The Roots of Violent Islamist Extremism and Efforts to Counter It

Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs

United States Senate

July 10, 2008

Zeyno Baran, Senior Fellow and Director of Center for Eurasian Policy, Hudson Institute

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Collins, Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. This issue is very important for me personally and professionally and I am honored to have a chance to share my views with you.

Violence is only one of the tools used by extremist Islamists in the broader "war of ideas" against Western liberal democracy. Winning the war against terrorism is not possible unless, as the 9/11 Commission Report correctly stated, the U.S. "prevail[s] in the longer term over the ideology that gives rise to Islamist terrorism." In order to succeed, we must first come to understand the roots of this ideology: namely, Islamism.

This is not to say that all Islamists will one day become terrorists; the vast majority will never engage in violence and in fact are likely to abhor terrorist acts. Nevertheless, the first step on the path to jihadi terrorism is instruction in Islamist ideology. Nearly all individuals involved in terrorism—whether as a foot soldiers executing the attack or as upper-level strategists, financiers, or recruiters—start out as non-violent Islamists. Therefore, the deciding factor in determining which Muslims can be allies in the so-called "long war" cannot be based on tactics—that is, whether or not a group embraces violent methods.[1] The deciding factor must be ideological: Is the group Islamist or not?

Although various Islamist groups quarrel over means (and often bear considerable animosity towards one another), they all agree on the endgame: a world dictated by political Islam. While many do not openly call for violence or terrorism, they provide an ideological springboard for future violence.

The prime example of these groups is the Muslim Brotherhood (MB). Founded in 1928, MB is the first modern Islamist movement; out of it have come numerous splinter groups, which in turn have given rise to yet more splinter groups. Consequently, there has been an exponential growth of fairly radical Islamist organizations active all over the world, including in cyberspace.

---

[1]   It is important to note that the "long war" concept was first used by the Islamists, and not the Bush administration. For example, in late 1998, Osama bin Laden's second-in-command Ayman al-Zawahiri explicitly wrote that "we have resolved to fight…in a long battle…Generations will pass the torch to the following ones…" Michael Scheuer, *Through Our Enemies' Eyes*, Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2006, p. 25.

Over the 60 years since its founding in Egypt, MB has spread across the Middle East and expanded into every corner of the world. The tactics of the Muslim Brotherhood may be nonviolent in the West, and less violent than other groups in the Muslim world, but the ideology behind those tactics remains fundamentally opposed to the Western democratic system and its values. The worldview MB promotes can lead those exposed to it become excited to the point of engaging in violence. For example, Khaled Sheikh Mohammed, mastermind of the September 11 terrorist attacks, told US interrogators that he was first drawn to violent jihad after attending Brotherhood youth camps.[2]

Muslim Brotherhood motto says it all: "**Allah is our objective, the Prophet is our leader, the Qur'an is our law, jihad is our way, dying in the way of Allah is our highest hope**."[3]

After I briefly discuss the ideology and ideas of Islamism, I will then talk about two key MB splinter groups, Hizb ut-Tahrir and al-Muhajiroun, before turning to the institutionalization of Islamism in America, which poses serious risks to the safety and stability of the country. Finally, I will highlight some areas in which I think the US government has adopted self-defeating policies and then suggest alternatives.

Islam vs. Islamism

Since 9/11, there have been various policies developed and numerous initiatives undertaken to counter so-called "violent Islamist extremism". However, the most important first step—education about Islam and Islamism—has never taken place. I simply cannot understand how one can cure a disease without understanding its root cause. So far the US government has simply dealt with the symptoms, while the problem itself is getting worse.

The starting point has to be distinguishing **between Muslims and Islamists,** and **between Islam (the religion) and Islamism (the political ideology).** Islam, the religion, deals with piety, ethics, and beliefs, and can be compatible with secular liberal democracy and basic civil liberties. Islamists, however, believe Islam is the *only* basis for the legal and political system that governs the world's economic, social, and judicial mechanisms. Islamic law, or *sharia,* must shape all aspects of human society, from politics and education to history, science, the arts, and more. It is diametrically opposed to liberal democracy.

The term "Islamism" was coined by the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB), Hassan al-Banna, in an effort to politicize Islam. Broadly, the label Islamist applies to individuals or groups who believe that Islam should be a comprehensive guide to life (for either Sunni or Shiite background). Islamists do not accept that the interpretation of Islam can evolve over the centuries along with human understanding or that the religion could be influenced or

---

[2]   *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States*, New York, NY: W. W. Norton, 2004.
[3]   "Muslim Brotherhood Movement," http://www.ummah.net/ikhwan.

modified by the cultures and traditions of various regions. Nor do they recognize that Islam can be limited to the religious realm, or to simply providing its followers with a code of moral and ethical principles. In this view, there is no such thing as religion being a private matter; all aspects of life are about Islam and for Islam.

