Ns National Security Criminal Investigations

Words Make Worlds
Terrorism and Language

INTRODUCTION

Words Make Worlds addresses the problem of language — specifically, the language that we use to define and describe certain types of terrorist activity — and how incorrect use of such language can compound the problem. It also uses language — specifically interpretations of the concept of *jihad* — as a backdrop to a discussion of radicalization, its linkages to extremist action, and possible mitigating strategies.

This special report is designed primarily to stimulate discussion among RCMP members and with their counterparts in other agencies, particularly with regard to the need for a common language to describe terrorism adequately. Just as critical is the need for a comprehensive understanding of the process of radicalization and the manner in which we may intervene.

Key Issues and Observations

> Terms like "Islamic terrorism," "Islamist terrorism," "*Jihad*ism" and "Islamo-fascism" succeed only in conflating terrorism with mainstream Islam, thereby casting all Muslims as terrorists or potential terrorists.

> Distorted and inflammatory linkages between Islam and terrorism can serve to convince Muslims — both in the West and in the larger Islamic world — that the West is, in fact, their enemy.

> The word *jihad* has become almost a catchall term for extremism of any kind. *Jihad* is not one of the Pillars of Sunni Islam, but merely describes the effort to live in the way that God intends for human beings and to find the inner will and discipline to live according to the basic tenets of Islam.

> The concept of *jihad* as an offensive war is largely a 20th century phenomenon, developed primarily in the writings of ideologues who reframed *jihad* as an obligation equivalent to one of the Pillars, transforming it from a spiritual concept to a political one.

> This highly politicised interpretation of *jihad* has been a key driver in a series of critical events in the Muslim world and lies at the heart of a range of terrorist plots and attacks, from the first World Trade Center bombing of 1993, through 9/11, to the Toronto 17 and Heathrow Bomb plots of 2006.

> By referring to extremists as *jihadis* we effectively recognize their actions as being in the path of God and, therefore, legitimate. And in opposing *jihad* and its practitioners, we risk characterizing ourselves as the enemies of Islam.

> With the extremist mindset, we are addressing a cultural and an emotional phenomenon that is much greater than the sum of any of its parts, including "physical" entities like al-Qai'da.

> The problem is particularly acute with regard to the link between radicalization of young Muslims in Western countries and extremist action against those countries.

> Identification of individuals likely to become radicalized to the point of extremist action is extraordinarily difficult. While they may be young, unassimilated and underclass, the "Hamburg Cell" that became the hard core of the 9/11 conspiracy were enrolled in degree programs at German universities and the suspects in the botched 2007 attacks in London and Glasgow were physicians and other professionals.

> At risk individuals may be characterized by a strong sense of specific or generalized grievance, with strong leanings towards a shared Islamic identity and a spirit of specifically Islamic activism and mobilization that is often in conflict with Western social and political norms. They reject Western culture and are drawn to historical and ideological discourse that "proves" the greatness of Islamic civilization. This combination of perceived oppression and the search for a dignified alternative, easily translates into openness to physical, or politicised, *jihad*.

> The most effective long term strategy against al-Qai'da-type extremism, whether domestic or global, may be rooted in the construction of "alternative narratives" designed to subvert extremist messaging.

> Intelligence and law enforcement communities must learn not only how to penetrate the extremist world effectively but, just as importantly, how to understand the discourse that defines that world.

> Messaging campaigns tend to work best when they are asymmetric; focused away from the opponent's center of gravity and towards groups that are more likely to be receptive.

> Large scale cross-cultural initiatives cannot ignore the political and social factors that combine to make the culture of extremism a compelling one, or the successes of Western political culture in promoting tolerance, freedom and prosperity. Ultimately, they must seek to find common ground and to demonstrate what is worth saving in both cultures.

> A global phenomenon requires a global response and meaningful international cooperation will be required if influence campaigns that are rooted in the notion of an alternative world are to have any real impact.

