**About the Author***

**J. Rami Mroz** is Manager of the Countering Violent Extremism Initiative at the EastWest Institute and a former Policy Innovation Fellow.  He holds an M.A. in Diplomacy and International Relations from the John C. Whitehead School of Diplomacy at Seton Hall University specializing in Negotiations and Conflict Resolution as well as the Middle East Region. Rami also holds a B.A. in International Relations from Marymount Manhattan College. Before rejoining EWI, he worked as an underwriting analyst in the Global Trade and Political Risk division of American International Group where he provided risk and credit analysis for companies worldwide. Rami was previously a research assistant for EWI's Middle East Bridges program dealing with the Israeli-Palestinian and Arab-Israeli conflicts and other sociopolitical and economic issues in the Middle East.  First joining EWI in 2001, Rami also provided logistical, research and administrative support to the Programs division for Central Eurasian Leadership as well as the Regional Transfrontier Cooperation Project in Southeastern Europe.

# *COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM*

## VIDEOPOWER AND CYBERSPACE

**J. Rami Mroz**

**Policy Paper 1/2008**

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The development of global communications technology, in this case digitial video and cyberspace, has diminished the importance of geographic proximity for violent extremists. It is now possible for them to communicate instantly with supporters (or potential supporters) in nearly all parts of the world. Violent extremists are limited far more by their access, or their supporter's access to, technology than by geography. The characteristics of the Internet, its potential anonymity, however temporary, and its high speed, create problems in developing counter-strategies. Violent extremists use these mediums in very similar ways regardless of culture, beliefs, ethnicity, or socio-economic status.

Violent extremists use video and cyberspace in order to:

- ❑ inject ideological or religious rhetoric into political debates
- ❑ mold existing imagery from mainstream media to suit their purposes
- ❑ generate emotive responses from their target audiences to develop and/or amplify a belief-driven sense of purpose
- ❑ protect and control channels of communication
- ❑ operate diffuse networks
- ❑ build an "army of believers"
- ❑ recruit operatives, especially young people, to commit violence
- ❑ provide operational intelligence and information
- ❑ intimidate their enemies
- ❑ raise funds.

Yet as powerful as the internet may be for violent extremists, cyberspace is a neutral vehicle for the rapid transfer of ideas, beliefs, and agendas. Thus it can, and must be used by those seeking to counter violent extremism. Forces of moderation, integration, and education can use these same outlets to promote peace, security, pluralism and acceptance.

The recommendations in this policy paper are meant to demonstrate how government, civil society and media leaders can work independently and together on this necessary undertaking. Key to any strategy to counter extremism is the ability to reach the same audiences targeted by extremists. Any strategy has to be carefully targeted towards specific groups. Yet there can be few broad assumptions about content across diverse target audiences.

Counter-strategies must avoid getting lost in debates on values, perceptions, or beliefs. Such debates in devising counter-strategies can only fuel negative sentiments and alienate the audiences we are trying to reach. Identifying common feelings and emotions between polarized groups—such as fear, feelings of insecurity, hate or violence—may be a better strategy because working these issues has the potential to create an inclusive atmosphere. If

we focus on similarities, rather than differences, and on addressing grievances, violent extremists will find it increasingly difficult to inflame divisions.

## Recommendations

In developing strategies to counter violent extremism through the use of the internet and related video material, the following recommendations should be considered:

*For Governments and Civil Society:*

- ❑ Distinguish sharply between strategies for fighting web-based aspects of terrorist operations and those used to counter violent extremism

- ❑ Exploit and support EWI's International Action Platform to Counter Violent Extremism. It aims to:
  - legitimize grievances against violent extremists
  - build trust and popularize youth initiatives
  - provide early warning and policy analysis on responses to the growth or emergence of violent extremism
  - promote the use of videos and the exploitation of web-based media to counter violent extremism
  - generate a more productive debate on reconciling the conflicts between hate crimes legislation and basic rights.

*For Media Owners:*

- ❑ Create a Media Leadership Forum in order to:
  - promote the activities of those who speak out against extremism
  - discourage avoidable practices that popularize violence
  - exploit consumer interest in media portrayal of violence to generate interest in non-violent approaches to conflict resolution.

*For Internet Service Providers:*

- ❑ Suppress web use directly supporting terrorist activities, but not other expressions of extremist thought.

