

Disrupting, Dismantling and Defeating Terrorism 2.0



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Third Way's National Security Program is launching a Defeating Terrorism Initiative to help U.S. policymakers better understand and confront the threat posed by al Qaeda and other violent extremist organizations.

The Defeating Terrorism Initiative will analyze in a series of products what is fueling the continued recruitment and radicalization of terrorists, how the battlefield—both geographical and ideological—is fluid and shifting, and what tools should be brought to bear to attack the root causes of the threat and halt the spread of violent extremism. In doing so, Third Way will provide near- and long-term policy recommendations for defeating terrorism that cover the military-intelligence-diplomatic spectrum and bridge the foreign-domestic divide.

Overview

Speaking at West Point last December, President Obama clearly defined America's mission in Afghanistan and set forth a new strategy to “disrupt, dismantle and defeat” al Qaeda. At that time, he sent additional troops to reverse Taliban gains in Afghanistan; he insisted that Pakistan move militarily against terrorist camps inside its borders; and he took the fight to the terrorists using missile strikes from Predator drones.

While far from complete, this disruption campaign is yielding important results. According to press accounts, the number of Predator strikes in the region is up sharply. Since Obama took office, over 600 terrorists have been killed by drone strikes, compared to 230 from 2004-08. Senior terrorist and insurgent leaders are being killed or captured almost daily, including most recently, al Qaeda's number three, Sheik Said Al-Masri. Al Qaeda leaders in the region are now on the run, wounded and under siege.

As the President has made clear, however, disruption is merely the beginning of a long and difficult fight. The campaign against terrorism will not end with the capture or death of Osama bin Laden. Al Qaeda as it existed on 9/11 is no more, replaced by a decentralized network of smaller and disparate splinter groups that embrace violent extremism but increasingly act independent of a marginalized leadership. This evolving terrorist threat has metastasized and taken root in ethnic communities in Europe, on the Arabian Peninsula and the Horn of Africa, and, most worrisomely, has now reached inside the U.S.. These networks will have to be dismantled, and al Qaeda will be defeated when it is isolated and its supply of new recruits is choked off.

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Understanding the Challenge—Time and Place

The President's disrupt, dismantle and defeat strategy encompasses short, medium and long-term actions for addressing the threat posed by terrorism. Our immediate objective is to disrupt al Qaeda's ability to plan and carry out attacks against the U.S. and our allies. In the medium term, even as we work to stop terrorist attacks from being carried out, we also are dismantling terrorist networks by targeting their leaders and safe havens, communications, financing, recruitment and weapons. Through these and other sustained, long-term efforts designed to deprive extremist ideology a foothold here and abroad, we ultimately will defeat terrorism.

The threat of terrorism will remain the top national security challenge for the U.S. and the global community for the foreseeable future. In varying permutations, modern terrorism existed for 30 years prior to 9/11. The hijacking and corruption of Islamic tenets to justify terrorism has fueled a jihadist philosophy which will continue to find favor among the aggrieved and disenfranchised unless actions are taken to

isolate, discredit and attack this extremist message. The goals of al Qaeda are unwavering and existential. Their timeline is marked in decades, not years. Their attacks are indiscriminate and ruthless, and their tactics will continue to evolve to circumvent defenses. Our strategy for defeating terrorism must reflect this reality.

The U.S. should plan accordingly, and, as it did during the Cold War, structure its national security strategy, its budgets and programs, and its law enforcement and intelligence operations with an eye toward disrupting the immediate threat, dismantling the structure of terrorist networks, and the ultimate goal of finally defeating the terrorists. Our approach must be expansive and include more than the projection of military might and improvements in airport and transit security. It will necessitate a new playbook of tactics and programs that in some cases build upon existing endeavors and in other instances break sharply from the past and force us to operate in ways we are not accustomed.