Describing Terrorism: Are You Talking to Me?

Since 9/11, Western intelligence and law enforcement agencies have often been criticised for the language that they use to describe terrorism that has an ideological basis in Islam.

Muslims have observed that terms like "Islamic terrorism," "Islamist terrorism," "*Jihadism*" and "Islamo-fascism" succeed only in conflating terrorism with mainstream Islam, thereby casting all Muslims as terrorists or potential terrorists. Intelligence officers and analysts who, in Canada, are governed by criminal law that explicitly links terrorism and religiosity[1], may have (or believe they have) a precise understanding of what is meant by these terms. As they are filtered through the media and the public imagination, however, this precision is blunted and even innocuous terms and completely legitimate expressions of belief become loaded with innuendo. This points to the difficulties inherent in finding language to describe forms of terrorism that are rooted in a particular interpretation of Islam, without implying that there is a "clash of civilizations" between Islam, in its broadest sense, and the West[2].

Like the other Abrahamic faiths — Judaism and Christianity — the fundamental tenets of Islam are rooted in compassion, kindness, forgiveness and, perhaps most importantly, social justice. One of the Pillars of Islam is *zakat* — the giving of alms to the poor — and during the Ramadan fast, Muslims are enjoined to remember the less fortunate for whom fasting is involuntary (2:177; 183-186)[3]. So incorrect statements about the nature of Islam are deeply offensive to the huge numbers of Muslims who try to live within those tenets. More importantly, distorted and inflammatory linkages between Islam and terrorism can serve to convince Muslims — both in the West and in the larger Islamic world — that the West is, in fact, their enemy.

Law enforcement and intelligence communities are acutely aware of this problem. Official communications about terrorism are increasingly at pains to downplay the Islamic component of terrorist conspiracies and terrorist acts, focussing on the mechanics of the plots rather than the cultural or religious backgrounds of the plotters themselves.

The media and the public are often highly critical of these attempts to shape discourse, arguing that they distort reality by effectively ignoring a critical component of the problem[4]. There is merit to this argument. A peculiarly violent and "ideologized"

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1   The *Criminal Code of Canada* (R.S.C. 1985, Chapter C-46, 2007), Part II.1, S 83.01 (1) (b) defines terrorism as "...an act or omission, in or outside Canada, that is committed in whole or in part for a political, religious or ideological purpose, objective or cause..."

2   Some political scientists have argued that religious and cultural identity will be the primary source of conflict in the post-Cold War world. For more on this, see Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

3   All scriptural references are to the M.A.S. Abdel Haleem translation of The *Qur'an* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

4   See, for example, Blatchford, Christie. "Ignoring the Biggest Elephant in the Room." *Globe and Mail* (5 June, 2006).

form of Islam is a component of the contemporary security environment. To ignore or downplay this is to ignore the "first principles" of a critical global threat.

Even attempts to take a more strategic or nuanced view by differentiating between "Islam" and "Islamism" can result in distortion. Islamism as a political ideology does not necessarily translate into terrorist "praxis." For example, the Muslim Brotherhood — a quasi-secret society to which members of al-Qai'da (including Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the planner and organizer of 9/11)[5] have been associated — is an Islamist group in that it explicitly links its political goals to an avowedly Islamic worldview.

Its founders and chief ideologues (who include Sayyid Qutb, discussed below) were predominantly anti-Western and tended to characterize Islamic political aspirations as fundamentally counter to democracy. Increasingly, however, the Brotherhood has repudiated radicalism and adopted a gradualist perspective which, while not aligned to Western democratic principles (the Brotherhood is linked to Hamas, for example) is more positively oriented towards them.[6] Few members of the Muslim Brotherhood espouse terrorism and in many Muslim countries they have served as voices of moderation, channeling people away from violence and towards legitimate politics and charitable activities.[7]

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[5]   National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States. *The 9/11 Commission Report* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2004). 145.