I understand that for most Americans, dealing with Islamism is extremely difficult because it is associated with Islam. Very few people dare to question the beliefs or actions of Muslims for fear of being called a bigot or an Islamophobe. Since American culture is disposed to accepting all religions and cultures, when someone says, "This is my religion," there is a tendency not to question it. Oftentimes, there are no further inquiries about what being a follower of that religion entails or about how many different sects or interpretations of that religion exist. That is why we need to be clear: what needs to be countered is a political ideology, not a religion.

Today's Islamists adhere first and foremost to the works of the Muslim Brotherhood's most famous ideologue, Sayyid Qutb, and are not necessarily concerned with Islam's spiritual or cultural aspects. Qutb, like his ideological predecessors Ibn Taymiyya and Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, was preoccupied with the relative decline of the Muslim world. All three believed that this deterioration was a result of Muslims straying from the tenants of "pure Islam." Qutb argued that Islam's crisis could be reversed only if "true" Muslims, emulating the ways of the Prophet Muhammad, worked to replace existing governments in the Muslim world with strictly Islamic regimes.[4] Accordingly, followers of Qutb desire the overthrow of their current governments and declare armed jihad against non-Muslim states.

It is important to underline that this step is often viewed as "**defensive jihad**," an interpretation which has broad acceptance among many Muslims. Traditionally, questions like who can declare jihad and under what conditions has been widely debated and a broad consensus has emerged: armed jihad is a form of "just war" to protect Muslims and the religion of Islam when under attack, but can only be declared by a legitimate authority. Today, as Islamists argue that contemporary political leaders lack the legitimate authority to order armed jihad, various independent actors have taken this responsibility into their own hands. This logic has been used to justify attacks in Western countries that are deemed to be waging war against Islam—not just militarily but also culturally.

It is also very important to understand that Islamism is ultimately a **long-term social engineering project**. The eventual "**Islamization" of the world** is to be enacted via a **bottom-up** process. Initially, the individual is Islamized into a "true" Muslim. This process requires the person to reject Western norms of pluralism, individual rights, and the secular rule of law. The process continues as the individual's family is transformed, followed by the society, and then the state. Finally, the entire world is expected to live, and be governed, according to Islamic principles**. It is this ideological machinery that works to promote separation, sedition, and hatred, and is at the core of Islamist terrorism.**

---

[4]   Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones*, Indianapolis, IN: American Trust Publications, 1990.

Islamists have a long-term and well-crafted strategy. They are known to form short-term alliances and make all kinds of exceptions as long as they serve the Islamist goal in the long-term. Hence, even though they would, for example, form an alliance with governments to "prevent terrorism," this does not mean that they have stopped providing the ideological machinery that creates future terrorists.

While the MB remains the most powerful and best networked "core" organization, over time there have been different offshoots—some of which have openly promoted violence. I will just mention two of the splinter groups because they have significant influence among second- and third-generation immigrant Muslim youth, including those in the US.[5] One of the most influential is **Hizb ut-Tahrir** (HT). Like the MB, HT as an organization does not engage in terrorist activities, but has become the vanguard of a radical Islamist ideology that encourages its followers to commit terrorist acts. It too has given rise to splinter groups, some of which have been directly involved in Islamist terrorism.

Exponential Radicalization

Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islamiyya (the Party of Islamic Liberation) was founded by Sheikh Taqiuddin an-Nabhani, whose political and religious philosophy was heavily influenced by the MB. He was first a member of the Brotherhood, but he found its ideology too moderate and too accommodating of the West.[6] As a result, he founded a splinter group in 1953, which developed from the main ideological pillars of the MB, but adopted a more radical stance on what the ultimate goal of Islamism should be and the means in which to achieve it.

Hizb ut-Tahrir effectively combines Marxist-Leninist methodology and Western slogans with reactionary Islamic ideology in order to shape the internal debate within Islam. HT doctrine stipulates that the only way to re-establish the kind of Islamic society promulgated by the Prophet Muhammad is to liberate (hence the name of the party) Muslims from the thoughts, systems, and laws of *kufr* (non-believers) by replacing the Judeo-Christian dominated nation-state system with a borderless *umma*.[7] In fact, HT's key contribution to Islamism is its focus on the creation of a worldwide Islamic *umma* (community) and the re-establishment of the Caliphate. For many decades these ideas were considered extreme; more recently, they have been adopted as mainstream by most Islamists.

HT is active in the Muslim world (where it aims to overthrow governments) and in the West (where it aims to unite the Muslims around their Islamic identity and prevent assimilation into mainstream culture). HT members believe that contemporary international politics is dominated by American efforts to wage a "**fourth crusade**" against Muslims.[8] HT fans the

---

[5]   Madeleine Gruen, "Hizb-ut-Tahrir's Activities in the United States," *Jamestown Terrorism Monitor*, Volume V, Issue 16. http://www.jamestown.org/terrorism/news/article.php?articleid=2373622

[6]   For more details on HT and AM, see Zeyno Baran, *Hizb ut-Tahrir: Islam's Political Insurgency* (Washington DC: The Nixon Center, 2000)

[7]   *The Methodology of Hizb ut-Tahrir for Change* (London: Al-Khilafah Publications, 1999), p. 5. See http://www.hizb-ut-tahrir.org/english/books/pdfs/method_for_revival.pdf.

