) maintain consistency between action and rhetoric, d) construct effective counter messaging, and e) leverage controversies created by terrorist actions against Muslims – are (as will be discussed later in the third section) largely the same recommendations provided by wider counter radicalization strategies.²³

In addition, the U.S. State Department and prominent think tanks assess that “radicalization does not occur by accident, or because such populations are innately prone to extremism.”²⁴ Under both presidents Bush and Obama, analysts have presented a “conveyer-belt” model in which ostensibly non-violent radical groups use theology and rhetoric to push individuals towards violent extremism.²⁵ A 2007 strategic assessment describes the model as “terrorists seek[ing] to convert alienated or aggrieved populations, convert them to extremist viewpoints, and turn them, by stages, into sympathizers, supporters, and ultimately, members of terrorist networks.”²⁶ The growth of radical ideologies and prevalence of sympathizers to violent extremists within Islamic societies creates demand for strategy that addresses all segments of the ideological spectrum in which the Jihadist meta-narrative is propagated.

²³Sageman, Marc (2011) (pp. 29-35)

²⁴ U.S. Department of State. (2007) Strategic Assessment. Office of the Coordinator for Counter Terrorism. Retrieved 07/10/2013 from: <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2006/82727.htm>

²⁵ Carpenter, J.S., Levitt, M., & Jacobson, M. (2010) “Confronting The Idea of Radical Extremism.” *Journal of National Security and Law Policy*. Vol 3, No. 2 (p. 306). Retrieved online on 05/25/2013 from http://jnslp.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/08/05_CARPENTER-ET-AL.pdf

²⁶ U.S. Department of State (2007)

Effective counter radicalization strategy also may serve as more than just a means to mitigate threats posed by Islamic terrorism. Both during and following the Cold War, America foreign policy has pushed an internationalist agenda that seeks to create global stability through economic integration and complex (albeit asymmetric in its favor) interdependence.²⁷ If pre-9/11 growth of radical fundamentalism and violent extremism were in part ideational responses to growing American hegemony and the encroachment of liberal cultural values upon traditional cultures and socio-political hierarchies, counter radicalization efforts may provide utility to grand strategy by reducing popular resistance to global integration and the creation of interdependence between the West and the developing world. Cognitive approaches to counter radicalization may also provide utility to future foreign policy demands requiring ideational shifts in target cultures.

Targeted cognitive approaches towards radicalization may meet with resistance among those who object to the spread of Western liberalism on neo-colonial grounds. But it is important to remember that one explanation for popular resistance to the spread of liberalism is the expectations gap mentioned by Nasser. The gulf between expectations set by rhetoric and experience delivered by policy has allowed for the prolific spread of anti-Western narratives among Muslim populations in both the developing world and at home in the U.S. and Europe. The effectiveness of counter radicalization strategy depends heavily on minimizing that gap. In other words, the construction and successful propagation of credible alternatives to the Jihadist narrative depends largely on correcting many of the

²⁷ Layne, C., and Schwartz, B. (1993). American Hegemony – Without and Enemy. *Foreign Policy* no. 92, Fall 1993. (pp. 5-23)

discrepancies and contradictions communicated by U.S. (and European) foreign policies and actions. In this sense successful counter radicalization strategy will require the U.S. and its Western partners, if they desire complex interdependence to spread further among stable regimes, to regain their “power of attraction.” To accomplish this they must successfully validate and reinforce, through actions and policies, the rhetoric used to justify the global expansion of liberal integration and U.S. military presence that inspired the enmity of radical Islamists. The scope of this essay however, will remain on the causes and processes of radicalization and effective counter measures.

Section II – The Mechanics of Radicalization

Part I - How does radicalization occur?

In order to formulate and implement effective counter radicalization strategies, it is necessary to understand what causes and motivates radical operators. Understanding the social and cognitive mechanics of radicalization can help policy designers mitigate the factors that drive and draw individuals towards violent extremism and enable the spread of radical ideologies. The following section uses terminology from the work of Dr. Alex Schmidt of the International Center for Counter Terrorism in The Hague to examine the radicalization process on three levels: the individual (micro), group (meso), and societal (macro).²⁸

Micro-level

Tom Rieger summarized research into radicalization on the micro-level when he wrote simply, “Not all radicals are the same.”²⁹ There are differing theories explaining who is most at risk to radicalization and how it occurs. There is significant overlap among explanations, but the only real consensus among researchers is that the motivational matrix driving radical actors, and in particular

²⁸ Schmidt, Alex (2013) pp. 9-11

²⁹ Rieger, Tom (2011) *Not All Radicals Are The Same: Implications for Counter Radicalization Strategy* ICCT Research Paper (pp 24-28). International Center For Counter Terrorism. Retrieved online 05/15/2013 from <http://www.icct.nl/download/file/ICCT-Schmid-Radicalisation-De-Radicalisation-Counter-Radicalisation-March-2013.pdf>

the matrix driving violent extremists, is so varied and complex that it is impossible to type universal characteristics. Those most susceptible are frequently characterized as youths experiencing, in Schmidt's words,

“Identity problems, failed integration, feelings of alienation, marginalization, discrimination, relative deprivation, humiliation (direct or by proxy), stigmatization and rejection, often combined with moral outrage and feelings of (vicarious) revenge.”³⁰

Here it is important to note that socio-economic deprivation in and of itself does not produce radicalization, although widespread deprivation appears necessary for radicalization to take root across large swaths of society.³¹ Schmidt acknowledges the difficulties of typing terrorists and the wide variety of proposed classifications. Other researchers examine different personality types and ideological propagators (see Table 1). The breadth of distinctions between types of individuals who engage in militant Jihad supports the assumption, made in the previous section, that there always will be an element of society at risk to becoming violent political extremists. Examining micro-level radicalization can however, provide utility to counter radicalization strategists. It provides insight into common grievances and types of personalities most often co-opted through narrative into accepting radical and violent ideologies.

³⁰ Schmidt, Alex (2013) p. 4

³¹ Piazza, J. (2006) Rooted in Poverty? (Terrorism, Poor Economic Development, and Social Cleavages). *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 18:159-177

Because each violent extremist may have complex motivations, counter strategies must address a variety of motivating factors in a variety of fashions. Often efforts must be tailored small audiences experiencing common conditions that lead to common but localized grievances, or further tailored to individual types of radicals within a localized audience. In other words, no single element of strategy will prove effective at countering radicalization across an entire target audience. Effective policies must be customized with specific knowledge of an audience and the political context in which a policy is being implemented.³² In the final section of this essay, the utility of a dynamic strategic communications framework to successful development of customized policies will be examined in depth.

Meso-level

Schmidt characterizes the meso-level as the “radical milieu,” meaning the specific social settings in which radicalized individuals and groups develop. Because those who introduce and propagate radical norms hold positions of relative authority and influence (often religious leaders) and yet individually influence only small pockets of society, radical norms can be seen as conforming to both top-down and bottom-up models of normative change.³³ Preventing radicalization and violent extremism on the meso-level is best conceived as an effort to influence the creation and adoption of norms within groups at-risk to indoctrination by radical ideologies. In order to prevent the spread of radical norms, those who introduce and propagate

³² Cornish, P., et al. (2011) p. 9

³³ Finnemore, M., Sikkink, K. (1998). International Norm Dynamics and Political Change. In *International Organization*, vol. 52, no.4, Autumn (pp 887-917). Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press.

radical change must be ideationally delegitimized. In addition, alternate, non-radical norms must be propagated in order to compete and prevent radical ideas from reaching a “tipping point” within groups into which they are introduced. These two steps correspond to counter narrative (delegitimization) and alternate narrative (competition) strategies.