[6]   International Crisis Group. "Understanding Islamism." *Middle East / North Africa Report* (No. 37 - 2 March, 2005), 7.

[7]   Leiken, Robert S. and Brooke, Steven. "The Moderate Muslim Brotherhood." *Foreign Affairs* (March / April 2007), 112.

The Problem of *Jihad*

Sometimes, the terminology that we reflexively employ when we discuss or describe "Islamist" terrorism is inaccurate. Moreover, the sense in which we use it can have the unintended consequence of authenticating or validating the very extremism we are trying to address. An example of this is the word *jihad*, which has become almost a catchall term for extremism of any kind. The nuances — to say nothing of the differing interpretations — of the term are much more subtle, however, and are worth examining.

Translated literally, *jihad* means "striving" and is often expressed in the context of the expression *jihad fi sabil illah*, or "striving in the path of God."[8] In this context, *jihad* describes the effort to live in the way that God intends for human beings[9] and to find the inner will and discipline to live according to the basic tenets of Islam.[10] Despite widespread popular belief to the contrary, *jihad* is not one of the Pillars of Sunni Islam (aside from fasting at Ramadan and the giving of alms, referred to above, these consist of the profession of faith, prayer and pilgrimage to Mecca — 1:1-7; 2:125-129; 142-153; 196-202; 22:26-30 among others). Nevertheless, *jihad* as a constant act of piety remains a duty for all Muslims and often refers to some act aimed at social or personal improvement. A Muslim might speak of his or her *jihad* to stop smoking, to raise money for a community project or, simply, to become a better person. In 2005, Raheel Raza was the first Muslim woman to lead mixed gender Friday prayers in Canada. She characterized the courage and determination that allowed her to persevere over the objections of conservative and traditionalist elements as a form of "gender *jihad*" aimed ultimately at helping all women take their rightful and scripturally mandated place as full participants in the temporal and spiritual life of the community of Muslims.[11]

Jihad also has a more combative interpretation. Like the basic texts of Judaism and Christianity, *the Qur'an* has numerous references to physical struggle and confrontation with unbelievers and others who represent a threat to the safety and the integrity of the community of the faithful.

> Tell the desert Arabs who stayed behind, 'You will be called to face a people of great might in war and to fight them, unless they surrender: if you obey, God will reward you well, but if you turn away, as you have done before, He will punish you heavily. (48:16-18. See also 2: 190-195; 8:12-20; 9:29 among others)

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8   Streusand, Douglas E.; Tunnell, Harry D. *Choosing Words Carefully: Language to Help Fight Islamic Terrorism* (National Defense University, 2006), 3.

9   Armstrong, Karen. *Islam: A Short History* (New York: Random House, 2002), 6.

10   Raza, Raheel. *Their Jihad...Not My Jihad* (Ingersoll, Ontario: Basileia Books, 2005), 18.

11   Ibid., 118-122.

Indeed, combat is one of the central metaphors of the history of early Islam, as the Prophet Muhammed and his followers did battle with and ultimately triumphed over idolaters and unbelievers.[12] Moreover, the canon of Islamic teachings stresses that it is the duty of all Muslims to defend *dar al-islam* (the land of Islam) from moral or spiritual corruption originating in *dar al-harb* (the land of war) where Islamic law does not prevail.[13] Despite this, Islamic law and tradition has always favoured defensive over offensive war, the importance of mercy to enemies and the inviolability of women, children and non-combatants:

> Fight in God's cause against those who fight you, but do not overstep the limits...If they cease hostilities, there can be no hostility...do good, for God loves those who do good. (2:190-196)

Also, Islamic teachings often stress the importance of the "greater" (spiritual) *jihad* over the "lesser" (physical) *jihad*.[14]