# CONTENTS

# INTRODUCTION

The use by violent extremists of the internet and video formats disseminated on it is a well-known and increasingly disturbing phenomenon. Cyberspace allows for the quick and relatively low-cost dissemination of audio-visual material to all corners of the globe. Extremists can record a violent act and broadcast it to hundreds of millions of people around the world within seconds. They use the internet and associated video formats to garner both attention and recruits. Additionally, the Internet provides for direct and indirect participation of users in extremist-sponsored conversations and activities through the utilization of forums, chat rooms or blogs, bank accounts for online donations, and mobilization of support.

As one expert has commented: "our deep commitment to a free society and the very nature of the web make it virtually impossible to prevent terrorists from using the Internet altogether."[1] Others argue that "the best way to indoctrinate people is to enable them to easily participate in the movement and this is made possible through the power of the Internet."[2] Michael Doran, Chief of Middle Eastern and North African Affairs at the United States National Security Council, noted "the web has created conditions that make it possible for…individuals who are not personally known to each other but who are animated by the same ideology…to coordinate actions in pursuit of it."[3] Doran concludes that "the Internet, therefore, is more than just a tool of terrorist organizations: it is the primary repository of the essential resources for sustaining the culture of terrorism,"[4] and it is this maintenance of culture that extremists, regardless of beliefs, find so appealing.

Violent extremists of any and every bent have long recognized the enormous emotional and psychological impact of video formats and have used them to inspire and captivate international audiences. Through this medium, violent extremists promote their beliefs, values, and ideas; recruit new followers; condemn their enemies; and promote agendas. The old adage "seeing is believing" remains as relevant today as ever.

Yet it is in combination (video formats linked to cyberspace) where these two mediums are most dangerous. Using videos on the web, extremists are able to package and disseminate their views with greater appeal. This format is particularly well suited to delivering ultimatums or threats, recording acts of violence, and presenting postmortem justifications for violent acts. Video

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[1] Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, *Statement of Michael S. Doran, 1.*
[2] Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, *Statement by Lieutenant Colonel Joseph H. Felter, 7.*
[3] Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, *Statement of Michael S. Doran, 2.*
[4] Ibid*, 3.*

formats comprise only a fraction of the information found in blogs, chatrooms, and websites yet they are among the most influential.

This policy paper analyzes successful efforts by extremists to use the mediums of videos and cyberspace. It provides a brief overview of the relatively inadequate practices of governments and civil society in response to these particular tactics, and then offers further recommendations for government, civil society, media leaders and internet service providers (ISPs) to counter violent extremists' use of videos and cyberspace. The paper bases its judgments on review of two regional cases: the United States and the Middle East/South Asia.

## UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

The common aim of most violent extremist groups is their desire for mass-mobilization of society to adopt their particular worldview and actively participate in civic and political transformation. Violent extremists recognize that videos and cyberspace are most relevant when attempting to transcend physical boundaries, either between geographically remote locations or between sections of one community cut off from each other by some intervening physical or legal regimes. Lack of freedom of association entices violent extremists to use video formats and the internet to communicate. Some violent extremists have learned to use cyberspace to ensure their message is received by the target audience, while others have gone one step further by taking ownership of production and distribution of audiovisual material through mainstream outlets like television.

Violent extremists tend to define themselves along ethnic, cultural, and religious lines. This sort of identity is "an important means of understanding large group psychology."[5] Through this self-definition, there emerges the existence of a desire for community or collective action. Two useful points should be kept in mind when discussing collective identity:

❑ "Theorizing on collective identity is a useful foundation for understanding ideological framing within social movement organizations" and

❑ "Collective identity is not an individual level phenomenon, but rather a larger manifestation of group attributes and member commonalties occurring on a social level."[6]

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[5] Cilluffo et al, "NETworked Radicalization: A Counter Strategy," 10.
[6] Ibid.

The purpose of this policy paper is not to revisit issues of identity long treated by psychologists like Erik Erikson, Jean Piaget and others. At the same time, it is important to identify one central and defining feature of extremism in contrast with its opposite, liberal pluralism: "unlike liberal social movements, which are often lauded as progressive initiatives responding to a variety of social injustices, conservative social movements are usually regarded as irrationally motivated exercises in intolerance."[7] However, that is not to say that secular liberal pluralism is the antidote to violent extremism. Rather, this issue, too broad for this study, could better be addressed through leveraging the wisdom of traditional societies and seeking integration of, rather then assimilation to liberal values.