Beyond the timeline is the question of where we must focus our efforts. Truly effective homeland security occurs in places far removed from the entry points to our country and before discontent becomes radicalization, terrorists are recruited, and plots are set in motion. We spend billions of dollars on massive passenger databases and sophisticated screening technology to catch a terrorist before he steps on a plane, but we have no coherent plan to make sure that the individual is never recruited and radicalized to be a terrorist in the first place. Without an effective offensive strategy to attack violent extremism overseas, playing defense at our borders is untenable; as former CIA Director Mike Hayden observed, it is like handing the terrorists the football one yard away from goal line and giving them an unlimited number of downs. A plot will eventually succeed in breaching our defenses unless it is part of a multi-faceted strategy to disrupt terrorism where it fomented and before it becomes operational.

The following policy framework builds on the key components of the Obama counterterrorism strategy and

forms a security narrative for attacking the present, persistent and evolving threat of terrorism.

1. Allocating Our Resources for the Long Term

Significant resources will be needed to defeat the terrorist threat, not just in the next year or two but over the long term. While national security spending should remain high, the administration and Congress must work together to restructure funding priorities within the security budget. Overall spending on the three pillars of American national security—military, intelligence, and aid/development assistance—is at about the right level, but it is out of balance.

Defeating terrorism will require a significant increase in intelligence and foreign assistance spending in the coming years. Clandestine operations capable of locating terrorists and disrupting plots globally and foreign assistance programs designed to deprive violent extremists the conditions overseas they can exploit are the critical factors for success. Where military force is necessary, it is likely to be conventional and troop-heavy, as we have found in Iraq and Afghanistan. A number of the Pentagon's high-dollar weapons systems are designed for a conventional threat which no longer exists and have little or no utility in defeating the terrorism. Ending such programs would allow for a reallocation of security spending supporting an increased investment in the intelligence and foreign assistance tools needed if we are to prevent the next Afghanistan.

2. Taming the Data Monster

In its mission to disrupt, dismantle and defeat the terrorist threat, the Intelligence Community is too often a victim of its own success. Our ability to collect information and data has grown exponentially in the past decade, while our ability to sift through this growing sea of information and identify that which is meaningful has grown arithmetically. After 9/11, the Central Intelligence Agency vastly expanded human

intelligence gathering overseas; National Security Agency sensors collect staggering volumes of signals intelligence on a daily basis; and the National Reconnaissance Office satellites provide images with greater proficiency than ever before. The garden hose of data that analysts used to drink from has become a fire hose. The gap between what is collected and reported and what is analyzed and used must be closed, or intelligence analysts and linguists at the National Counterterrorism Center and elsewhere will continue to be overwhelmed.

The Intelligence Community's inability to employ advanced information technology to handle the crush of ever-increasing information collected on known and suspected terrorists was the central failure uncovered in the Christmas Day bombing plot investigation, and it must be addressed. Automated recognition, correlation and search tools used commonly in the commercial sector to manage massive databases are essential to locating and connecting disparate fragments of intelligence quickly. In recent years, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence has made considerable strides at mandating integration, collaboration and uniform standards across the intelligence enterprise to foster an environment where relevant, actionable information is shared. It has fallen short, however, in establishing the advanced IT and automated distribution protocols necessary to process and synthesize terrorist identity information and reporting. The FBI also has struggled mightily to modernize its case management system.

Time is not on our side. The DNI formed the Intelligence Advanced Research Projects Activity in 2006 to conduct advanced research on innovative solutions that cut across the Intelligence Community. IARPA, working with In-Q-Tel, the CIA's venture capital firm for the development of information technology solutions, should be tasked to lead an information technology "Manhattan Project" to identify and correct the gaps in the collection, processing and dissemination of counter-terrorism information.