The concept of *jihad* as an all-out offensive war is largely a 20th century phenomenon, developed primarily in the writings of ideologues like Abdul Ala Mawdudi, founder of Pakistan's *Jamaat-I Islami*, and Sayyid Qutb, the Egyptian thinker who is in many respects the ideological father of al-Qai'da and its offshoots. Mawdudi and Qutb found a refuge from both political repression at home and the perceived decadence of Western and secular societies in a particularly conservative interpretation of Islam. They reframed *jihad* as an obligation equivalent to one of the Pillars (and in the process transformed it from a spiritual concept to a political one). In this new understanding, *jihad* became a physical rather than a spiritual struggle, one that should be used against both the ignorance and barbarism of those who threaten the fundamental integrity of Islam (the Western world or the "far enemy") and "secular" Muslim leaders (the "near enemy") who turn their backs on the teachings of the Qur'an and the life of the Prophet.[15] Omar Bakri, the Syrian-born Islamic cleric recently barred from the United Kingdom, vividly illustrated both the thinking behind, and the consequences of, this form of *jihad* in a 2007 television interview:

> The duty of *jihad*...had been neglected by the Islamic nation for a long time, because of the arrogance and injustice of America and its allies against the Islamic nation, and because of their support for Israel...the 9/11 operations were a response to great acts of aggression by America — its attacks on Afghanistan, on Iraq, on Sudan, not to mention the historic Crusades from long ago[.]...[K]illing innocent people is forbidden in Islam. But who is innocent — that is another question.[16]

This highly politicised interpretation of *jihad* has been a key driver in a series of critical events in the Muslim world, from the assassination of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat in 1981 to the rise of the Taliban. And filtered through the anti-Western ideology of Usama bin Ladin and his adherents, it lies at the heart of a whole range of terrorist plots and attacks beginning with the first World Trade Center bombing of 1993, through 9/11, the Madrid and London bombings, to the Toronto 17 and Heathrow Bomb plots of 2006.

If both interpretations of *jihad* can be termed "correct," then both are highly problematic from the point of view of policing and intelligence. If we use *jihad* to describe either terrorist activity or the terrorist mindset, we risk alienating those Muslims for whom *jihad* describes either a highly personalized internal struggle or to effect positive change within or beyond the Muslim community. We effectively brand them, if not as terrorists, then as dangerous radicals, which in turn perpetuates popular mythology that equates Islam and its adherents with terrorism.

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[12] Op. Cit., Armstrong, 18-22.

[13] "Jihad" in Martin, Richard C. (ed.). *Encyclopedia of Islam and the Muslim World* (New York: Macmillan, 2004).

[14] Ibid.

[15] Op. Cit., Armstrong, 168-170.

[16] Cited in Middle East Research Institute. *Special Dispatch Series* (No. 1529 - March 30, 2007).

On the other hand, the conflation of *jihad* and, if not terrorism, then at least violence in the name of faith (or a political creed masquerading as faith), is not incorrect. But by referring to extremists as *jihadis* — a positive component of the Muslim historical and cultural experience — we effectively recognize their actions as being in the path of God and, therefore, legitimate.[17] And in opposing *jihad* and its practitioners, we risk characterizing ourselves — again — as the enemies of Islam. Not only does this empower extremists, but it sends a strong message that we are engaged in a struggle, not with extremism, but to suppress Islam itself. Again, this is not a message that we can afford to send.

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[17]   Op. Cit., Streusand & Tunnell, 2.

So What Do We Say?

As the historian of religion Karen Armstrong has observed, knowing who the enemy is not is just as critical as knowing who the enemy is.[18] In the process of naming enemies correctly, we learn more about them: how they think and how they are likely to act. Therefore, it is in the best interests of those at the forefront of addressing terrorism — the intelligence and law enforcement communities — to assume a leadership role in researching and determining appropriate terminology to describe extremism and its perpetrators. To date, relatively little work has been undertaken in this area.[19]

A glossary of alternate terminology is beyond the scope of this report. Nevertheless, more appropriate descriptions of the challenges that we face do exist. As previously mentioned, Usama Bin Ladin and many other extremists are heavily influenced by and have added the writings of the Egyptian ideologue Sayyid Qutb, who urged his followers not only to withdraw from the moral vacuum of modern society but also to destroy it.[20] Qutb validated extreme violence in the cause of faith, so "Islamic terrorism" could more accurately be called "Qutbian terrorism."