## APPEAL OF VIDEOS AND CYBERSPACE TO VIOLENT EXTREMISTS

Understanding the appeal of videos and cyberspace for violent extremists groups is no more difficult than understanding television or the Internet's appeal to broad global audiences. Historically, most new media formats have been used to transfer and convey ideas and beliefs. Thus, the idea of new media operating as an appealing platform for violent extremists is nothing new. Yet we must acknowledge that video formats are often more persuasive than other media. An article on fundamentalism in the *Economist* in 1993 reported that "the magical potency of the oral word and the encapsulated message conveyed by the visual icon are dethroning the written word–and the mental habits of rational discourse sustained by it."[8] Videos become ever more powerful in their ability to trigger emotive responses, and "images and icons have always been an effective way of communicating the idea of the sacred."[9]

In one review of religious fundamentalism and Internet use it was noted that "the same technology that is perceived as a threat to the existence of fundamentalist communities may be viewed as a force that enhances their cohesiveness."[10] Broadcasting religiously charged imagery enables extremist groups to present a religiously charged message within a policy debates. These groups strategically use imagery, which identifies and manipulates deep-rooted emotions already crystallized within their target audience. Simply put, "the force of the image depends on the viewers preconception…People

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[7] Adams, "White Supremacists, Oppositional Culture," 761.
[8] "Religion and communications: Feeding fundamentalism," *The Economist*, August 21, 1993, 36. http://www.proquest.com/.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Barzilai-Nahon, "Cultured Technology," 29.

read television images according to what they already think."[11]   Finding material to reinforce pre-existing beliefs either implicitly or explicitly has been perfected to a near art form in some cases.

Videos alone, however, are incapable of reaching a broad audience. If videos provide the vehicle for the transfer of ideas, then cyberspace provides the conduit. For instance, fundamentalist Christians and Muslims initially greeted cyberspace with the same suspicion that faced radio and television in previous decades.   Much like the past experiences with radio and television, a dichotomy emerged between, "religious fundamentalism [as] a system of absolute values and practiced faith in God…conversely cyberspace as a reflection of contemporary rationale and scientific modernity."[12] Fundamentalist and traditionalist societies have consistently shown anti-modernization tendencies throughout history.

Nevertheless, this suspicion of new technology tends to be short-lived. One review of radical politics on the net finds that "information communication technologies (ICT's) have been employed for radical politics since their inception."[13] Cyberspace is no exception. Given the goal of violent extremists to present religiously charged messages within a political context, then it comes as no surprise that "even those who wish to evade, ignore, or struggle against technology are profoundly affected by it."[14] Many violent extremists have learned to come to terms with technology and even borrow it from their mainstream counterparts. Overall, "religion, even in its fundamentalist hermeneutics, does not perceive IT with irreversible hostility … in most religions, technology itself is perceived as a potentially friendly tool, or at least as a must, in order to disseminate religious texts and religious studies internally and externally."[15]   Violent extremists have found these mediums acceptable and attractive forms of relaying their messages and expanding their reach.

Additionally, violent extremists utilize videos and cyberspace to propagate their deeply rooted Manichean rhetoric.[16]   Kimmy Caplan of Bar Ilan University, Israel, writes "many minority groups, religious and others, certainly those who express a strong opposition to the social, cultural, and religious values of the majority, divide the world into images of 'us' and 'them' – 'good' and 'bad.' Minorities perceive the media, be it radio, television or newspapers,

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[11] "Religion and communications: Feeding fundamentalism," 36.
[12] Barzilai-Nahon, "Cultured Technology," 26.
[13] Pickerill, "Radical Politics on the Net," 266.
[14] Barzilai-Nahon, "Cultured Technology," 26.
[15] Ibid, 37.
[16] Tankel et al, *Countering Violent Extremism: Lessons from the Abrahamic Faiths,* 62.

as a force behind their alienation."[17] Many thus seek to remedy the situation by using the same forms of production and dissemination techniques as mass media, which is perceived by violent extremists in the same way the mainstream perceives violent extremists; one-sided, narrow-minded, and morally repugnant.