Analyzing the growth of radical groups within Islamic societies, Dipak Gupta stresses the importance of group psychology on individual decision-making processes. He argues it is natural human behavior for individuals to crave belonging in a group, and once in the group to derive utility from adhering to its rules and norms. By emphasizing the critical role of ‘political entrepreneurs’ (read norm introducers), he explains how new, radical norms are introduced and take root in religious groups that form around them.³⁴ Group affiliation is desirable because individuals establish identity through membership and group activities – in terrorist organizations participants *become* the person they want to be through their membership in the group. As a result, “when an idea gains momentum, the number of people seeking its affiliation by being part of the community increases.”³⁵ This explains why as radicalism began to spread in Muslim communities, it also gained momentum, which served to further increase the attractiveness of its ideology and indoctrinate ever-growing numbers. The concept of self-reinforcing and

³⁴ Gupta, D.K. (2010) Spread Of Radicalism: A Theoretical Perspective On The Process By Which Ideas Flood The World. *International Journal of Security and Terrorism*, Volume 1 (1), 2010, ss.1-15

³⁵ Gupta, D.K., Spitzberg, B., Tsou, M.H., Gawron, J.M. (2011) Tracking The Spread of Violent Extremism. In Fenstermaker, Laurie, and Todd Leventhal Fenstermaker, L., and Leventhal, T., (Eds.), *Countering Violent Exremism: Scientific Methods and Strategies*. TOPICAL STRATEGIC MULTI-LAYER ASSESSMENT AND AIR FORCE RESEARCH LABORATORY MULTI-DISCIPLINARY WHITE PAPER IN SUPPORT OF COUNTER-TERRORISM AND COUNTER-WMD. (pp. 44-56)) Retrieved online on 03/26/13 from: http://www.nsiteam.com/pubs/U_Counter%20Violent%20Extremism%20Final_Approved%20for%20Public%20Release_28Oct11v3.pdf

accelerating momentum is consistent with the idea of a “normative cascade” that occurs after an idea reaches a “tipping point” in models of normative change.³⁶

Eventually many radicalized groups isolate themselves from wider social discourse as a means to defend against infiltration and conflicting ideologies. Communication between members can then become an echo chamber serving to affirm and validate the group’s beliefs. This process, commonly referred to as groupthink, can internalize increasingly radical norms and lead to extremism and eventually terrorist activity.³⁷ For individuals radicalized to violent extremism within the U.S., the radical milieu is contained almost entirely in the virtual world. During a May, 2013 panel discussion on the myths and realities of online radicalization, Peter Nuemann, Director of Security Studies and The International Centre for the Study of Radicalization at King's College London, argues that those radicalized in the U.S. are not normally “lone wolfs,” but rather members of a vast and vibrant online community.³⁸ For this reason, he argues a majority of preventative domestic counter efforts should focus on greater understanding and more effective use of online footprints and virtual networks.

The meso-level is the most cognitively delicate and tedious arena for counter radicalization strategy implemented by governments. A completely successful strategy would stop radical norms from reaching a tipping point and facilitate a wider acceptance of “non-radical” norms, effectively countering the spread of

³⁶ Romaniuk, S. (2010). Not So Wide, Europe: Reconsidering the Normative Power of the EU in European Foreign Policy” In *Romanian Journal of European Affairs*. Vol 10, no. 2. (pp 52-68).

³⁷ Gupta, D.K. (2010) pp. 1-15

³⁸ Nuemann, Peter. (2013) Transcript of opening remarks of a panel convened by the New America Foundation in collaboration with the Muslim Affairs Council. May 28, 2013. Video retrieved online on July 1, 2013 from: http://www.newamerica.net/events/2013/online_radicalization_myths_realities

radical ideas within targeted groups. However, it is unrealistic to believe government efforts can be highly effective or influential in this regard. Enlisting moderate partners and creating stakeholders within Muslim communities is therefore vitally important to this effort. If a government does chooses to engage an audience through means other than moderate proxies, the precision with which messages are communicated at the meso-level is paramount.³⁹ Poorly conceived or executed messages are counter-productive and risk being co-opted to support the Jihadist narrative that the West is trying to destroy Islam.

Macro Level

Macro-level analysis corresponds to the dissemination of radical ideology across larger swaths of Islamic societies. Macro-level factors are widely experienced social and political conditions that may create cognitive openings for radicalization to spread. These conditions may result from the role of governments, public opinion, tensions in majority-minority relations (this is an especially significant condition in cases of ethnic diaspora), or a scarcity of opportunities for social and economic advancement.⁴⁰ Effective counter strategies on this level would create economic and social wellbeing, provide political choices, mitigate repression and discrimination, and engage in credible and precise public diplomacy.

³⁹ Leuprecht, C., Hataley, T., Muskalenko, S., McCauley, C. (2009) p. 33

⁴⁰ Schmidt, Alex (2013) pp. 4-5

Marketing of the Jihadist Meta-Narrative

Gupta's theoretical perspective on how radicalism has spread within Islam combines ideational theory of normative change and group dynamics with narrative theory and commercial marketing strategies. He identifies three types of political entrepreneurs fundamental to the successful creation of norms associated with radicalization. He cites Malcom Gladwell's "archetypes of social epidemics" when defining them as *connectors*, *mavens*, and *salesmen*.⁴¹

The role of connector represents the primary nodes of radical networks. These are people that have an established social, economic, and political network, and are known to many because of their position, money, and power. Osama Bin Laden is an example of a connector – he facilitated the meeting of logistic, financial, and ideological elements to enable a radical group to mobilize and act.⁴² Connectors also serve to bridge societal pockets in which radical norms have taken root, creating networks and enabling ideologies to disseminate across large swaths of a population from within.

The second type, the mavens, is comprised of theoreticians, theologians, and the providers of ideology. Mavens formulate intellectual and theological rationale for radical action. They are often Imams, and they construct the narrative in which radical norms are contextualized.⁴³ They create the messages propagated to target demographics within their own and other Muslim societies, and have proven to be highly effective strategic communicators in their own right.

⁴¹ Gladwell, Malcom. (2000). *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make A Big Difference*. Little, Brown, and Co: Ney York, NY (cited by Gupta, et all (2011) p. 46

⁴² Gupta, D.K. (2010). pp. 5-6

⁴³ Gupta, D.K. (2010). pp. 5-6

The third type, the salesmen, rely on personal charisma and persuasion to attract followers to the message. Mullahs or charismatic individuals often fill this role, but in reality individuals who may fulfill more than one often blur the distinction between the three roles. What is important to conceptualize is how the meta-narrative is constructed, packaged, and marketed in a manner that maximizes “sales” and the normalization of both radical and violent norms.⁴⁴ Ideology is conceived, produced, and marketed by these three archetypes.

Counter efforts from moderate partner organizations within Islamic communities may benefit by the identification of individuals who fill these roles. However, within virtual communities many content consumers are also content creators, so it is difficult to ascribe specific roles to members of an online community or group.⁴⁵ This vagueness is consistent with findings that indicate there are multiple mechanisms for radicalization, and it is not possible to control or eliminate it by controlling or eliminating one mechanism.⁴⁶ Here it is important to remember the earlier finding that no single element of strategy will effectively counter radicalization across an entire target audience. Rather, policy groups must be conceived as parts of a whole, and implemented cohesively as individual elements of a unified and multi-faceted strategy.

⁴⁴ Gupta, D.K. (2010). pp. 5-6

⁴⁵ Stevens, Tim. (2010). pp. 112-122.