As always, however, we must remain mindful of words and their nuances. For example, many contemporary terrorist movements—including Afghanistan's Taliban and al-Qai'da — have theological roots in Wahhabism, a sect that forms the "state orthodoxy" of contemporary Saudi Arabia.[21] Wahhabism is a particularly strict interpretation of Islam that adheres to the Salafist notion that "pure" Islam must be rooted in the teachings of the "early fathers" — the Prophet Muhammad and his companions.[22] Both "Wahhabist" and "Salafist" have been used extensively to define particular types of terrorism. But while elements of Wahabbism could give rise to a mindset that includes extremist action — as 9/11 itself demonstrates — the vast majority of Wahabbists and Salafists are not and never will be terrorists.

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[18] Armstrong, Karen. "Violent Islamic Radicals Know They Are Heretical." *Guardian* (July 8, 2006).

[19] Douglas Streusand and Harry Tunnell have written on this subject and are cited elsewhere in this report. The European Union has also prepared a handbook of non-offensive terminology to use in describing terrorism, but this remains classified (see Waterfield, Bruno, "Don't confuse terrorism with Islam, says EU," *The Telegraph* (March 31, 2007)).

[20] Op. Cit., Armstrong, 169-170; Wright, Lawrence. *The Looming Tower: Al Qaeda and the Road to 9/11* (New York: Knopf, 2006), 28-31.

[21] Fisk, Robert. *The Great War for Civilization: the Conquest of the Middle East* (London: Fourth Estate, 2005), 1045.

[22] Allen, Charles. *God's Terrorists: the Wahhabi Cult and the Hidden Roots of Modern Jihad* (London: Little, Brown, 2006), 210.

Jihad and People

The debate over *jihad*, its meaning and its proper role plays itself out in Muslim communities around the world. In Canada, Muslim commentators like Raheel Raza emphasize the need for Muslims both to speak out and to take action to ensure that terrorism, extremism and anti-Western propaganda are eliminated from Muslim discourse. Muslims must "take back the mosques" to ensure that the voices of "reasonable Muslim men and women" are heard over calls for physical *jihad*.[23] Indeed, this imperative can itself be expressed as a form of *jihad*.

The critical consideration is not so much what Ms. Raza says — reasoned, compassionate and very much a product of the Canadian "multiculturalist" environment — but rather the manner in which this diverges from other forms of Islamic discourse. There are real ideological and rhetorical differences that divide Muslim communities throughout the West and the larger Islamic world. These differences can be sufficiently profound to cause, not so much a "clash of civilizations," but rather a series of clashes within a specific civilization, in this case Islam.

In Europe, where extremist ideology tends to inhibit the integration of certain segments of Muslim populations into their host societies,[24] the conception of the physical *jihad* exerts tremendous influence. Beyond this, ideological conflict within Islamic communities often manifests itself as conflict between two distinct cultural groupings. Tariq Ramadan characterizes the first of these as middle class, "assimilated" Muslims whose Islam is sophisticated and attuned to broader social and intellectual currents.[25]

The second group (and, necessarily, the group of greatest interest to the law enforcement and intelligence community) consists of young, unintegrated (often despite having been born in the West) and sometimes underclass individuals (but not always — the "Hamburg Cell," discussed below, were enrolled in degree programs at German universities and the suspects in the botched 2007 attacks in London and Glasgow were physicians and other professionals).[26] Characterized by a strong sense of specific or generalized grievance, they exhibit strong leanings towards a shared Islamic identity and a spirit of specifically Islamic activism and mobilization that is often in conflict with Western social and political norms. They reject Western culture (including westernized intellectuals and assimilated Muslims) as a reproach to "true" Islam and are drawn to historical and ideological discourse that "proves" the greatness of Islamic civilization. This combination of perceived oppression and the search for a dignified alternative, easily translates into openness to physical, or politicised, *jihad*.[27] Exemplars of this demographic include Mohammed Bouyeri, the Netherlands-born killer of Theo Van Gogh, the British-born London Bombers, and the "Hamburg Cell" that became the hard core of the 9/11 conspiracy.