[8]   "Annihilate the Fourth Crusade", March 20, 2003, http://www.khilafah.com.pk/

flames with publications such as "**The Inevitability of the Clash of Civilization**," which is riddled with conspiracy theories.[9]

HT members claim to want freedom and justice. But the freedom they want is "freedom from democracy," and the justice they want can only be found under Islamic rule. Under such rule, Muslims who do not abide by sharia law will be "considered as apostates and liable to punishment according to Islamic law"[10]—or, to put it more directly, they will be executed.

The freedom and justice HT seeks by overthrowing democracy can often only be attained through violence. Hence, groups such as HT never denounce acts of terror because it is deemed as a necessary means towards their ultimate goal. Moreover, HT opposes violence only until the Caliphate is created—we don't even have to wait for an Armageddon to occur—so long as HT believes that a Caliphate has been created, it will take up arms.

However, Hizb ut-Tahrir is not likely to take up terrorism itself. Terrorist acts are simply not part of its mission—HT exists to serve as an ideological and political training ground for Islamists. In order to best accomplish this, HT will remain non-violent, acting within the legal system of the countries in which it operates—the same can be said about many of the Islamist groups, including the MB. It does not even need to become a terrorist group—winning hearts and minds is far more effective in achieving the ultimate goal. Acts of terrorism are only one tool in the radical Islamist toolbox; Islamists will be even stronger if they can turn people and systems around without violence. However, in the event they cannot establish their Caliphate by words, it may turn to using violent force.

In many ways, HT is part of an elegant division of labor. The group itself is active in the ideological preparation of the "true" Muslims, while other organizations handle the planning and execution of terrorist attacks. Despite its objections to this description, HT today serves as a *de facto* conveyor belt for terrorists.[11] As HT becomes more appealing to the activist Muslim at-large, they gain a wider reach in the community. When discouraged people try to find answers, there is a greater chance they will turn to this group, which will provide them with the ideological tools that could incite them to commit a terrorist act. Simply put, HT is not the "non-violent" movement that it claims to be.

---

leaflets/030320iraq.html.

[9]   "The Inevitability of the Clash of Civilizations", April 20, 2004, http://216.239.41.104/ search?q=cache:5UCEoh1Owq8J:www.hizb-ut-tahrir.org/english/books/clashofcivilisation/ clashofcivilisation.pdf+the+inevitability+of+a+clash&hl=en.

[10]   Igor Rotar, "Central Asia: Hizb-Ut-Tahrir Wants Worldwide Sharia Law", *Forum 18,* October 29, 2003.

[11]   In response to an article of mine entitled, "The Road from Tashkent to Taliban", April 2, 2004 on National Review Online, http://www.nationalreview.com/comment/ baran200404020933.asp, describing how HT serves as conveyor belt for terrorists, Dr. Abdullah Robin, a member of Hizb ut-Tahrir Britain, posted an open letter to me on HT's website, http://www.1924.org.

HT has lead to the formation of even more radical and militant groups than itself, such as the al-Muhajiroun (AM). This organization was founded by Omar Bakri Mohammed. He was born to a wealthy Syrian family in 1958 and recruited at an early age by the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood. After his participation in a failed coup against President Hafez al-Asad, Bakri was expelled from Syria. He fled to Lebanon and became a member of the local HT branch. Then, during the Syrian invasion of Lebanon in 1979, Bakri moved to Saudi Arabia, where he established AM as a front for HT. After being exiled by the Saudi government, Bakri then moved to the UK, where he received asylum in 1985.

Bakri was at first a leader of HT in the UK. However, he had a falling out with the HT leadership over tactics—he believed HT should take a populist approach and preach activism, whereas al-Nabhani sought to develop HT as an elitist and clandestine political party. HT leadership believed Bakri's style was appropriate for "more advanced stages of the party's strategy" that should be confined to Muslim countries where there was greater potential for revolution.[12] When Bakri formed AM in the UK, those drawn to a more risky and activist Islamism, the "graduates" of HT, joined his new, more radical organization.