⁴⁶ Leuprecht, C., Hataley, T., Muskalenko, S., McCauley, C. (2009) p. 32

Part II – The Terrorism Equation: Grievance, Ideology, and Mobilization

Despite many classifications or “types” of terrorist actor and several models of radicalization, most research converges on a fundamental troika necessary for terrorist actions to occur: grievances, ideology, and mobilization.⁴⁷ Because counter mobilization efforts are largely kinetic operations in response to existing threats, this essay focuses mainly on strategies to prevent and mitigate the first two factors in the troika. The manner in which grievance and ideology interact is simple, yet dynamic. Peter Nuemann argues that “without grievance, ideology does not resonate, while without ideology, grievances are not acted upon.”⁴⁸ Most radical ideologies explain the personal grievances of Muslims as exclusively and completely the fault of Western persecution of the Muslim faith. A political and social order derived from fundamentally “pure” Islam is presented as the solution that will end the underlying causes of all grievances. Often this utopian vision is characterized as a return to the “Golden Age of Islam” – a mythologized period spanning the first four caliphates of Islamic political and social rule on the Arabian Peninsula and Northern Africa.⁴⁹

Within this narrative, the West is labeled an aggressor in a war against Islam in which it seeks to destroy the faith, happiness, and piety of Muslims. The war is evidenced by Western support for Israel, a continuing presence of Western

⁴⁷ LaFree, G., Ackerman, G., (2009) *The Empirical Study of Terrorism: Social and Legal Research* Annual Review of Law and Social Science Vol. 5: 347-374

⁴⁸ Nuemann, Peter (2011) Summary of debate from policy luncheon at The Washington Institute. Jan 5, 2011. Retrieved online 05/05/2013 from <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/combating-violent-extremism-the-counterradicalization-debate-in-2011>

⁴⁹ Thompson, Steven R (2012) *Countering the Narrative: Combatting the Ideology of Radical Islam*. U.S. Navy War College. Retrieved Online 04/21/2013 from: <http://www.usnwc.edu/Lucent/OpenPdf.aspx?id=130&title=Perspective>

militaries in traditionally Muslim-populated lands, and combat operations that have killed large amounts of Muslims in Iraq and Afghanistan, and to a lesser extent Pakistan. Within this war, every Muslim should engage in Jihad against forces that seek to harm Islam – namely the West and its allies. Terrorist actions are justified and it is the duty of all Muslims, if they do not engage in militant Jihad themselves, to support the efforts of those who do.⁵⁰

This story is simple, powerful, and effective at attracting disaffected members of Muslim communities. It explains a complex world in simple terms and prescribes a specific course of action to produce an ultimate solution. It is certainly not the first ideology to gain popularity by promoting simple solutions to complex problems. The difficult challenge for preventative strategists in the U.S., Europe, and elsewhere is how to effectively counter the narrative while offering a credible alternative? The U.S. government is viewed with suspicion and contempt, if not hatred, in most of the Muslim world and lacks theological legitimacy. How then, should the West engage and communicate with Islamic populations?

⁵⁰ Thompson, Steven R (2012) p. 18

Section III – Review of Counter Efforts

Part I – Recommended Policy Responses

Tawfik Hamid argues the key for improving the image of the West in the Muslim world is not a change in policies, but simply a change in the manner in which those policies are perceived.⁵¹ While that argument is consistent with findings that indicate narrative-based strategies are fundamental to mitigating the threat posed by radicalization, it does not consider that macro-level grievances may create cognitive openings for radical narratives. Nor does it consider that some policies may affect the way other policies are perceived. Evelyn Early's research finds public opinion of the U.S. on the Arab street is "based on American actions, not American ability to craft a narrative," and nearly every study of counter radicalization stresses a fundamental need to synchronize government actions with rhetoric.⁵² In other words, to change the perception of the West in Islamic societies, the U.S. *has* to change its policies. However, current research also recommends that improving the West's image should not be included in counter radicalization

⁵¹ Hamid, Tawfik (2011). A Strategic Plan to defeat Radical Islam. Fenstermaker, L, and Leventhal, T (Eds.), *Countering Violent Extremism: Scientific Methods and Strategies*. TOPICAL STRATEGIC MULTI-LAYER ASSESSMENT AND AIR FORCE RESEARCH LABORATORY MULTI-DISCIPLINARY WHITE PAPER IN SUPPORT OF COUNTER-TERRORISM AND COUNTER-WMD. (p. 75) Retrieved online on 03/26/13 from http://www.nsiteam.com/pubs/U_Counter%20Violent%20Extremism%20Final_Approved%20for%20Public%20Release_28Oct11v3.pdf

⁵² Early, Evelyn (2011) Arab Satellite Television and Popular Culture Countering Violent Extremism. Fenstermaker, L, and Leventhal, T (Eds.), *Countering Violent Extremism: Scientific Methods and Strategies*. TOPICAL STRATEGIC MULTI-LAYER ASSESSMENT AND AIR FORCE RESEARCH LABORATORY MULTI-DISCIPLINARY WHITE PAPER IN SUPPORT OF COUNTER-TERRORISM AND COUNTER-WMD. (pp. 78-84) Retrieved online on 03/26/13 from http://www.nsiteam.com/pubs/U_Counter%20Violent%20Extremism%20Final_Approved%20for%20Public%20Release_28Oct11v3.pdf

objectives; rather, they should include improving the image of Islamic moderates, and discrediting the image of radical leaders.⁵³

To mitigate the threat posed by violent extremists, research examined in the previous section suggested grievance and radical ideology must be addressed, and the link between them disrupted. Accordingly, a majority of policy recommendations can be divided into roughly two categories: those that attempt to mitigate grievances and those that combat radical ideologies. There is crossover between these categories because some policies serve both purposes. Grievance-related policies should be conceived, developed, and implemented in the context of constructing a credible alternative to the Jihadist narrative. Whether the alternate narrative is more effectively communicated by U.S. actions or the words of its moderate partners should not affect policy development or the actions themselves.

Grievances

The first section of this essay emphasized that no set of policies can alleviate all grievances for all people across a given society. However, it is frequently argued that grievances resulting from macro-level conditions can be mitigated by development and political reform.⁵⁴ What these policy objectives aim to provide are stability and choices to individuals within a society. It is tempting to believe successful development policies, economic growth, and political reform can root themselves in any society and lessen repressive social structures and perceptions of

⁵³ "Rewriting the Narrative: An Integrated Strategy for Counterradicalization" (2009) Presidential Task Force on Confronting The Ideology of Radical Extremism. The Washington Institute. (p. 11) Retrieved Online April 1, 2013 from: <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/pubs/PTF2-Counterradicalization.pdf>

⁵⁴ "Rewriting the Narrative: An Integrated Strategy for Counterradicalization" (2009) p. 3

inequity. But it is important to view the development of Muslim societies in their own respective contexts, and not project upon them a progression mirroring the self-perceived development of secular, Western societies.

In her paper “Prevention of Violent Extremism: ‘What are the People Saying?’” (2011), Alexis Everington argues that despite a high level of “religiosity” in most Muslim societies, moderate ideologies and supportive Islamic communities may serve as decidedly positive factors for mitigating the growth and potency of violent groups.⁵⁵ Nader Hashemi, the Director of the Center for Middle East Studies at the University of Denver, ascribes high levels of religiosity to “post-colonial failures” and having “long been under authoritarian rule where the basic rules of society have not yet been negotiated.” He adds, “this applies especially to the normative role of religion in public life, which is only beginning to be debated in the Arab world.”⁵⁶

Both Hashemi and Everington’s identify religion as a fundamentally important and unavoidable factor that will influence political and social development in most Muslim societies for the foreseeable future. Everington argues collectivist and anti-materialistic social norms may make efforts to develop urbanized, individualistic societies counter-productive. Development aid must

⁵⁵ Everington, Alexis (2011) Prevention of Violent Extremism: What Are the People Saying? Fenstermaker, L., and Leventhal, T (Eds.), *Countering Violent Extremism: Scientific Methods and Strategies*. TOPICAL STRATEGIC MULTI-LAYER ASSESSMENT AND AIR FORCE RESEARCH LABORATORY MULTI-DISCIPLINARY WHITE PAPER IN SUPPORT OF COUNTER-TERRORISM AND COUNTER-WMD. (p. 78-84) Retrieved online on 03/26/13 from http://www.nsiteam.com/pubs/U_Counter%20Violent%20Extremism%20Final_Approved%20for%20Public%20Release_28Oct11v3.pdf

⁵⁶ Hashemi, Nader (2013) *Don't View Egypt's Coup With a Western Lens*. The Christian Science Monitor. Retrieved Online on 07/09/2013 from <http://news.yahoo.com/dont-view-egypts-coup-western-lens-161122878.html>

therefore be provided as each community “desires or requires it, and not as we think it should be provided.”⁵⁷

Policies must be responsive and customized to localized audiences in order to alleviate common grievances resulting from political, social, or economic issues. They must be implemented in a way that is synergistic with community needs and desires. Research indicates even among Jihadists, local and regional concerns consistently outweigh global ideology as motivating or demotivating factors.⁵⁸ Knowledge of local cultures, actors, and specific political contexts are fundamental to success in this area of counter radicalization.