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[23] Op. Cit., Raza, 61.

[24] Op. Cit., International Crisis Group, 13.

[25] Ramadan, Tariq. *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 106-107.

[26] "British Identify Two 'Principal' Suspects." New York Times (July 8, 2007).

[27] Ibid., 107-109.

Exemplars, like Raza, of Ramadan's first group tend to distance themselves from the second group, claiming that it has transformed the traditional concept of *jihad* as a form of spiritual struggle into an ideology of violence and revenge. But there is also distortion in portraying "true" Islam in an unremittingly positive light. Extremism in the name of a politicized Islam is a perversion of the faith. The problem is, to its adherents it is a legitimate form of discourse, fully justifying direct action that can range from proselytizing to overt acts of terror on the scale of New York, Bali, Madrid and London.

The messaging — particularly the interpretation of *jihad* — that originates with "assimilated" Muslim thinkers and commentators is comforting, particularly to non-Muslims who find themselves perplexed and disquieted by the violence inherent in al-Qai'da-type extremist ideology. But those thinkers and commentators may not speak for that portion of the Muslim world that is disconnected, isolated, or otherwise susceptible to such ideology. So it is difficult to state with any degree of accuracy how meaningful their message is in the overall context of Muslim discourse, or to what degree it can compete rhetorically with the siren call of extremism and physical *jihad*.

Making Worlds

The Extremist World

An understanding the nuances of concepts like *jihad* is critical. Any attempt to promote one understanding or interpretation over another is probably fruitless, however. As Douglas Streusand points out, "classical texts speak only to, not for, contemporary Muslims…" and ultimately, individual Muslims will make up their own minds.[28] What is clear is that with the extremist mindset, we are addressing a cultural and an emotional phenomenon that is much greater than the sum of any of its parts, including "physical" entities like al-Qai'da. As one Saudi extremist exhorted,

> I do not need to meet the Sheikh and ask his permission to carry out some operation, the same as I do not need permission to pray or to think about killing the Jews and the Crusaders. There are a thousand bin Ladens in this nation. We should not abandon our way, which the Sheikh has paved for you, regardless of the existence of the Sheikh or his absence.[29]

Since 9/11 (and, in some cases, long before it), governments and law enforcement and intelligence communities have been engaged in a concerted strategy to confront extremism through a variety of means. In many respects, we have been successful. Conspiracies have been disrupted, terrorist operations have been pre-empted, meaningful alliances have been forged and knowledge and understanding of the threat posed by this particular form of extremism has become both sophisticated and widespread. The problem continues, however, and shows no sign of dissipating. Indeed, many indicators suggest that it is getting worse, particularly with regard to the link between radicalization of young Muslims in Western countries and extremist action against those countries.

The phenomenon of radicalization is a critical subset of the terrorist threat and awareness of it as a challenge is growing rapidly among law enforcement and security agencies. Radicalization refers to the process by which individuals — usually young people — are introduced to an overtly ideological message and belief system that encourages movement from moderate, mainstream beliefs towards extreme views. While radical thinking is by no means problematic in and of itself, it becomes a threat when individuals espouse or engage in violence or direct action as a means of promoting political, ideological or religious extremism.[30]

Historically, radicalization has spanned not only the entire "left-right" political spectrum, from environmental and animal rights activists to neo-Nazis, but a range of ethnic and religious interests as well. Radicalization can occur due to a multitude of factors and influences. There is no single group that seeks out vulnerable and impressionable young people. Nor is radicalization limited to any single ethnic

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[28] Op. Cit., Streusand & Tunnell, 3.