Bakri described the September 11 attacks as "a great achievement by the *mujaheddin* against the evil superpower" and his followers annually celebrate that day.[13] Bakri stated that, "Sheikh Osama bin Laden is not just another warrior for present-day Muslims; he is a hero who stands for divine justice and freedom from oppression. Any action against him is seen as action against the global body of Muslims."[14] In fact, he has claimed to be "the eyes of Osama bin Laden" and reports indicate that the two have communicated at least as far back as 1998. After 9/11, the *Los Angeles Times* released the text of a 1998 fax from Bin Laden in Afghanistan to Bakri, urging him to "Bring down their airliners. Prevent the safe passage of their ships. Occupy their embassies. Force the closure of their companies and banks."[15]

AM has recruited in schools to send fighters to Afghanistan to join the Taliban.[16] Reports indicate that al-Muhajiroun's network fed militants into the heart of conflicts around the world. Bakri openly admitted that he "recruited hundreds of Britons to fight for Islamic causes in recent years."[17] In 2000, Bakri estimated "that between 1,800 and 2,000 go abroad for military training every year. They either go for national service in Pakistan or to 'private camps' in South Africa, Nigeria or Afghanistan where they learn of weapons and explosives."[18] Although Bakri's numbers may be inflated, it is clear that al-Muhajiroun activists were drawn into conflict.

---

[12]   Suha Taji-Farouki, "Islamists and the Threat of Jihad: Hizb al-Tahrir and al-Muhajiroun on Israel and the Jews", *Middle Eastern Studies*, 36, no. 4: (October 2000), p. 31.

[13]   Thair Shaikh, "London to Host Islamic 'Celebration' of Sept 11", *Daily Telegraph* (London), September 9, 2002, http://news.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2002/09/08/nextre08.xml.

[14]   Press Release, Al-Muhajiroun, September 16, 2001.

[15]   Stephen Braun *et al.*, "Haunted By Years of Missed Warnings", *Los Angeles Times*, October 14, 2001.

[16]   "UK Muslims 'Killed' in Afghanistan", BBC News, October 29, 2001, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/1625115.stm.

[17]   Liz Sly, "Arrests Signal Crackdown on Extremists", *Chicago Tribune*, October 5, 2001.

[18]   Cahal Milmo, "Five Britons Die Fighting for Taliban in Mazar", *Independent* (London),

From this brief summary, it is apparent that one central organization, the Muslim Brotherhood, has led to splinters that have become progressively more radical. From the supposedly non-violent Muslim Brotherhood splintered the HT, which advocates for a Muslim world run by *sharia* law without democracy, but does not openly advocate for violence. From the HT, we got AM, which, frustrated with the inability to make serious progress towards the common goal, took steps up to a new radicalism. AM is directly linked to Osama Bin-Laden, Hamas, and Hezbollah, and blatantly advocates for terrorist acts.

The Jihad-Identity Nexus: The Ziggurat of Zealotry[19]

This week marks the anniversary of the 7/7 London suicide bombings that killed 52 people. Until that day, the British government believed there was an implicit "covenant of security," meaning that radical Islamist groups could operate out of the UK, spread hateful messages, provide global networking, distribute literature, etc, as long as they did not attack the homeland. But as we see over and over again, once certain ideas are spread widely and persistently, one cannot control how people will use them—especially if these ideas are about the legitimacy of killing people in the name of their religion.

There were warnings before 7/7 and there have been warnings since. We repeatedly hear about cases of individuals not considered to be "potential terrorists" or seen as "normal" by family and friends engage in violent acts. These are not oppressed or poor people; they tend to be well-educated, gamely employed, and with loving families. As terrorism experts often note, if there is one common element among the terrorists is the tendency to appear as regular people— they do not come across as "death loving" or "crazy"; they completely believe what they do is proscribed to them by their religion as the ultimate show of faith.

It is very rare for someone to wake up and randomly decide to commit a violent act; there is almost always a process of radicalization and a network of like-minded people who become enablers. In the West, Muslims undergoing an identity crisis are the most vulnerable. There are also those who are perfectly well-adjusted and integrated and simply want to learn more about their religion; if these well-meaning citizens end up getting their information from Islamists, they too can become radicalized over time.

Radicalization can be seen as a multi-stepped process. At the bottom of the radicalization pyramid are the disenfranchised, who simply want Muslims to live in better conditions. They are typically involved in social work and proselytizing. Some of these people come into contact with an HT or AM recruiter (or a member of another Islamist group) and develop a relationship, and with it, a sense of community. The recruiter gradually introduces elements of ideology, though

---

November 17, 2001.

[19]   This phrase is taken from a Western intelligence source. The ziggurat was a form of temple in a pyramidal structure, built in receding tiers upon a rectangular, oval, or square platform, with a shrine at the summit. Access to the summit shrine was provided by a series of ramps on one side or by a continuous spiral ramp from base to summit.

without mentioning that there is a greater movement behind it. After a certain period, he or she is convinced that social work alone will not make any real difference; the political conditions must change. At that point, the person takes the leap to political involvement.

Once trust is established, and with the encouragement of the recruiter (who is now a "friend"), the seeker is introduced to the organization, its political philosophy, and its objectives. During this process, the organization promotes an identity that is tied to a sense of pride founded in the glory days of Islamic civilization. In study groups and literature, the emphasis is on consciousness raising, or teaching the individual the "right" way to think about Islam. The current state of the Muslim world is blamed on the forces of democracy and capitalism and those Muslims who ally with America and Israel. These groups use theological explanations to create a sense that Islam and Muslims are under attack.