Historically, the difficulties of developing and implementing effective localized policies arise when configuring them with global and regional policies – or even the localized policies of other agencies, units, or organizations. Frequently, the implementation of one policy may contradict the objectives and intended message of another.⁵⁹ To overcome this dilemma, military commanders, diplomats, analysts, policy developers, NGO employees, moderate partners – every individual who implements any aspect of policy – must come to a greater understanding of narrative driven strategy and the need for policy cohesion in all respects.

⁵⁷ Everington, Alexis (2011) p. 84

⁵⁸ Fenstermaker, Laurie (2011) p. 8

⁵⁹ Beal, J., Goodfellow, T., Putzel, J. (2006) ‘On the Discourse of Terrorism, Security, and Development’. *Journal of International Development* 18. pp. 51-67

Entering Partnerships and Creating Stakeholders among Moderates

Both radical and moderate Islamic ideologies conjoin religion and politics – any debate regarding one necessarily involves the other. Because Western governments lack theological legitimacy in religious matters, they are hindered from engaging in popular discourse regarding either. Developing partnerships with moderate Muslim NGOs and creating moderate stakeholders within Muslim communities is one of two complementary approaches recommended for solving this problem. Partners and stakeholders can engage local Muslims directly on theological and political issues and may combat the Jihadist narrative far more effectively than Western governments.⁶⁰ However, partner organizations must be perceived by local populations as operating independently from government control in order to maintain legitimacy and influence. In the past, outreach and development projects perceived as proxies for Western governments have alienated local communities both domestically and internationally. The effectiveness of what otherwise might be successful development projects has been undercut by the withdrawal of community support.⁶¹ Partners must be carefully vetted and chosen wisely (in several instances, organizations funded by preventative efforts in the UK have later been found to reinforce radicalization ⁶²), and yet both partners and

⁶⁰ Mirahmadi, H., Farooq, M. (Dec 2010) *A Community Based Approach to Countering Radicalization*. World Organization for Resource Development and Education [online] Retrieved 12/12/12 from: <http://www.worde.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/WORDE-Counter-Radicalization-Report-Final.pdf>

⁶¹ Bürkli, D., Bubbers, J., and Esenlik, E. (2011, April) *Preventing or Enabling? Counter-radicalization Policy in a Divided Britain*. International relations and Security Network [online]. Retrieved 12/12/12 from: <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/isn/Security-Watch/Articles/Detail/?ots783=4888caa0-b3db-1461-98b9-e20e7b9c13d4&lng=en&id=128161>

⁶² Mirahmadi, H., Farooq, M. (Dec 2010)

stakeholders must be allowed to pursue their own agendas free of government interference.

Threats posed by violent extremists require a pro-active response from Western governments. However, governments should monitor the progress of moderate influences and independent proxies within Muslim societies, and be conscious of risks associated with careless messaging. In the words of Brigadier Gen. Jack Shanahan, it is “essential to ensure that strategies do not create more problems than they solve.”⁶³

Part II – Countering Ideology

Providing Credible Alternate Narratives

One of the most frequent recommendations from policy researchers calls for the U.S. to narrow the gap between its rhetoric and actions when dealing with other countries and populations. Within the military, the difference between rhetoric and action is referred to as the ‘say-do’ gap, and in the ‘battle for hearts and minds,’ it has become an increasingly important policy driver within theatres of operation.⁶⁴ In one sense, its growing importance within the military is a positive sign because it demonstrates both cognizance of a narrative deficit between words and deeds, and

⁶³ Shanahan, Brig. Gen. John N.T. (2011). Forward. Fenstermaker, L., and Leventhal, T. (Eds.) *Countering Violent Extremism: Scientific Methods and Strategies*. TOPICAL STRATEGIC MULTI-LAYER ASSESSMENT AND AIR FORCE RESEARCH LABORATORY MULTI-DISCIPLINARY WHITE PAPER IN SUPPORT OF COUNTER-TERRORISM AND COUNTER-WMD. (pp 1-2) Retrieved online on 03/26/13 from http://www.nsiteam.com/pubs/U_Counter%20Violent%20Extremism%20Final_Approved%20for%20Public%20Release_28Oct11v3.pdf

⁶⁴ Josten, Richard J. (2006). “Strategic Communications: Key Enabler for Elements of National Power.” *IO Sphere*, Summer 2006, pp. 16-20. Retrieved Online on Feb. 10, 2013 from: http://www.au.af.mil/info-ops/iosphere/iosphere_summer06_josten.pdf

acknowledgment of local populations' concerns and their importance to both mission and long-term policy objectives. Yet in another sense, the increasing focus on the gap between words and actions highlights a very large and complex problem: how can local, regional, and international policies – designed to produce security, economic growth, political reform, civic development, social inclusion, and cultural sensitivity – be implemented without undercutting one another? The demands of one policy initiative often contradict the demands of others. In a 2006 paper for the Information Operations journal *IO Sphere*, Richard Josten wrote that the U.S. government was remarkably vast and its agencies were separated to a large degree by conflicting policies and intra-organizational goals. He argued the government was in dire need of a revamped strategic communications framework to synchronize the messages it sent and halt an epidemic of “informational fratricide” (so named after “missile fratricide,” in which two missiles collide mid-air and neither hits their intended targets).⁶⁵ The second part of the final section will address this conundrum and what has been done, and can still be done, to correct it.

Countering Ideology – Counter Narrative Strategy

Counter narrative strategy requires engaging an audience directly in an attempt to discredit radical and Jihadist ideologies. Although most effectively pursued by moderate leadership within Islamic communities, Western governments also engage in counter narrative operations. These include both public diplomacy (speeches, scholarship exchange, etc) and growing efforts to engage at-risk

⁶⁵ Josten, Richard J. (2006) p.18

populations in “new” media platforms – i.e. web sites, chat rooms, social networks, micro blogging, YouTube, etc.⁶⁶ Because it lacks theological legitimacy, government-led efforts must avoid religious debate and focus on delegitimizing radical leaders by attacking the logic of their claims with empirical evidence, humor, and even derision. One typical “talking point” challenges the claim Jihadists are defending Islam against the west by pointing out the vast majority of Al Qaeda’s victims have been Muslim.⁶⁷ Highlighting discrepancies within the narratives and exploiting fissures within jihadist movements are tactics recommended by the growing body of research published in recent years.⁶⁸

During a 2012 lecture on international terrorism, Dr. Paul Cornish, former Head of International Security at Chatham House and currently Professor of Strategic Studies at Exeter, observed that in surveillance footage of the 2008 terrorist attacks in Mumbai, one of the attackers looked ‘cool.’ He explained his concern was that the terrorist knew his appearance would be broadcast across the world and sought to project an attractive image to those who might view the footage.⁶⁹ The implication was that terrorist organizations are marketing themselves through videos of their attacks, much like Western marketing firms use models to sell products in TV commercials. Terrorists’ efforts to market their organizations through television and new media indicate the spread of violent extremism is at least partly dependent on its ability to sell itself through media. An

⁶⁶ Stevens, Tim. (2010) pp.112-122.