3. Preventing the Next Afghanistan–Denying Terrorists Sanctuary

A fundamental weakness in US counterterrorism policy is that it is largely reactive rather than preemptive. To dismantle these networks, there needs to be a greater focus not just on profiling where terrorists exist today, but on where conditions are favorable for the emergence of violent extremism, how terrorists might exploit this situation, and preventative steps that should be taken. Before this can occur however, the U.S. must accomplish something it has failed to do to date: develop a more predictive, early-warning model of where violent extremism may exist, say, in three to five years and coordinate efforts across the military–intelligence–diplomatic divides to promote unity of effort.

The Intelligence Community should prepare an annual National Intelligence Estimate on Terrorist Threats and Trends. The report should detail and describe: 1) the estimated terrorist presence in foreign nations; 2) the capabilities and activities of the terrorist groups; 3) the ability of foreign nations to disrupt and dismantle the terrorist groups and the efficacy of their efforts; 4) the role the U.S. and other nations in aiding this effort; and 5) those areas of concern where trends toward extremism may produce a favorable environment for terrorists to exploit and establish a presence.

In support of this pre-emptive analysis of the spread of terrorism, U.S. diplomatic missions and stations should be tasked to provide early warning indicator reports to the National Counterterrorism Center and counter-terrorism officials at the State Department, Pentagon, CIA, and FBI. The National Security Council should convene regular meetings of its principals to develop and approve coordinated and comprehensive Counterterrorism Action Plans for those nations dealing with an established terrorist presence and those susceptible to the spread of violent extremism, including the identification of resources and metrics for

evaluating progress in prosecuting terrorist cells and denying them sanctuary.

4. Forging Strong Partnerships

The U.S. cannot do this alone—we must have the help of nations willing to work with the U.S. to attack the roots causes of extremism and who are committed to being intolerant of terrorist presence and activities inside their country will be required in order to staunch the spread of terrorism. Successful efforts in Pakistan, Yemen and elsewhere have been largely ad hoc and driven by the need to move militarily against an established and formidable terrorist presence. If we are to disrupt plots, dismantle networks and defeat terrorism, we will need to establish a broader coalition of foreign partners who recognize the self- and shared-interest in placing counterterrorism at the top of bilateral relationship.

For example, as we chart a new way forward on global development, security cooperation must be a considered factor in prioritizing aid recipients and calibrating levels of assistance. Poverty, disease, and illiteracy promote disenfranchisement and helplessness which extremists in turn exploit to further their violent agendas. While it is true that many notable terrorist recruits were not products of this socio-economic environment, there is alarming evidence that extremist groups are exploiting personal despair to replenish and expand their ranks. The U.S. must work with its allies and the private sector to promote an expanded global agenda which alleviates the root causes of human suffering in the developing world. By aggressively attacking want and ignorance, we can drain the swamp of misery in many countries in sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, and Asia currently susceptible to the violent extremist message.

5. Increasing and Improving the Training of Foreign Forces

After eight years of war in Afghanistan, it is disconcerting that the key factor determining whether there will be lasting

security once our troops withdraw is our ability to recruit and train Afghan security forces and police. The scale and cost of this effort is considerable, but we already know that the model is fraught with problems. Independent reviews have found that reliance on contractors has led to widespread waste, price gauging, poor accountability, and inadequate oversight. Looking ahead, we must learn from the lessons of Afghanistan and Iraq. Too many nations have security forces that lack the tools and training to effectively root out terrorist organizations within their borders.

There needs to be a new paradigm for training foreign military and security forces, one which is less ad hoc, less contractor-based, and more pre-emptive. The foreign training initiative should have three components: 1) the Pentagon and State Department should perform a targeted assessment of which countries are most vulnerable to the destabilizing effects of violent extremism; 2) the administration and the Congress should significantly increase funding of the State Department's International Military Education and Training (IMET) Program which invites foreign officers to the U.S. for education and training and sends U.S. military trainers to foreign countries to provide specific, localized training; and 3) the Pentagon should create a foreign training component that supplements the work of the IMET by dedicating National Guard and Reserve units to targeted countries for extended training missions. While the use of contractors to supplement this uniformed effort will be necessary at times, it should be the goal of this initiative to minimize the need to rely on contractors as the U.S., working with our allies, ramps up its efforts to provide foreign security forces with the training and assistance needed for their own internal security and capability to deprive terrorists the foothold they can exploit.