To reinforce the study groups, consciousness-raising activities continue in private meeting places, where self-declared sheikhs instill a combination of radical theology and a sense of mission. After a while, some people become recruiters themselves to help the *umma*'s consciousness-raising, while others lose patience and resort to more drastic measures.

The third level of the radicalist ladder consists of people who have decided to engage in local violence. They may target their own government by bombing an office building, or focus on a local American or Israeli target. Some people remain at this level. Others engage in one-time violence and move back down one level to the political stage. Quite a few moves on to the fourth and the final step: global jihad.

What seems to encourage people to take the final step are the hateful rants delivered by imams and leaders of the Islamist organizations. For example, over the years London's Finsbury Park mosque became a virtual social club for radicals: Omar Bakri and Abu Hamza al-Masri lectured there, and terrorists such as Richard Reid and Zacarias Moussaoui regularly attended the mosque.

On the journey from increased consciousness to militancy, it is rare for individuals to commit acts of violence for exclusively ideological reasons. Young Muslims who engage in risky activities usually do so for a combination of ideological and social reasons. An individual who is indoctrinated with militant Islamist ideology but is not embedded within a network of like-minded peers ultimately lacks the vehicle through which he can act. In the reverse scenario, someone who feels strongly attached to the "brothers" of a local Islamist cell may become a political militant or gang member, but will not become a "religious fanatic, ready to sacrifice himself for the glory of God without the necessary ideological foundation."[20] In order to ensure that both factors are present, both HT and AM fuse ideological training with social networks. By virtue of the study groups and social activities that assume the base of their organizations, both groups have covered the globe with like-minded Islamists that encourage their peers to step up towards militancy. The internal structure of both organizations not only encourages radicalism, but strengthens inter-Islamist networking.

---

[20]   Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*.Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004). p. 115.

Islamist Infrastructure in the US

For the purpose of this hearing, I will not talk about the MB globally; I will just focus on its network in the US. There is a false sense of security in the US that derives from the belief that American Muslims are well-integrated—that the US will not face the same threat Europe is facing from its alienated Muslim youth. However, if we look at the number of attempted homegrown terror plots that were prevented (often by pure luck) we need to be very concerned. The NYPD report, "Radicalization in the West: The Homegrown Threat" is an excellent source in this regard.[21] It outlines several European and American based Islamist terror cases, and finds that the homegrown threat is indeed serious in the US. Moreover, the radicalization process is accelerating (i.e. the time between being exposed to Islamism and attempting violent acts) and the individuals involved are getting younger.

To understand how and why this is happening, one has to look at where people learn about Islam, who represents Muslims and Islam, what activities are conducted by these groups, and other related infrastructure questions. This is where the MB comes in—the most prominent Muslim organizations in America were either created by or are associated with the Brotherhood and the Wahhabis and are therefore been heavily influenced by Islamist ideology. Over the course of four decades, Islamists have taken over the leadership in almost all Islam related areas in America. **This is worrisome, yet almost no one in the US government deals with it.**

How did it happen? MB members from the Middle East and South Asia began coming to the US in the 1960s as students. Most were escaping persecution—e.g. government crackdown after an attempted Islamists coup of some sort. This is also when Saudi Arabia's Wahhabi establishment began its global Islamization project, partnering with Brotherhood members around the world. In 1962, the Muslim World League (MWL) was established in Mecca, with Brotherhood members in key leadership positions, to propagate Wahhabism worldwide. Over the ensuing decades, the MWL has funded many legitimate charitable endeavors but also a number of Islamist projects**.** Some of this money has come to support Brotherhood activists in the US, in part to change the perception of Wahhabism in America from "extremist" to "mainstream." Looking at the situation today, they have achieved their mission to a large degree.

I will not go into a detailed history of Islamist networks established in America since then. I will just highlight some points here. The primary focus of these organizations has been education, or indoctrination, of the youth, which marks the critical first step of the bottom-up approach that these organizations use.

We see the first MB organizations established in America were the Muslim Student Associations (MSA), which are based in universities. When the first set of MB-indoctrinated university students graduated, the North American Islamic Trust (NAIT) was created in order to

---

[21]   Mitchell Silber and Arvin Bhatt, "Radicalization in the West: The Homegrown Threat," New York Police Department, August 1, 2007, available at http://sethgodin.typepad.com/seths_blog/files/NYPD_Report-Radicalization_in_the_West.pdf.

expand these radical ideas and extend their influence beyond college campuses. NAIT established a variety of Muslim professional associations, schools, Islamic centers, and publishing houses so that Islamist literature could be widely circulated. NAIT was established in 1973; today, it owns hundreds of Islamic centers, mosques and schools across the US.