An element of relativism does exist because, regardless of the viewpoints of violent extremists, their views are, to them, rational and beneficial to society and they thus seek to use the same populist approaches to spreading their messages. If one takes into account commonly used forms of commercial and government propaganda, it comes as no surprise that, according to Gabriel Weimann of the United States Institute of Peace, "terrorist sites commonly employ three rhetorical structures, all used to justify their reliance on violence…the claim that the terrorists have no choice other than to turn to violence…the demonizing and delegitimization of the enemy…and…extensive use of the language of nonviolence in an attempt to counter the terrorists' violent image."[18] These tried and tested techniques are inherently political and provide a good example of using religiously charged rhetoric in a political context.

There is a debate on the effectiveness of recruitment of cadres of youth using these mediums. Some argue that these tools are effective means of recruitment while others would say these forms of communication are influential to young minds but must be accompanied by a form of physical contact/indoctrination. This does not mean, however, that videos and cyberspace are not valuable tools for indoctrination. This issue becomes particularly convoluted when discussing the question of youth because while their impressionability is naturally higher, they are not conclusively unable to think for themselves. Furthermore, indoctrination is directed towards young adults as well. In one study of Internet recruitment by violent extremists, it was noted that extremist websites "appear to be authoritative, especially to a juvenile."[19] However, "it should be emphasized that U.S. government analysts report there is as yet no direct evidence specifically linking the Internet to recruitment of individuals to mainstream, established terrorist organizations or movements."[20]

A fair assessment of this highly contentious issue, published in the *Washington Post,* is as follows: "In order to recruit new members,

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[17] Caplan, "God's Voice," 263.
[18] Weimann, *How Modern Terrorism uses the Internet,* 6.
[19] Ray, "Recruitment by Extremist Groups."
[20] Hoffman, "The Use of the Internet," 16.

organizations must thus present an ideological appeal that is congruent with potential members while offering a supportive and inclusive network working toward attainable political ends."[21] Videos and cyberspace provide major components of this network's platform.

Violent extremists also use videos and cyberspace to amplify their own legitimacy by generating fear among their enemies. Violent extremists are well aware that these mediums are "peculiarly well suited to allowing even a small group to amplify its message and exaggerate its importance and the threat it poses."[22] In many cases, government restrictions prevent violent extremists from physical congregation, so violent extremists eagerly take advantage of the opportunity to develop and disseminate their message as well as network without fear of arrest or censorship. Extremists know that these methods are effective, useful, and difficult to trace and they will continue to rely on them in the future

**Case studies**

The two cases discussed in this Policy Paper were selected on the basis of their size and scope as well as their ability to represent wider trends. Christian Extremist movements in the United States were chosen for their well-coordinated networks with affiliate organizations and widely documented use of videos and cyberspace as tools to maintain their interactions. (It should be noted that the Christian Extremist movement is really a diffuse network of many different organizations, including neo-Nazis, the Ku Klux Klan and White Power enthusiasts who often shroud themselves in religious rhetoric and ideology.) Al-Qaeda and affiliated Islamic fundamentalists in the Middle East and South Asia were chosen for similar reasons: their well-coordinated networks with affiliate organizations and widely documented use of videos and cyberspace as tools to maintain their interactions.

Unfortunately, the banner of religion was used here to delineate these two different movements.  It should be noted that within these overall movements which are really a juxtaposition of like-minded social movements, various ideas beliefs and values exist.  That is not, however the purpose of this brief.  Rather we seek to review the concept of common methodology which despite beliefs and values, looks surprisingly constant.  This brief does not argue that all of these groups think the same way or even speak about the same situations in similar forms.  The issue here is action.

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[21] Adams, "White Supremacists, Oppositional Culture," 761.
[22] Jack Warrick, "Bin Laden, Brought to You by…." *Washington Post*, September 12, 2007, A1. http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/09/11/AR2007091102465.html.

As discussed above, extremist groups have rather quickly overcome any initial reservations about videos and cyberspace to use them widely and effectively to disseminate their messages, spread fear, and recruit new followers. By looking at movements that are fundamentally different in terms of ideology, political agenda, and goals, this paper will argue that similarities in tactics—regardless of differences in motivation—can provide a starting point for developing more effective strategies to counter the extremist interactions that videos and cyberspace have facilitated and reinforced.