6. Halting the Spread of Violent Extremism—Attacking the Recruitment and Radicalization Process

President Obama and his national security team acted quickly to pierce the growing bubble of protection that the Taliban had established in Afghanistan and Pakistan and which gave al Qaeda the space and security to recruit, train and plot its next attacks. The President's decision to increase forces in Afghanistan, combined with Pakistan's military offensive and ramped up drone attacks, has, in little more than a year, fundamentally reversed the security situation in the region and put al Qaeda sanctuaries in jeopardy and its leaders literally in the cross-hairs. Similar coordinated actions against terrorist cells in Yemen have demonstrated the immediate benefits of a "they can run, but they can't hide" counter-terrorism policy. Terrorists that are on the run and more concerned about their own continued existence are a diminished threat. Disruption in these places is working. But while the noose tightens around the al Qaeda and Taliban leadership, the next generation of terrorists is being recruited in places far from the Hindu Kush or Waziristan.

The spread of violent extremism philosophy has been rapid and far-reaching. Al Qaeda-spawned jihadism has established operational foot-holds in Africa, Southeast Asia, Western Europe, and, most recently, inside the United States. This is by design. The central goal of al Qaeda and its affiliated offshoots is to corrupt the tenets of Islam and promote a theology of violent extremism designed to topple nations and establish a fundamentalist caliphate. The message, not the actions of 19 suicide hijackers, is the means to this end. We must be mindful that the battlefield has already shifted, and our ability to defeat terrorism in the long run is tied to our ability to isolate, attack and inoculate against this virulent disease.

A. Improving U.S. Counter-Ideology Efforts

Terrorists are increasingly successful in using jihadist ideology as a propaganda tool to radicalize Muslims, garner financial and political support for extremist causes, and recruit new terrorists. Radicalization messaging can be internal and suppress moderate and constructive Muslim and

Arab voices. It has spread from one Muslim country to another. It has been used to target disaffected Muslim communities in Europe and most recently reached inside the U.S. with deadly effect, producing alarming indications of a growing homegrown terrorist threat.

Lasting gains in defeating terrorism cannot be achieved if for every al Qaeda terrorist killed by a Predator missile in Pakistan, two more are recruited in a jihadist in electronic social networks. The U.S. has no coherent roadmap of the terrorist enemy and their ideological methodology. We have underestimated the ideological training and indoctrination system employed by terrorist groups. Moreover, historical public broadcast and outreach tools, such as Voice of America and al Hurra, are ill-suited to counter the spread of extremist propaganda and recruitment taking place on the Internet, in chat rooms, and in mosques. We are confronting and intercepting fully formed jihadists, but these actions are at the end of long ideological training process that produces them. The reality is terrorists are being replaced faster than we can arrest or kill them.

The cumulative failures that allowed Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab to board Flight 252 on Christmas Day obscure an even more vexing problem: disrupting the recruitment and radicalization process *before* it produces a suicidal terrorist. Minimal skill, training and money are needed to carry out a devastating terrorist attack. The ability to corrupt the human psyche to kill innocent people is the X factor.

The U.S. counter-ideology program is fragmented and not effectively coordinated, with the National Security Council, the State Department, the Pentagon, the FBI, and the Intelligence Community each responsible for some part of the overall mission. There is no comprehensive federal interagency strategy for using public diplomacy and strategic communications to counter extremist ideology. Congress has voiced concerns about this lack of coordination and raised legitimate questions about the effectiveness and

transparency of the Pentagon's information programs overseas.