Then, in 1981, several other prominent Islamist organizations were created: the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT), a think-tank dedicated to the "Islamization of knowledge"; the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), a self-described umbrella organization for all Muslims in North America to "to advance the cause of Islam and service Muslims in North America so as to *enable them to adopt Islam as a complete way of life*"; and the Islamic Association for Palestine (IAP) "to communicate the Ikhwan's [Muslim Brotherhood] point of view" and "to serve the cause of Palestine on the political and the media fronts."[22] After Hamas was created in 1987 in Gaza, the IAP became its leading representative in North America.

There are a whole set of other organizations that can be added to this list; I will just mention two more because they are particularly well-known and influential. The Muslim American Society (MAS), founded in 1993; and the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), which I believe was created by MB to influence the US government, Congress, and NGOs, along with academic and media groups. The Brotherhood identified the media as "stronger than politics," highlighted the importance of training activists to present a "view of the IAP" that would be acceptable to Americans. One of CAIR's founders, Omar Ahmad, explicitly suggested the need for "infiltrating the American media outlets, universities and research centers."[23] Yet, despite being founded by leading Islamists, CAIR has successfully portrayed itself as a mainstream Muslim organization over the past 15 years—and has been treated as such by many US government officials, including Presidents Clinton and Bush.

What is critically important in all these organizations is their support for one another; the same leaders appear in multiple organizations, tend to have familial relations, and move within the same close trusted circles. Outwardly they all appear to be different entities, but they are actually part of a carefully planned Islamization effort. Thus, **an American wanting to learn about Islam (a Muslim or a potential convert) would start in MSA, end in ISNA, or move to CAIR, all the while ignorant of the fact that he or she has been part of a political movement instead of a faith group.**

It is unnerving to think that American Muslims who are genuinely seeking greater knowledge about their religion are obliged to turn to one or several of these organizations. Once there, Islamism is presented as synonymous with Islam, and the new member has no way of knowing otherwise. New members often fail to realize the groups they joined are not merely religious groups but political ones with a Wahhabi bias. If I was born and raised in the US, the chances are that I would have been an Islamist as well. However, I grew up in Turkey, and when

---

[22]   "A Brief History of the Muslim Brotherhood in the US," internal Muslim Brotherhood document, October 25, 1991, available at http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/HLF/MBUS_History.pdf
[23]   Transcript of October 1993 meeting of US Palestine Committee leaders in Philadelphia, available at http://nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/HLF/93Philly_12.pdf.

I came here to attend university and went to my first MSA meeting, I could detect the influence of Islamism. It was the first and last time I attended such a meeting.

It is also very important to note that despite their outwardly moderate positions, **NAIT, ISNA, and CAIR were all named as un-indicted co-conspirators in the federal case against the Holy Land Foundation for Relief and Development (HLF), which was charged with providing millions of dollars to Hamas**. Among other things, court documents and testimony specifically identified CAIR as a member of the Palestine Committee in America, which is tasked with working to "increase the financial and moral support for Hamas," to "fight surrendering solutions," and to publicize "the savagery of the Jews."[24]

It is extremely worrisome that CAIR Chairman Parvez Ahmed stated, "It is not just the HLF that is under fire, but the entire American Muslim community is under fire."[25] With this, Ahmed is implying to the American Muslim community that groups like CAIR are being persecuted simply because they are Islamic rather than because of links to terrorist organizations—further creating a sense that all Muslims need to unite under the Islamist cause. Such rhetoric is increasingly used to drive a wedge between Muslims and non-Muslims in America. The only way to stop this is through education—of Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

The HLF trial provided us with a shocking set of documents—yet most people, especially Muslims, will never read them and will buy into the story of victimization propagated by the Islamists.

One document outlining the "**general strategic goal for the group in North America**" explains the goal as consisting of six stages:

1. Establishing an effective and stable Islamic Movement led by the Muslim Brotherhood
2. Adopting Muslims' causes domestically and globally
3. Expanding the observant Muslim base
4. Unifying and directing Muslims' efforts
5. **Presenting Islam as a civilizational [sic] alternative**
6. **Supporting the establishment of the global Islamic state wherever it is**[26]

Accordingly, Muslims should look upon this mission as a "**Civilization Jihadist responsibility**" which is outlined below:

> **The Ikhwan must understand that their work in America is a kind of grand Jihad in eliminating and destroying the Western civilization from within and "sabotaging" its miserable house by their hands and the hands of the believers so**

---

[24]   Internal memo of the Palestine Committee, October 1992, available at http://www.investigativeproject.org/redirect/InternalMemo.pdf.