## The Middle East and South Asia

It is impossible to discuss videos, cyberspace, and extremism in the Middle East/South Asia without reflecting on the most infamous example—al-Qaeda. Al-Qaeda has been described by some as a "web-based phenomenon."[23] It has consistently used the Internet for major aspects of its operations—ideological or logistical.[24] In September 2007, having been absent from al-Qaeda video propaganda for three years, Osama bin Laden had a message for the American people. He told them to "reject their capitalist way of life and embrace Islam to end the Iraq war, or his followers [would] 'escalate their killing and fighting against [them].'"[25] In doing so, Bin Laden succeeded in reinforcing the beliefs of his followers and attempted to mobilize the masses in the West to join his ranks or perish.[26] His message provided a clear-cut example of introducing religiously charged rhetoric in a political context.

One study argues that, "the web's independence of national boundaries and ethnic markers fits exactly with bin Laden's founding vision for Al Qaeda as a base from which to stimulate revolt among the worldwide Muslim *ummah*."[27] Indeed, "propaganda and radicalization matter, whether online, offline or a mixture of the two," and, "propaganda fuels the radicalization process, and evidence of the effects of that process is disturbing."[28] Focusing on videos and cyberspace, the key to al-Qaeda's strategy is the premium placed on audio/visual stimulation and mass-mobilization, rather than physical/military confrontation with its enemies. Some argue that "Al-Qaeda and its offshoots

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[23] Gendron, "Militant Jihadism."

[24] Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, *Statement of Michael S. Doran, 1.*

[25] Josh Meyer, "Bin Laden takes on Capitalism," *Los Angeles Times*, September 8, 2007, A8.

[26] Obviously, the use of video power cuts both ways. In 2007, an American TV evangelist, Bill Keller, posted a video message to bin Laden on YouTube and other major video sites warning bin Laden to repent and convert to Christianity. According to the *St. Petersburg Times (September 18, 2007)*, Keller called bin Laden "a tool of Satan" who could escape the wrath of God by turning his life over to Christ and urging other Muslims to do the same."

[27] Gendron, "Militant Jihadism."

[28] Cilluffo at al, "NETworked Radicalization: A Counter Strategy," 3.

are engaged in a jihadi sweeps season," and while we "think of the war on terror in terms of a military contest…they think of it in terms of building an army of believers," and that "we are condemned to a strategy that is the equivalent of stepping on cockroaches one at a time."[29]

The use of videos and cyberspace by Islamo-centric groups like al-Qaeda exceeds the mere promotion of collective identity or reinforcement of the movement. Bruce Hoffman, a leading expert in terrorism, argues that "radical Islamic terrorist organizations in particular are seen as being on the 'cutting edge of organizational networking': having demonstrated an ability to harness information technology for offensive operations as well as the more typical propaganda, fund-raising and recruiting purposes."[30] The Canadian Centre for Intelligence and Security Studies reports, "the activities of groups like Al Qaeda on the internet serve not only to promote their ideological and theological tenets, but to convert large portions of cyberspace into 'an open university for jihad'."[31] For instance, the "Manchester Manual", a manual of terrorist tradecraft produced by al-Qaeda in the 1990s, notes explicitly that "openly and without resorting to illegal means, it is possible to gather at least 80% of information about the enemy."[32] One cyberspace center is called Jihad University, which "offers training information in the use of small arms, mortars, rockets, and artillery; guidance on where to fire at U.S. forces vehicles to inflict the greatest damage; sniper training; and detailed instructions about the construction of improvised explosive devices (IEDs), suicide vests, etc."[33]

But extremist use of the Internet and cyberspace is not limited to a vehicle for dissemination of information. One study has shown that, "through data-mining, terrorists are able to gain valuable information about transportation facilities, nuclear power plants, public buildings, ports and even the counter-terrorism activities and strategies of Western security services. It is illegal in the United States to photograph or videotape bridges and tunnels, large portions of airports, and many security checkpoints and establishments in the United States for fear that violent extremists and terrorists will record and transmit this information to their handlers and superiors whom they have likely never met.

Additionally, the *Washington Post* reports that "Al-Qaeda has become more skilled not only in production techniques but also in its attempts to protect its

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[29] Eisenberg, "Terror videos flood Internet," *Knight Ridder Tribune Business News*, August 13, 2007. http://www.proquest.com/.
[30] Hoffman, "The Use of the Internet," 5.
[31] Nordeste, "A Framework for Understanding Terrorist Use of the Internet."
[32] Hoffman, "The Use of the Internet," 11.
[33] Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, *Statement of Michael S. Doran,* 5.