The Obama administration has begun to focus on the problem. The Department of State has acknowledged that an overseas partnership with the Pentagon's well-funded Military Information Support Teams can help realize its diplomatic objectives in combating violent extremism. In addition, a Special Representative to Muslim Communities has been appointed at the State Department.

By contrast, addressing radicalization efforts inside the U.S. is both a law enforcement and intelligence challenge, involving the FBI and state and local law enforcement officials, as well as the Department of Homeland Security. The creation of the Department's Counter Violent Extremism Working Group to coordinate multi-agency efforts underway to address the threat inside our borders is a constructive step. But more must be done to effectively attack the recruitment and radicalization process—we need the counter-ideology equivalent of the National Counterterrorism Center.

The National Security Council must take ownership of the mission and develop a national strategy for countering the spread of extremist ideology, to include broadening the efforts of our allies. The strategy should include an assessment of how the Internet's global reach is being used to recruit and radicalize new terrorists, ways of providing early detection of these efforts, and tools that can be used to counter them. The foreign and domestic leads for carrying out this mission should fall to the State Department and Department of Homeland Security, respectively. Discrediting the terrorist message and promoting moderate voices overseas are the most effective tools at disrupting the terrorist recruitment process.

B. Discrediting the Terrorist Message

Violent extremists recruit by promoting a message that caters to the psychological yearnings of the individual, such as belonging, self-worth, purpose, and honor. They also have

effectively appropriated and twisted the teachings of Islam to recast terrorism as a form of religious jihad. In attempting to provoke a clash of civilizations, al Qaeda and other extremists are manipulating Islamic tenets to justify murdering innocents to achieve political ends. Muslim clerics and scholars must speak publicly and forcefully to discredit the terrorist messaging as being outside the Islam and at odds with its teachings. Many did so after the 9/11 attacks, and this has proved vitally important at de-legitimizing the terrorist agenda. Support from imams and clerics willing to speak out and defend their religion from being hijacked must be increased, not just overseas but within the U.S. as well.

C. Promoting Moderate Voices in the Muslim and Arab Communities

As radicalization has spread in Muslim and Arab countries, moderate voices have been suppressed, criminalized and extinguished. Censorship and other government and cultural barriers limiting the publication of constructive content remove an effective counter-weight to extreme fundamentalism. This form of intellectual protectionism must be opposed, and the U.S. should make getting other countries to lift these restrictions and censorship a high priority in its diplomatic agenda.

7. Closing Pandora's Box

As we address the near, medium and long-term terrorist threats, nothing is more pressing than preventing al Qaeda from obtaining a weapons of mass destruction, and in particular, a nuclear weapon. Even a small amount of purloined nuclear materials, detonated conventionally as a dirty bomb, could produce devastating lethal and psychological consequences. The Obama administration's nuclear doctrine is not only a responsible approach to improving U.S. security; it properly places the threat of nuclear terrorism as a top security priority. The concrete commitments made by 47 world leaders at the April Nuclear Security Summit to account for and secure all nuclear materials within four years is an significant step in keeping

these materials out of the hands of terrorists. Other nations have agreed to give up their nuclear materials stockpiles voluntarily.

Still, more must be done. As we address the threat of a nuclear-armed Iran through isolation and tougher sanctions, we must expand our efforts to secure existing stockpiles. The Cooperative Threat Reduction Program (also known by names of its bipartisan Senate sponsors, Nunn-Lugar) has safely secured and decommissioned vast quantities of Russian nuclear, chemical and biological weapons since its creation in 1992. With the U.S. and Russia possessing the lion's share of weapons of mass destruction, our primary focus should be on the accounting and safeguarding of Russian stockpiles as it draws down its forces. The possibility that a criminal syndicate or black market could purchase or steal a small but deadly quantity of fissile material—from Iran, North Korea, Russia or elsewhere—and sell it to a terrorist organization represents a real danger. The U.S. should apply the successes of Nunn-Lugar program more broadly and seek international contributions to safeguard or render useless surplus nuclear materials around the world.