⁶⁷ Helfstein, S., Abdullah, N., Al-Obaidi, M.. (2009). *Deadly Vanguard: A Study of Al-Qaeda Violence Against Muslims*. Combatting Terrorism Center at West Point. Retrieved Online June 28th, 2013 from http://www.ctc.usma.edu/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/deadly-vanguards_complete_l.pdf

⁶⁸“Rewriting the Narrative: An Integrated Strategy for Counterradicalization” (2009) pp.14-16

⁶⁹ Cornish, Paul. (2012, Oct, 16) Lecture on International Terrorism at Bath University, UK. Transcribed from notes.

interesting aspect of counter narrative strategy is the use of media and marketing techniques to both challenge radical narratives and facilitate greater social cohesion in Muslim communities – a “social buffer” that can negatively affect the recruitment and mobilization of extremist groups.

Section IV – Strategic Communications

Section Introduction

The first three sections of this essay, respectively, have explained the need for a preventative counter radicalization strategy, examined the cognitive processes and social mechanics of radicalization, and reviewed current research on prospective policy responses. Policy recommendations have been placed in the context of either alternate or counter narrative strategies. The effective use of strategic communication (SC) has been referenced and recommended frequently regarding both elements. However, exactly what SC is and how it may be best utilized remains somewhat nebulous among both researchers and government. The fourth and final section of the essay attempts to clarify the concept of strategic communication and identify how it can be used more effectively to counter threats from violent extremism. The section is divided into three parts. The first part defines strategic communication as it relates to counter radicalization. It also describes the narrative context and contemporary information environment in which SCs transpire. The second part of the final section examines the U.S. government's efforts to implement an integrative strategic communications framework and the demand for an even more holistic approach. The third and final part details how strategic communications may be used most effectively to directly

challenge radical narratives within targeted populations and communities. The section concludes by exploring the uses of commercial marketing strategies in counter narrative operations.

Part I –Strategic Communications and Media Ecology

What are Strategic Communications and what is their use to Counter Radicalization Strategy?

Strategic communications are traditionally conceived in a military context as messages communicated for the purpose of signaling and explaining intent to allies and adversaries.⁷⁰ Within the larger scope of foreign policy, applications for SC include messages conveyed through public diplomacy, development aid, democracy promotion, and other policies that communicate and support a strategic narrative. Research and analysis regarding counter radicalization efforts emphasize the importance of precise messaging in all aspects of preventative strategy, including inter-agency coordination and narrowing the gap between political rhetoric and policies. When incorporated into counter radicalization efforts, strategic communications may be conceived as a means to deliver effective policy and elicit desired responses from target audiences.

A 2011 Chatham House report entitled “Strategic Communications and National Strategy” expounds on the now common acknowledgement among analysts that messages are sent and received through both words *and* actions.⁷¹ When

⁷⁰ Cornish, P., Lindley Franch, J., Yorke, C. (2011) (p. V – Preface and Acknowledgments)

⁷¹ Cornish, P., Lindley Franch, J., Yorke, C. (2011) (p. 2)

words communicate a message, they create an expectation for actions consistent with the original message. When actions communicate a message that contradicts or is inconsistent with words, words are delegitimized. Actions may be then interpreted more easily in the context of alternate narratives, in this case those provided by radical mavens. The report argues that an effective communication strategy demands policy cohesion and consistency between rhetoric and action. If applied holistically SC can serve not only as a means to communicate strategy, but also as a means to “deliver” policy. The authors feel SC can even achieve “the required ends of national strategy” by “going beyond media messaging to help develop a targeted campaign of social change by close knowledge of the audience.”⁷²

Narrative Credibility and the Contemporary Information Environment

Since 9/11, building credibility among Muslim populations has been difficult for Western governments, who have tended to both sabotage their own messages and construct ineffective narratives from facts and figures instead of storylines and emotion.⁷³ Radical narratives on the other hand, are effective at generating and manipulating an emotional response in their audience. Dipak Gupta frequently references authors Chip and Dan Heath to explain the “stickiness” of radical narratives. In their 2007 best seller ‘Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die,’ the brothers posit that the degree to which a message successfully ‘sticks’ with its target audience often depends on several basic characteristics.

⁷²Cornish, P., Lindley Franch, J., Yorke, C. (2011). p-X (Executive Summary and Recommendations)

⁷³ Cornish, P., Lindley Franch, J., Yorke, C. (2011). p-Viii (Executive Summary and Recommendations)

A successful message must be *simple, concrete, credible*, have aspects that are *unexpected*, and it must appeal to our *emotions*. Finally, it should contain a compelling *storyline*.⁷⁴ Radical mavens have fashioned ideologies that adhere to these principles, and the radical narrative has proved to be an effective one. To an extent it can be argued that Western governments are in fact losing a marketing war to radical political entrepreneurs. “The West is engaged in a war against Islam. We must fight to protect it. Our actions are justified, and it is your duty to support us” – the message is simple, direct, and divisive. The narrative is effectively evidenced by continued Western presence and military operations on ‘Muslim lands’, and includes by implicit association evidence of war on every value system and socio-political structure contained within local cultural systems. The element of unexpectedness is contained in the simplicity with which the narrative contextualizes complicated events, allowing the indoctrinated to feel a clear understanding of a complex world.⁷⁵

Another reason it is difficult for Western governments to establish credibility for their narratives is the information environment in which this marketing war of narratives is conducted. The global span of the Internet and instantaneous manner in which it transmits information allows problems to become simultaneously local and global in nature. The ability of a government to shape the narrative through which it is perceived has been weakened by the replacement of uni-directional, top-

⁷⁴ Heath, C. and Heath, D. (2007) *Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die*. New York: Random House.

⁷⁵ Gupta, Dipak. (2010). The Path of Global Spread of Ideologies. In Fenstermaker, L., Kuznar, L., Rieger, T., Speckhard, A., (Eds) *Protecting the Homeland from International and Domestic Terrorist Threats*. TOPICAL STRATEGIC MULTI-LAYER ASSESSMENT (SMA) MULTI-AGENCY AND AIR FORCE RESEARCH LABORATORY MULTI-DISCIPLINARY WHITE PAPERS IN SUPPORT OF COUNTERTERRORISM AND COUNTER-WMD (p 189) Retrieved online on June 6, 2013 from: http://www.start.umd.edu/start/publications/u_counter_terrorism_white_paper_final_january_2010.pdf

down information flows with multi-directional “all to all” media platforms (the blogosphere, facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Instagram, etc).⁷⁶ Within these platforms, content is often created and contextualized by site users.⁷⁷ Reaction and feedback to any policy in any location can reach a global audience instantaneously. New media can be used to contextualize the actions of Western governments in radical narratives before traditional top-down public relations have a chance to counter the interpretation. However, the same properties that enable effective propagation of radical ideology via new media can theoretically be used to counter its spread.⁷⁸ An effective communications strategy will generate consistent policies that fit within the strategic narrative, and also engage in sophisticated use of new media to maintain message control, combat message fratricide, and challenge radical narratives. Counter narrative operations and tactics using new media are discussed in the third part of this section.