Web distribution channels from outsiders."[34]   A review of terrorism on the Internet notes, "when beheadings can be made public only by delivering a videotape to a television station, there is a chance of denying the perpetrators their objectives: broadcasters can choose not to put on the show. But once the Web becomes an alternative distribution channel, terrorists are free to open their own theaters."[35]   In this way, al-Qaeda is able to circumvent issues of censorship and also mobilize its base while avoiding the dangers involved with physical congregation. Terrorist groups like al-Qaeda are naturally diffuse and loosely associated in cells. Much like terrorist groups, the web is also diffuse and loosely associated into network nodes, which makes cyberspace the perfect medium for dissemination.

The ability of videos and cyberspace to operate as tools for mass-mobilization as well as the dissemination and reinforcement of ideas and beliefs makes them invaluable recruitment tools.   According to terrorism expert Marc Sageman, "the youth of every generation are idealistic and believe they have the power to change the world…it is this normal stage in young men's intellectual and psychological development that bin Laden and his followers [and others like them] seize and manipulate so insidiously."[36] Well aware of this phenomenon, a different study on terrorist use of the Internet shows that "recruiters roam online chat rooms and cybercafés, post messages on online bulletin boards, looking for receptive individuals, and particularly vulnerable youth, who, through grooming and encouragement in a private online setting, can be encouraged to join the ranks of a terrorist group."[37]   Examining online recruitment further, one expert concludes "the Internet can facilitate terrorist recruitment…along with print materials, social influences, and other factors…[and while] it is likely that direct invitations to take part in a terrorist organization are usually delivered face-to-face, there is no doubt that the web plays an important role in indoctrinating recruits before they are drawn in directly."[38]   So how does this happen?

A recent analysis of recruitment tactics concludes that "U.S. intelligence officials and terror experts say that jihadist groups are masterfully exploiting new media to reach out to disaffected young men who are seen as keys to building their movement."[39] Keeping in mind the appeal of mass media, particularly to youth, various forms of promotion and exploitation mirror tactics used by mainstream media and many extremists involved in the creation and

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[34] Warrick, "Bin Laden, Brought to You by….".
[35] Jackson, "Internet DIY," 107.
[36] Gendron, "Militant Jihadism."
[37] Nordeste, "A Framework for Understanding Terrorist Use of the Internet."
[38] Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, *Statement of Michael S. Doran,* 4.
[39] Eisenberg, "Terror videos flood Internet."

dissemination of this material operate in the same fashion, as would a marketing or advertising executive.

Another article titled, *NETworked Radicalization,* noted that "once produced only in Arabic, videos are being dubbed, subtitled, or produced in a wider range of languages in order to reach a broader audience…Some now include hip-hop and rap musicians whose catchy, melodic messages contain calls to violence."[40]  Carol Eisenburg continues, "videos are deftly executed, with computer simulations, voice-overs, English subtitles and copies in multiple languages. They draw eyeballs all over the world as they are re-circulated on blogs, Web sites, chat rooms and bulletin boards."[41]  Cyberspace (in this case websites, blogs and applications) has also been designed to generate appeal among young audiences. The Homeland Security Policy Institute of George Washington University concurs: "websites are often flashy and colorful, apparently designed to appeal to 'a computer savvy, media-saturated, video game-addicted generation".[42]  The Institute reported a site featuring a game called 'Quest for Bush', "in which the player fights Americans and proceeds to different levels including 'Jihad Growing Up' and 'Americans' Hell." Methodology regarding recruitment is dependent on the ability of violent extremists to facilitate indoctrination by identifying with their target audience and as of late, they have had much success.

In addition to creating their own appealing websites to deliver their message and attract new supporters, violent extremists can also capitalize on imagery provided by the mainstream media and individuals. In some cases, violent extremists own the media outlets themselves, such as the Hezbollah owned Al-Manar TV station in Lebanon or al-Qaeda's affiliation with the As-Sahab network. One article on fundamentalism states, "Images of war and violence, whether shaky footage caught by extremists and disseminated on the web or footage shot by journalists and aired on major media outlets, has reinforced sectarian divisions."[43]  The 2006 war in Lebanon is a telling case in point: "in a matter of weeks, YouTube [became] a video dumpster for a global audience to share first-hand reports, military strategies, propaganda videos and personal commentary about a violent conflict as it unfolds."[44]  Violent extremists are able to mold existing imagery (such as violence committed by enemies), which has already developed an emotive impact on the perceptions of many into a narrative, which sometimes calls for violent action in response. Reports and