[29] Cited in Stern, Jessica. "The Protean Enemy." *Foreign Affairs* (July - August 2003), 35.

[30] This conceptualization of radicalization is in common use in the RCMP national security program

or interest group.[31] In a contemporary context, however, domestic radicalization associated with violent Islamist extremist ideology is a particular concern for law enforcement and security agencies. Since 9/11, virtually all of the planned or actual terrorist attacks in Western Europe and North America have been carried out by young Muslims of various national and cultural origins who were either native-born citizens or long-term residents and who had undergone an identifiable process of radicalization. These include the Theo Van Gogh killing and the "Hofstad Plot" in the Netherlands; the Madrid bombings; the 7/7 bombings and their aftermath; the "Toronto 18" case; Operation OVERT (the "Heathrow Plot"), and the 2007 firebombing of Glasgow Airport and failed terrorist attacks in Central London.

These cases embody many of the key features of contemporary radicalization that are of particular concern to law enforcement and security agencies. Foremost among these is the speed with which radicalization occurs and the fact that pre-radicalization indicators are often extraordinarily subtle, particularly to a cultural outsider like a police or intelligence officer. It is also clear that trying to anticipate (or address) radicalization through concepts like "alienation" is not useful. Terrorists do not necessarily exist at the margins of society. Subtle (and largely immeasurable) social, political and religious motivations may trump belonging and citizenship.[32]

Alternative Narratives

Ultimately, the most effective long term strategy against al-Qai'da-type extremism, whether domestic or global, may be rooted in the construction of "alternative narratives" designed to subvert extremist messaging. We need to find ways of counterbalancing the culture of death and martyrdom with a culture that celebrates the value of life.[33]

In order both to develop a long term strategy and to create meaningful alternative narratives, however, a number of things need to happen. Intelligence and law enforcement communities must learn not only how to penetrate the extremist world effectively but, just as importantly, how to understand the discourse that defines that world. This includes not just words, not just rhetoric, but extends to the meaning and symbolism underlying even sounds, colors and images[34] — in short, a much broader and deeper understanding of the cultural roots of extremism than we currently possess.

We also need to determine the targets of our messaging. The US Cold War experience shows that messaging campaigns tend to work best when they are asymmetric; focused away from the opponent's center of gravity and towards groups that are more likely to be receptive.[35] Domestically, hardened activists are probably a lost cause, whereas confused and idealistic adolescents may represent real opportunities to exert far-reaching influence. Internationally, it may be possible to engage groups which, like the Muslim Brotherhood, remain Islamist while being prepared to repudiate extremism.

[31] Personal experiences of the process of radicalization can be observed in the lives of figures as diverse as Vladimir Lenin, Ernesto "Che" Guevara and the American outlaw Jesse James. See Anderson, Jon Lee. *Che Guevara: A Revolutionary Life* (New York: Grove Press, 1997); Service, Robert. *Lenin: A Biography* (London: Pan, 2000); and Stiles, T.J. *Jesse James: Last Rebel of the Civil War* (New York: Vintage, 2002).

[32] See, in particular, Sageman, Marc. *Understanding Terror Networks* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 107-135.

[33] This builds on ideas expressed by, among others, Gabriel Weimann of Haifa University, cited in Sinai, Joshua. "Defeating Internet Terrorists." *Washington Times* (8 October, 2006).

[34] See, for example, Combating Terrorism Center, United States Military Academy. *The Islamic Imagery Project: Visual Motifs in Jihadi Internet Propaganda* (http://www.ctc.usma.edu/imagery.asp).

[35] Rabasa, Angel; Benard, Cheryl; Schwartz, Lowell H. & Sickle, Peter. *Building Moderate Muslim Networks*. (Santa Monica: RAND Center for Middle East Public Policy, 2007), 142.