[25]   Steven Emerson, "Worst Approach to Counterterrorism Yet," *IPT News Service*, September 18, 2007, available at http://www.investigativeproject.org/article/474

[26]   "An Explanatory Memorandum on the General Strategic Goal for the Group in North America," May 22, 1991, available online at http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/HLF/Akram_GeneralStrategicGoal.pdf.

that it is eliminated and God's religion is made victorious over all other religions.[27]

Clearly, in this case jihad is not intended to be an inner, personal struggle, as is often claimed by American Islamists when they must explain why they were caught inciting for "jihad."

This document makes clear the Muslim Brotherhood's goal is to spread its version of political Islam, making it a "civilization alternative" to a Western way of life. Even though many Brotherhood-linked organizations have dismissed this memo as "outdated," it is fairly consistent with recent statements as well as the generic long war strategy. In 2004, **MB's official supreme leader, Mohammed Akef** called the US a "Satan" and said that he was confident America would collapse. Akef also **stated that he has "complete faith that Islam will invade Europe and America, because Islam has logic and a mission**."[28]

In the past 17 years, the MB in the US has made serious progress in its six-stage strategy. In fact, if it were not for the 9/11 attacks and the increased scrutiny on American Muslim organizations that came as a result, it might now be farther along in its plan. Terrorist acts inside the US are huge setbacks for American Islamists because their long-term strategy of gradual infiltration was seriously hurt by the 9/11 attacks; they increasingly came under the scrutiny of law enforcement authorities. It is not surprising that most of these organizations offer their cooperation to prevent Islamist terrorism inside the US. This is also the primary reason why some in the US favor engaging the Islamists.

However, as described earlier, this is a misguided policy, as ideological extremism is at the root of the terrorist problem. The NYPD explicitly stated this link in its recent report on homegrown terrorist threats, saying "jihadi-Salafi ideology is the driver that motivates young men and women, born or living in the West, to carry out 'autonomous jihad' via acts of terrorism against their host countries."[29] Turning a blind eye to Islamism and its ideological extremism—even if done for the sake of combating violent extremism and terrorism—is, in other words, extremely short-sighted and self-defeating.

Though many American Islamist organizations deny any connection to Hamas, the direct links between Hamas and the Brotherhood are indisputable. When questioned, many American Islamist organizations deny any links to the MB. If and when this deception fails, then they say the association was in the past. If pressed even further, they adopt the role of the victim, accusing their accusers of "McCarthyism" and "Islamophobia." This intimidation, up to and including anti-defamation lawsuits, has silenced many journalists, researchers, and other Muslims.

---

[27]   "An Explanatory Memorandum on the General Strategic Goal for the Group in North America," May 22, 1991, available online at http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/HLF/Akram_GeneralStrategicGoal.pdf.
[28]   "New Muslim Brotherhood Leader: Resistance in Iraq and Palestine is Legitimate; America is Satan; Islam Will Invade America and Europe," MEMRI Special Dispatch Series No. 655, February 4, 2004, available at http://www.memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Area=egypt&ID=SP65504#_edn10.
[29]   Mitchell Silber and Arvin Bhatt, "Radicalization in the West: The Homegrown Threat," New York Police Department, August 1, 2007, available at http://sethgodin.typepad.com/seths_blog/files/NYPD_Report-Radicalization_in_the_West.pdf.

Cloaking themselves in civil rights and charity work, the leaders of these organizations have successfully managed to disguise their true agenda: supporting Islamism, and protecting and augmenting the operations of radical groups that support terrorism. It is therefore not unexpected that large sections of the institutional Islamic leadership in America do not support US counter-terrorism policy. Far from it: they denounce virtually every terrorism indictment, detention, deportation, and investigation as a religiously motivated attack on Islam. Instead of considering whether the individual in question actually broke any laws, they instinctively blame the legal accusations on bigotry or anti-Muslim conspiracies.

Yet, **the Islamist threat is real and is the result of decades of networking, infrastructure-building, and intellectual and ideological preparation**. These groups have spent billions of dollars in creating networks of like-minded supporters. In fact, much of their support comes from the "us versus them" mentality they have helped to create. Islamists sometimes even provoke incidents intended to make the American Muslim community feel under siege, presumably in an attempt to compel them to unite. They have worked hard at social engineering (i.e. Islamization) for nearly four decades. Over time the Islamist network expanded its coverage geographically—from local to international, from charities to public relations, and eventually to national politics.

Countless young American Muslims—whether converts, Muslims born into secular families, or those brought up in traditional households—that have entered college since 9/11 are curious about Islam and their identity as both a Muslim and an American. Too often these young men and women end up at the local MSA chapter looking for answers. Perhaps it's no wonder that a Pew report released in May 2007 found a quarter of American Muslims aged 18 to 29 believe suicide bombings against civilians can sometimes be justified to defend Islam, while only 9 percent of those older than 30 agreed.[30]

How to counter Islamism?

First and foremost, US government entities and all those individuals tasked with "Muslim outreach" need to know who they are dealing with before bestowing legitimacy on them as "moderate" Muslims. For months now, FBI agents have been trained by CAIR to be "sensitive" to Muslims. This is completely self-defeating. Furthermore, there have been rather embarrassing cases of top government officials, including Presidents, posing with their "moderate" Muslim friend for a photo, only to find later that the person was providing funding to enemies of the United States.