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[40] Cilluffo et al, "NETworked Radicalization: A Counter Strategy," 7.
[41] Eisenberg, "Terror videos flood Internet."
[42] Cilluffo at al, "NETworked Radicalization: A Counter Strategy," 7.
[43] "Religion and communications: Feeding fundamentalism."
[44] Sara Kehualani Goo, "Videos on Web Widen the Lens on the Conflict; YouTube Users Explore Israeli-Hezbollah Violence," *Washington Post*, July 25, 2006, A1.

images of violent acts perpetrated by those who claim to have a monopoly on 'legitimate force'(as Max Weber famously defined the modern state) are often used and in some cases repackaged by violent extremists groups to disseminate their message not least through videotaping attacks on western military forces and other targets.

Finally, from an operations standpoint, the Internet remains an effective fundraising tool and many violent extremists have worked diligently to enlarge their coffers through the use of cyberspace and videos. Overall, experts conclude "Al Qaeda and its affiliates…depend heavily on donations which are obtained through a global fundraising network of charities, non-governmental organizations, and other financial institutions that actively canvass on the internet through websites, chat rooms, and forums."[45] The ability for al-Qaeda to widely promote its agenda while at the same time, raising local funds is a scenario that is only made possible through the use of videos and cyberspace and perceptions of violent extremists engaging in such large-scale virtual networking are not without merit. One study on video sharing websites and hate groups notes "YouTube [an immensely popular site which allows organizations and individuals to upload videos, provide commentary and ratings at no cost] alone streams hundreds of millions of clips daily to a global audience, with its users posting more than 65,000 new videos to its swollen archives every day."[46] Through the chaotic use of YouTube and other similar sites, violent extremists and terrorists are able to garner support without fear of reciprocity.

Thus, al-Qaeda and like-minded groups use video formats and cyberspace to promote and reinforce ideas and beliefs, provide open, protected and unimpeded distribution channels, develop and maintain diffuse networked that mirror the interests of the organizations themselves, aid in the recruitment of new followers, and operate as strategic libraries for terrorist operations and other acts of violence.

**The United States**

While violent extremist groups in the United States represent a wide array of beliefs ranging from Christian fundamentalists to neo-Nazis, they maintain the same core beliefs in the sense that they desire to maintain or rather reverse decisions that they see as usurping the "pure" culture, religious, and racial balance of power in the United States and the World. A 2006 Southern Poverty Law Center survey of hate groups in the United States found 844

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[45] Nordeste, "A Framework for Understanding Terrorist Use of the Internet."
[46] Mock, *Sharing the Hate*.

groups currently active on U.S. soil.

The use of video formats and cyberspace in the United States is naturally more advanced than their use in the Middle East and South Asia simply because of the disparity between levels of penetration of related technologies in the two regions. However, the levels of technological availability have little effect on the appeal of these mediums or the methodology by which they are utilized. The difference merely raises a question of the size and scope of activities.

Issues of diffusion, development of networks, and fundraising are prevalent in the strategy and operations of American-based extremist groups. The advantages of videos and cyberspace are clearly recognized. "The leaders have died or been jailed," says Karen Aroesty, the St. Louis-based regional director for Missouri and Southern Illinois Anti-Defamation League, "but what we've seen, particularly here, is a more sophisticated use of mainstream tools in order to sell the product."[47] Violent extremists in the United States have learned to use videos and cyberspace to enhance their legitimacy and promote their agendas through the manipulation of imagery directly. It has been argued that neo-Nazis were among the first extremist groups to understand and seize the benefits of cyberspace.[48]

The very nature of videos and their ability to generate emotive responses makes them susceptible to powerful manipulation. Violent extremists in the United States have seized on this. To enhance or enlarge a group's perceived influence, extremists need only "a crafty amateur filmmaker [who] can edit or exploit camera angles to foster the illusion of a much larger and more dramatic event."[49] The ease and sophistication with which false images can be created and disseminated has been used to good effect. One study of extremist videos and hate websites in the United States concludes that "neo-Nazis and other white supremacists are close on the heels of the commercial advertisers now rushing to exploit this still-burgeoning medium."[50] With regard to dissemination, U.S.-based violent extremists have been highly successful at protecting the source of their material. A different study shows that "just a few years ago, hundreds of websites served terrorists and their supporters," and, "now, ten to twenty-five such sites are thought to generate new material which is mirrored in several thousand others."[51]

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[47] Ibid.
[48] Cilluffo et al, "NETworked Radicalization: A Counter Strategy," 6.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Mock, *Sharing the Hate*.
[51] Cilluffo et al, "NETworked Radicalization: A Counter Strategy," 6.