The Internet is arguably one of the most important tools available to the contemporary terrorist, particularly for al-Qai'da-inspired entities that are less groups than they are loose associations of far flung networks. With little "physical" capacity, they must rely on the Internet to recruit and train adherents, to raise funds, to propagandize, to document their history and mythology and to organize terrorist attacks.[36]

An interesting feature of the presence of al-Qai'da-inspired groups on the Internet is that much of the associated technological innovation / software development is done by extremists who have received engineering and computer training at Western colleges and universities. Indeed, the path to radicalization often seems to lead from Muslim homelands to the Muslim diaspora via the study of applied science in Europe and North America. The "Hamburg Cell," discussed above, is by no means atypical in this regard.

To the extremist mind, there is undoubtedly poetic justice in using the technology of the West as a means of attacking and terrorizing the very societies that created it (the choice of civil aviation as a continuing focus of terrorist activity is no accident).[37] On a more practical level, it is notable how few extremists have any grounding in either the history or culture of the societies that they are bent on destroying. By immersing themselves in the applied sciences, they acquire a superficial understanding of the technological manifestations of Western culture, but not of its intellectual underpinnings.

For this reason, the creation of alternative narratives requires not just cultural understanding on our part, but also on the part of the target audience as well. To be effective, however, any large scale cross-cultural initiatives cannot be rooted in a missionary sensibility that characterizes one culture as inferior to another. At the same time, they cannot ignore the political and social factors that combine to make the culture of extremism a compelling one, or the successes of Western political culture in promoting tolerance, freedom and prosperity. Nor can they fail to include key constituencies such as women and — as the predominant demographic throughout the Muslim world — young people. Ultimately, they must seek to find common ground and to demonstrate what is worth saving in both cultures.[38]

The concept of the alternative narrative is also applicable to community engagement strategies aimed at the prevention of domestic radicalization. It is important to note, however, that individual ethno-cultural communities may be extremely suspicious of engagement strategies that are linked explicitly to a security agenda. At best, counter-radicalization programming can seem like political expediency. At worst, it can provide activists and extremists with an opportunity to characterize the programming itself as a covert means of infiltrating and manipulating communities. While the radicalization issue is certainly more critical in some communities than in others, ideological and social stimuli are constantly evolving. Therefore, lasting radicalization prevention strategies must be applicable to society as a whole and not to any single religious, ethnic or cultural constituency. Beyond this, national counter-radicalization strategies are not solely the task of the police, of the security services, or of government. They must also involve health authorities, school boards, social and community services, faith- and ethnic-based groups and non-governmental organizations. All must contribute equally to the counter-radicalization narrative, because all have a stake in its outcome.

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[36]   Gabriel Weimann. "www.terror.net: How Modern Terrorism Uses the Internet." *United States Institute of Peace Special Report* (No. 116, March 2004), 3-4.

[37]   Ibid., 5.

[38]   While the historical circumstances were significantly different, it was exactly this approach that helped to remake both postwar Germany and postwar Japan - two societies that had spent a generation immersed in a culture of death, martyrdom and destruction. A lengthy analysis of Japanese wartime culture and its historical roots may be found in Benedict, Ruth. *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture* (New York: Meridian, 1946).

Conclusion

Al-Qai'da-inspired extremism, and its many offshoots and analogs, is a truly global phenomenon. Not only has it helped to create a highly unstable political and cultural fault line that runs from the shores of the Mediterranean to the South China Sea, it exists (and flourishes) in Europe, in Australia and throughout the Americas. This is precisely its importance as a venue for extremism and precisely the challenge inherent in any attempt to counteract extremist messaging. No single agency, no single sector, and no single government can undertake such a strategy on its own. A global phenomenon requires a global response and meaningful international cooperation will be required if influence campaigns that are rooted in the notion of an alternative world are to have any real impact.