Many of the American Muslim organizations are founded to further a political agenda. They are not civil rights groups or faith groups—they are political entities with a very clear political agenda. When they raise a civil rights issue, it may be to correct a real issue, but most of the time it is brought up to serve an Islamist cause. They hardly ever take up civil rights issues of Muslims who are not linked to Islamism. Moreover, when Islamists engage in

---

[30]   "Muslim Americans: Middle Class and Mostly Mainstream," Pew Research Center, May 22, 2007, available at http://pewresearch.org/assets/pdf/muslim-americans.pdf.

interfaith activities, they only do it as an act of *dawa*, whereas Jewish or Christian groups tend to be genuinely interested in building bridges with Muslims.

Second, it is an Islamist myth that US support and engagement for truly moderate Muslims would discredit these Muslims in the eyes of the community. This is a trick to keep the US away from non-Islamists, while the Islamists continue to enjoy all kinds of access and influence. Islamists thrive on US support and engagement, which effectively legitimizes their self-appointed status as representatives of Muslim community. This engagement also legitimizes the Islamists' self-appointed ability to judge the "Muslimness" of others.

Bestowing this status and capability upon Islamists is particularly dangerous in America. Muslims living in the US—particularly converts and those born to immigrants—are more vulnerable to being won over by Islamist ideology because America does not have a strong native tradition of Islam. American Muslims searching for a greater understanding of what it means to be Muslim often find little information available except those provided by Islamists.

For example, the State Department works with various Islamist organizations in conducting "visitor exchange programs" with Muslims, including imams, coming from outside the US to learn about Americans, American culture and American Muslims. However, this program is de-facto helping Islamists to gain further legitimacy and helping them extend their networks of personal contacts.

Third, with so much information already in the public domain, it is simply irresponsible to claim ignorance of some American Muslim groups' agendas. There are a whole set of questions that need to be asked of organizations who offer help in "countering violent extremism". These include:

- Who is the founder and what is the organization's purpose? (Clearly, one would need to confirm that they are indeed telling the truth, since so many of the Islamist groups are based on deception and dual roles.)
- Where does their funding come from? (Not just now, but also at the start; again, one should not just accept what they say at face value.)

Fourth, the mantra that only Islamists can pull radicalized Muslims away from terrorism, and therefore they need to be further empowered in dealing with "countering violent extremism" is completely illogical. The reason these people are radicalized is Islamist ideology; if the MB and related groups could keep radicals under control, they would have done so already. These people either left MB structures or do not want to be affiliated with them precisely because they have moved to more radical platforms. As long as Islamism is actively spread, its ideas will continue to wreak havoc.

The purpose of "engagement" needs to be clear. It means finding allies among Muslims who would help to prevent radicalization. The only true allies in countering an ideology that is fundamentally opposed to America and its ideas are those Muslims who share American ideas— or at the very least, do not want to undermine them. This group includes the pious and practicing, liberal, secular, and cultural ones—the quiet, but still overwhelming majority of American

Muslims. Most of these Muslims are truly moderate, and by definition simply want to live their lives and do not want to take part in organizations to further the global political agenda of the Islamists.

The Muslims that need active support are non-Islamist people who understand the inherent incompatibility between Islamism's desired imposition of *sharia* law upon society at large and Western society's pluralism and equality. They are on the American side of the "war of ideas." Non-Islamist Muslims can be practicing or not—it is irrelevant. After all, the issues the terrorists raise to gain support are often unrelated to Islam as a religion.

In addition to finding allies, in the "war of ideas" the US also has to have a good product. An increasing number of Muslims prefer the competitor's "product" which contains a two-pronged message:

1) The current system only benefits those in the US-led "West" and so must be overthrown. This very seductive message not only appeals to Muslims, but also brings together a diverse assortment of leaders/peoples from Hugo Chavez to Vladimir Putin and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

2) "Democratization" is a euphemism for the replacement of traditional cultural values with those of the West (i.e. cultural assimilation).

This simple "product" casts the West as the aggressor so Islamist Muslims feel justified in waging a *defensive* jihad. The tools the "competitor" include deception and cooptation—they are well aware of the power of strategic communications.

Unlike the threat posed by the Soviet Union, America's new and more fluid enemy demands a multi-faceted, and more importantly, an ideological response. To effectively counter the message of the Islamist organizations, the US needs to pull together its own toolkit and confidently and aggressively make its case. A good start would be to reveal the deception of the Islamists.

For non-Islamist Muslims, especially in the US, Islam is a matter of personal faith. As long as the government continues to grant them freedom to practice their faith as they see fit and their civil rights are respected, they have no reason to organize politically. And there is no doubt America is and remains the best place for Muslims.