Part II - National Framework for U.S. Strategic Communications

Current Framework

In 2009 the Obama administration conducted a report focusing on “comprehensive interagency strategy for public diplomacy and strategic communication.” Its executive summary begins by stating,

⁷⁶ Cornish, P., Lindley Franch, J., Yorke, C. (2011) p. 6

⁷⁷ Stevens, Tim (2010) pp. 112-122

⁷⁸Stevens, Tim (2010) p. 114

“Across all our efforts, effective strategic communications are essential to sustaining global legitimacy and supporting our policy aims. Aligning our actions with our words is a shared responsibility that must be fostered by a culture of communication throughout the government. We must also be more effective in our deliberate communication and engagement, and do a better job understanding the attitudes, opinions, grievances, and concerns of peoples – not just elites – around the world. Doing so is critical to allow us to convey credible, consistent messages, develop effective plans and to better understand how our actions will be perceived.”⁷⁹

The report highlights efforts by the U.S. government to synchronize its messaging and refine its communications with target audiences. It describes mechanisms for national-level coordination (Strategic Communications Interagency Policy Committee [SCIPC]) and operational level coordination between the state department and military. It identifies Joint Interagency Cooperation Groups (JICG) as the nexus of operational coordination between civilian and military commanders in conflict zones. Although they have no operational control, JICGs are tasked with informing military commanders of civilian operations in an attempt to achieve greater message control. The report states that in 2009 greater balance needed to be achieved between civilian and military operations, implying military actions predominated diplomatic and civilian initiatives. The report also described a policy focus on deliberate communication and direct engagement with publics, or “understanding, engaging, informing, influencing, and communicating with people through public affairs, public diplomacy, information operations and other efforts.”

⁷⁹ National Framework For Strategic Communications. (2009).The White House. (p. 1)Retrieved online 05/14/2013 from: <http://www.fas.org/man/eprint/pubdip.pdf>

In this area of focus it identified a need for better organization of, and field access to, information, intelligence, research, and analysis of local audiences.⁸⁰

The report explained the framework of strategic communications for all aspects of foreign policy and defined three priorities for all areas of their application: 1) audience recognition of mutual interest with the U.S., 2) audience belief that the U.S. plays a constructive role in global affairs, and 3) audience perception of the U.S. as a respectful partner in efforts to meet complex global challenges.⁸¹ The research reviewed in Section III of this essay found that improving the image of the U.S. should not be a top-priority of counter radicalization efforts. Instead, it found they should focus more directly on lessening the appeal of radical voices through support for respected and moderate voices within Muslim communities, even if they did not have a favorable opinion of the U.S. and its policies. These kinds of differences in policy priorities highlight the need for coordination of counter radicalization policies and inter-agency communication.

Also in 2009, the Presidential Taskforce on Confronting the Ideology of Radical Extremism recommended a multi-agency coordinating mechanism be created. The task force acknowledged the undesirability of reorganizing existing counter terrorism and strategic communication frameworks, but emphasized the importance of a mechanism devoted specifically to counter radicalization efforts, run from one office and overseen by a deputy-level cabinet position. The office was proposed to function as a clearinghouse to disseminate information and

⁸⁰ National Framework For Strategic Communications. (2009). p. 5

⁸¹ National Framework For Strategic Communications. (2009). p. 6

synchronize policies.⁸² In September of 2011, the Center For Strategic Counterterrorism Communications (CSCC) was created by executive order to coordinate an integrative counter terrorism strategy. However, the CSCC (which will be discussed below) focuses on the coordination of counter narrative efforts, not as means to create greater policy cohesion and credibility for alternate narratives. The CSCC falls short of the task force's recommendations, but even the mechanism described and recommended in its report was a top-down, uni-directional model ill-designed for the contemporary global information environment.

A Theoretical Model for an Improved Strategic Communications Framework

Cornish and his co-authors argue that effective communication, by nature, is a two-way process. It requires messages to be transmitted in a manner that generates appropriate feedback and response. The sheer volume of messages communicated to the U.S. government requiring feedback is overwhelming. For a central office to discern every message, develop a coordinated response, and respond appropriately to every signal related to counter radicalization strategy is not only inefficient, it would overload the clearinghouse and diminish the effectiveness of every other agency. In addition, the instantaneous nature of new media and 24-hour cable news coverage create added temporal pressure on governments' communications systems to respond to events quickly.⁸³ The demand for all levels of policy implementers to respond to all levels of policy dilemmas in a cohesive and timely fashion gives rise to the most intriguing aspect of the Chatham

⁸² "Rewriting the Narrative: An Integrated Strategy for Counterradicalization" (2009) p. 13

⁸³ Cornish, P., Lindley Franch, J., Yorke, C. (2011) pp. 7-8

House report: its conceptualization of a 'holistic' strategic communications framework.

The model relies on pattern, consistency, and greater understanding of strategic cohesiveness at all levels of policy implementation. A central clearinghouse should strive to instill through inter-agency communications a dynamic understanding of counter radicalization strategy among every actor and aspect within the framework, from diplomats to policy developers, platoon leaders, NGO managers, and members of foreign governments. In effect, the type of communications framework they are advocating would communicate to its operators more than *what* to think before they send a message, it would teach them *how* to think, and thus minimize informational fratricide and maximize cohesion among policies developed and implemented by field operatives.⁸⁴

A photograph on the cover of the report represents the concept of communication from clearinghouse to operators. The photograph is of a microphone, lying flat and pointing away from the reader. In the foreground is an audio cable, also lying flat and clearly unplugged from the back of the microphone. One idea the picture implies is that to communicate effectively, there must be a clear message broadcast at a volume and in a manner that the audience can receive and understand. The fact that the microphone is unplugged suggests that a message is not reaching its intended target. In the context of counter radicalization strategy one might assume that the intended audience is those at-risk to radicalization. However, the metaphor may be more appropriately applied to government. Imagine every

⁸⁴ Cornish, P., Lindley Franch, J., Yorke, C. (2011). p. 29

instance in which an individual, agency, or organization representing ‘the West’ messages a Muslim audience. Now imagine all those individuals together in an auditorium – they are the audience the cover photograph is referencing. Within this model, the clearinghouse must communicate a greater understanding of counter radicalization strategy to the designers and implementers of policy in order to avoid informational fratricide and policy failure. Strategic communications must be a “central government concern and a whole government unifier.” Coordinating a deeper and more full understanding of SC and counter radicalization strategy among its transmitters may allow for quicker and more appropriate responses to a target audience. The report argues that if holistic understanding is propagated within the system, over time the messages it sends will trend towards consistency, cohesiveness, and ultimately, narrative credibility.⁸⁵

Part III – Countering Radical Narratives

There is more research regarding the construction of credible alternate narratives than counter narrative strategy. Within the growing literature, some scholars and analysts feel defeating the radical Jihadist meta-narrative can only be accomplished from within Islam by moderate leadership.⁸⁶ Other researchers recommend government-run counter narrative operations remain transparent, discourse-oriented interactions on websites and in online chat rooms.⁸⁷ At this point

⁸⁵ Cornish, P., Lindley Franch, J., Yorke, C. (2011) *Strategic Communications and National Strategy* Chatham House Report [online] Retrieved 03/12/13 from <http://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/public/Research/International%20Security/r0911stratcomms.pdf>

⁸⁶ Thompson, Steven R. (2011) p.21

⁸⁷ “Rewriting the Narrative: An Integrated Strategy for Counterradicalization” (2009) p.17

in time, there is consensus that words cannot make the U.S. government attractive to the vast majority of Muslims in the Middle East.⁸⁸ Evelyn Early argues convincingly that anti-U.S. government sentiment in the Arab world is a direct result of U.S. actions, and its abilities to counter the Jihadist narrative will not change public opinion towards American foreign policy.⁸⁹ In addition, clumsy messaging can easily be detected and interpreted as manipulative. It may be shunned or become a target for counter counter narratives, or simply upset moderates, further weakening the U.S.'s ability to influence its target audience.⁹⁰⁹¹

Following 9/11 and his identification of the enemy as “those who hate our freedoms,” George W. Bush’s administration ran a series of commercials in countries with significant Muslim majorities. The ads depicted Muslim women living happily in America, but they were not well received in the markets in which they were broadcast. Some researchers questioned what values the ads were designed to change, noting that those who supported radical ideologies were not likely to be swayed by depictions of life in America.⁹² The campaign failed to realize contempt for the U.S. in Islamic societies was a reaction to “who we are” far less than it was a response to “what our government does.” Both the message and the target audience of the ads were poorly conceived by the their creators, and the ads proved to be counter-productive attempts to counter radical ideology. As more research is

⁸⁸ “Rewriting the Narrative: An Integrated Strategy for Counterradicalization” (2009) p. 11

⁸⁹ Early, Evelyn (2011) pp.78-80

⁹⁰ Leuprecht, C., Hataley, T., Muskalenko, S., McCauley, C. (2009) p.25

⁹¹ Proposed Policy Recommendations for the High Level Conference (2012). RAN Working Group. Retrieved online on 07/06/2013 from http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/ran-high-level-conference/docs/proposed_policy_recommendations_ran_at_en.pdf

⁹² Leuprecht, C., Hataley, T., Muskalenko, S., McCauley, C. (2009) p.25

conducted on counter narrative strategies and governments develop greater competencies to communicate effectively in new media, new ideas for counter narrative initiatives may prove to be effective applications for strategic communications.

There are two main objectives for counter narrative strategy. The first is the delegitimization of radical ideologies and leaders. As touched upon earlier in the essay, public diplomacy is an element of this strategy. Speeches are the most direct form of public diplomacy although student exchange programs are arguably the most effective – they provide many students with direct and ostensibly positive experiences of American government and culture. In addition to public diplomacy, direct engagement through websites and online promotional materials attempts to make clear the damage caused by Jihadists to Muslim communities. This tactic includes humanizing the victims by showing the relatives of Muslims who have been killed by Al Qaeda.⁹³ Ultimately, these strategies seek to engage at-risk Muslims and emphasize extremists' bankrupt ideologies. Towards this end, the CSCC maintains a "Digital Outreach Team" that "openly engages in Arabic, Urdu, Punjabi, and Somali to counter terrorist propaganda and misinformation about the United States across a wide variety of interactive digital environments that had previously been ceded to extremists."⁹⁴

Domestically, self-radicalization via the Internet is a prominent concern. Several "homegrown" attacks have been successfully launched during the past 5

⁹³ "Rewriting the Narrative: An Integrated Strategy for Counterradicalization" (2009) (P. 13)

⁹⁴ Center For Strategic Counterterrorism Communication. (2011) United States Department of State. Online. Retrieved 05/02/2013 : <http://www.state.gov/r/csc/>

years, but the physical and mental damage they have caused has been minor compared to that caused by large-scale, well-funded, and extensively planned attacks historically preferred by global Jihadist organizations. Despite the lesser amount of damage it has inflicted to date, online self-radicalization is the most likely source of successful future attacks in the U.S. and is considered a growing threat. (source) In addition to providing a location in which to engage and debate at-risk or radicalized Muslims, new media provides an opportunity for counter narrative strategists to engage in more creative means of messaging. Portraying Al Qaeda as a “strong, coherent” force grants it unwarranted legitimacy; more effective strategic communications will make use of “satire and humor to humiliate Al Qaeda leadership.”⁹⁵ At CSCC, integrative analysis of intelligence from various agencies and experts is conducted, which is provided to its “plans and operations” wing. This department draws off ongoing analysis to formulate new ways to engage in counter narrative strategy and operations.⁹⁶

Counter narrative strategies also seek to delegitimize extremist ideology and leaders through support for moderates and alternatives in Islamic communities – or as the 2009 Presidential Task Force expressed, “stimulate competition for the would-be radicalizer.”⁹⁷ Competition in this sense includes moderate groups in addition to both NGOs and partners in the private sector. Internationally, the CSCC enlists “credible Muslim voices which condemn radical ideology and promote

⁹⁵ “Rewriting the Narrative: An Integrated Strategy for Counterradicalization” (2009) p.16

⁹⁶ Center For Strategic Counterterrorism Communication. (2011)

⁹⁷ Rewriting the Narrative: An Integrated Strategy for Counterradicalization” (2009) p. 12

productive alternatives such as entertainment, sports, literature, education, and business through social networking technology and broadcast media.”⁹⁸

The CSCC policy of enlisting prominent cultural figures who promote moderate views through media touches on perhaps one the most interesting of counter narrative strategies: the use of media, pop culture, and marketing strategy to generate greater social cohesion within communities and the creation of a “social buffer” against radicalization. Alexis Everling writes,

“The media should be used to shape the general environment in which the seeds of counter-radicalization can be sown. For example, radio programs in FATA (Free Autonomous Tribal Areas in Pakistan) that generate greater community cohesion would help create a social buffer to radicalization (and in doing so reduce the threat of effective violent Jihadist messaging). In other words, the social buffer—and not the direct media communication itself—should be the objective of counter-radicalization efforts.”⁹⁹

Overseas, the degree to which the U.S. government can pursue these policies overtly is limited by a low ceiling of support popular cultural figures can receive from the U.S. before he or she loses legitimacy. In this regard NGOs and private sector partners may prove especially beneficial as proxies through which material and ideological support may be indirectly funneled. There also are other ways to facilitate social cohesion and the development of civil society.

The 2009 Presidential Task Force on Countering the Ideology of Violent Extremism notes that one of the best tools for public diplomacy is the network of international television and radio stations including Voice of America (VOA) and

⁹⁸ Thompson, Steven R. (2011) p.20

⁹⁹ Everling, Alexis (2011) p. 85

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, managed by the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG). Unfortunately, it also noted that BBG had been unresponsive and ineffective as a means of public diplomacy, characterizing the non-partisan organization as paralyzed by partisan bickering in congress. It also characterized its management as lacking a sense of mission and imagination – even 2 years after Condoleezza Rice took independent action in 2006 to double the BBG’s budget for Iran through a supplemental appropriations request, its broadcasts there still featured re-runs of Larry King Live and CNN filler because it lacked original programming.¹⁰⁰ In 2009 the BBG launched an initiative to create more original programming which currently includes 24-hour commercial free programming on Alhurra TV and Radio Sawa, both of which are moderately successful media outlets providing a coverage of world events with an emphasis on the role and policies of the U.S. in world affairs. Although Alhurra TV is a news channel, Radio Sawa incorporates a mix of news, Western, and Arabic popular music and remains popular a station. Together they reach a weekly audience of over 35 million people.¹⁰¹

American pop culture is still prevalent within the Arab world. Over 50% of Arab youths watch Western films or programs daily, and some of the most popular serial dramas on Arab TV advance the narrative that Jihadists are the enemy of Muslims.¹⁰² According to Evelyn Early, Arab societies are largely moderate and within them it is common for an individual to appreciate Western culture, but strongly dislike the U.S. government. She recommends the U.S. employ a

¹⁰⁰ Rewriting the Narrative: An Integrated Strategy for Counterradicalization” (2009) p. 11

¹⁰¹ Broadcasting Board of Governors website. Retrieved on 07/02/2013 from: <http://www.bbg.gov/broadcasters/mbn/>

¹⁰² Early, Evelyn (2011) pp. 141-142

communications strategy that “recognizes its cultural advantage while recognizing its policy disadvantage.”¹⁰³ Her recommendations for U.S. strategic communications are to support partners’ attempts to further moderate discourse, but also to exercise restraint. Her research reveals that although the U.S. cannot see it and cannot take part in it, there is a vibrant and active discourse within the Arabic world about the role of religion in public life – in other words America should recognize and appreciate the discourse happening below the surface in many Muslim societies.

Risks attendant to engaging in counter narrative operations include creating greater resentment of the U.S. government, undercutting credibility for the alternate narrative it seeks to provide, and lending more credibility to radical narratives. Western governments should allow moderate elements within Islamic cultures to counter radical ideologies without clumsy, unnecessary, and counter productive efforts. Counter narrative operations that target a political spectrum are best undertaken through public diplomacy and traditional mediums that engage popular culture by providing news, opinion, and apolitical entertainment. These efforts must remain cognizant of risks and sensitive to cultural sensibilities, and they should refrain from communicating overtly subversive messages.

Counter narrative operations that target at-risk segments of Muslim societies may use humor, derision, and marketing savvy to counter radical narratives more aggressively. New media is less intrusive and requires messages that attract the target audience in order to engage it. Using greater understandings of new media platforms and competency for strategic communications, operators in the CSCC and

private sector may one day develop messages that “stick” and thrive within at-risk youth.

Conclusion

Terrorism is a complex phenomenon created by political and social forces. Among those forces, radicalization is a key mechanism for consolidating individual grievances and mobilizing a threat against Western interests and societies. The nature of the threat posed to global security by radical Islamic extremists is unique to their particular form of “new” terrorism and its drivers for increasingly spectacular and horrific attacks. Traditional, kinetic counter terrorism operations have proven counter-productive to lessening the influence of radical voices. The relationship of radicalization to violent extremism has created demand for a nuanced, cognitive approach to lessen the threat through non-kinetic preventative strategies.

Although there are many different drivers that push and pull individuals towards radicalization and violent extremism, all militant Jihadists share belief in the same meta-narrative. The narrative supports ideologies that contextualize grievances and bridge the gap between personal grievance and mobilization for terrorist actions. Counter radicalization strategy is an attempt to combat terrorism by mitigating grievances, radical ideologies, and to a lesser extent mobilization within individuals, groups, and societies. It can be divided into two categories – alternate narrative strategy and counter narrative strategy.

Achieving greater consistency between word and deed is the first step to mitigating grievances and establishing a credible alternate narrative. Engaging in and supporting development and reform efforts benefitting all levels of society is fundamental to building credibility and improving the image of the U.S. in Muslim societies. However, although long-term foreign policy priorities include improving its image, short and mid-term counter radicalization priorities dictate the U.S. should support moderate narratives even if a narrative fails to improve its image within the target audience. In order to best nurture alternate narratives within Muslim communities, the U.S. should pursue development and reform efforts in a manner dictated by the community's wants and needs, not its own foreign policy goals. Successfully managing this process to meet community wants and needs *and* policy goals requires specific understanding of both local audiences and holistic understanding of strategic communications.

Improved strategic communications are necessary for better implementation of all aspects of counter radicalization strategy. The U.S. national strategic communications framework could benefit by the creation of a central clearinghouse focused on achieving message consistency and coordinating a deeper and more holistic understanding of communications and counter radicalization strategies to policy designers and implementers at all levels.

Efforts to counter radical narratives through public diplomacy, traditional media, and the virtual world of "new" media will benefit by implementing improved communications. Better understanding and more effective use of new media may include strategic use of media platforms, social networks, video imaging, and

contemporary marketing strategies to create “sticky” content that thrives in the new information environment.

The ability of strategic communications to mitigate grievance, ideology, and mobilization of terrorist networks by facilitating greater social cohesion and healthy civil societies needs to be explored further, and if proven effective, pursued vigorously.

The most effective communications may be those outside the control of U.S. strategic operations. Both types of narrative strategy find great utility in partnerships with moderates in Islamic communities. Partnering with moderates allows both alternate and counter narrative strategic goals to be advanced through proxies who can engage the audience in theological discourse. The Jihadist narrative appears to have lost a degree of influence in Muslim societies. Although radicalization has spread, the number of sympathizers may be declining following the peak of sectarian violence during the Iraq war. Radical extremism in Islam may well run its course and fade as a threat to the U.S. and Europe. Islamist governments were elected in many of the countries that underwent revolution during the Arab spring, and as difficulties and grievances persist or grow worse under the their stewardship, it will become increasingly difficult to place universal blame on the West, and the U.S. in particular. It is also true, as Brigadier Gen. Jack Shanahan cautioned in Air Force Research Laboratory white paper on countering extremism, that counter-radicalization strategies may have unintended consequences and must be approached as a doctor approaches a patient – ‘First, do no harm.’ The best

course of action may be “to do nothing at all.”¹⁰⁴ However, because the threat is active and significant, Western security agencies will continue to engage in counter strategies against violent extremism. Among possible strategies, a well-conceived and effectively communicated preventative counter radicalization strategy is the best option.

¹⁰⁴ Shanahan, Brig. Gen. John (2011) pp.1-2

Table. I

Types Of Radicalized Violent Extremists As Classified By Author		
Col. Matt Venhause ¹⁰⁵ (2010)	Tom Bjorgo ¹ (undated)	Peter Nesser ¹ (2006) – Applies specifically to “homegrown” radicals within Western Democracies.
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Frustrated revenge seekers 2. Status seekers in search of recognition 3. Identity seekers 4. Thrill Seekers 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ideological activists 2. Drifters and fellow travelers 3. Socially frustrated youth 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Immigrants, especially 2nd generataion 2. Political refugees 3. Converts 4. Those with criminal and drug-filled backgrounds
Tom Reigers ¹⁰⁶ (2011)	Tom Reigers – Continued (2011)	Dipak Gupta ¹⁰⁷ (2010) – Applies to ideological entrepreneurs, norm creators, and organizational leaders
Type 1 radical: a) Elitist/intolerant b) Lack confidence in gov’t c) Mainstream d) Experienced Hardship	Type 2 radical: a) Self-perception as victim b) Lower income c) Leader seeking d) Ideology seeking	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Connectors – wealthy organizers utilizing established social, political, and economic networks 2. Mavens – theologians, providers of ideology, constructors of narrative and message 3. Salesman – charismatic and persuasive individuals who attract new members

Fig. 1 is a chart compiled from several individual sources in addition to an extensive literature review conducted by Dr. Alex Schmidt from the International Center for Counter Terrorism. It compares several of the many attempts to type terrorists and classify the triggers and drivers that push and pull them towards radical ideologies and violent extremism. An individual may be driven by multiple motivating factors and may fall into more than one category. The purpose of the chart is to emphasize the complexity of terrorists’ possible motivations and highlight the cross-section of actors at risk to radicalization.

¹⁰⁵ Schmidt, Alex (2013) *Radicalization, De-Radicalization, and Counter Radicalization: A Conceptual Discussion and Literature Review*. ICCT Reasearch Paper (pp 22-27) International Center For Counter Terrorism. Retrieved online May 15, 2013 from <http://www.icct.nl/download/file/ICCT-Schmid-Radicalisation-De-Radicalisation-Counter-Radicalisation-March-2013.pdf>

¹⁰⁶ Rieger, Tom (2011) *Not All Radicals Are The Same: Implications for Counter Radicalization Strategy* ICCT Reasearch Paper (pp 24-28) International Center For Counter Terrorism. Retrieved online May 15, 2013 from <http://www.icct.nl/download/file/ICCT-Schmid-Radicalisation-De-Radicalisation-Counter-Radicalisation-March-2013.pdf>

¹⁰⁷ Gupta, D.K. (2010) *Spread Of Radicalism: A Theoretical Perspective On The Process By Which Ideas Flood The World*. *International Journal of Security and Terrorism*, Volume 1 (1), 2010, ss.1-15

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http://academia.edu/1203175/Negotiated_deradicalization_in_the_Irish_peace_process

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