As in the case of al-Qaeda, violent extremists in the United States have relied on the internet to maximize their operational advantages. Many websites tend to concentrate heavily on "guns, explosives, and military tactics."[52] When it comes to operational guidance and training, the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) reported that various extremist websites contained bomb-making manuals, including downloadable copies of the "*Jolly Roger Cookbook*, *The Big Book of Mischief*, and *Anarchy Cookbook*."[53] Additionally, the ADL reports that "federal agents investigating at least 30 bombings and four attempted bombings between 1985 and June 1996 recovered bomb-making literature that the suspects had obtained from the Internet."[54] Overall, the ADL has concluded that "beyond finding their inspiration on the Internet, right-wing extremists have gone online for nuts-and-bolts tactical guidance when planning crimes."[55] In one case, reported by the *Wall Street Journal*, "New Mexico students built their device well after the August 1999 passage of a federal law designed to curb the availability of bomb-making recipes on the Web."[56] The same reported noted that, "federal prosecutors have yet to record [as of 2001] a single prosecution under the statute, which mandates up to 20 years in prison for anyone who distributes bomb-making material knowing or intending that the information will be used for a crime."[57] Media attention to this phenomenon as well as government reactions and responses to violent extremism in the United States was greatly diminished in the years immediately following 9/11 due to an overall reduction of fringe attacks. However, recently these attacks have been occurring at levels that are rising.

Extremist groups in the United States also see videos and cyberspace as useful tools for recruitment. A review by the *Houston Chronicle* highlights the fact that "'the Web's importance in converting "middle class kids" to their causes cannot be overestimated', hate group leaders say."[58] The same article highlights extremist William Pierce from the neo-Nazi National Alliance, who calls for the violent overthrow of the United States government. Pierce is perhaps best known outside of extremist circles for writing *The Turner Diaries*, "which allegedly inspired Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh."[59] Pierce's new 'educational novel' for young people, as well as the *Turner Diaries*, can

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[52] Silverberg, "Hate on the Net."
[53] Anti-Defamation League, "Bomb-Making Manuals: Explosive Contents."
[54] Ibid.
[55] Anti-Defamation League, "The Consequences of Right-Wing Extremism."
[56] David Armstrong, "Bomb Recipes Flourish Online Despite New Law," *Wall Street Journal*, January 18, 2001, Eastern Edition, http://www.proquest.com/.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Anne Hodges, "Logging On To Hate: Frightening specials show how extremists target youths," *Houston Chronicle*, October 19, 2000. http://www.proquest.com.
[59] see Daniel Levitas on Christian Extremism in the United States in Tankel et al., *Countering Violent Extremism: Lessons from the Abrahamic Faiths*.

be found for sale on the Internet.[60]

Violent extremists are well-versed in the need not just to make the message appealing, but also to pay attention to how it is delivered. Referencing the use of music in crafting their message, Pierce was quoted as saying: "On the internet, I'm on equal footing with [Disney's chief] Michael Eisner…I want 'resistance music' to be the music of choice for young people."[61] Another extremist leader, Don Black, observed: "the so-called 'godfather of hate on the internet,' had one of the first racist/neo-Nazi hate web sites in the United States," and reportedly, when his son was 11 years old, he developed his own hate site.[62] The website, and associated company, Micetrap Records, operates as a sort of amazon.com for hate music. This is hardly the only such site.

As noted above, we need to take into account and accept the overall premise that advanced technology in the United States allows for more diverse forms of communication. Technology has now progressed to the state where video games and the Internet are often interlinked. Some of these games are politically oriented or created to provide political and even religious incentives for the player to commit acts of violence. While lesser forms of violent videogames do exist in the Middle East and South Asia, children and adults in the United States can now play games on virtual platforms that allow them to act out the goals and objectives of the game's characters. A debate rages in America over violent video games and their impact on American youth. The Department of Defense prevented a Christian group from sending an evangelical video game to U.S. troops in Iraq after ABC News inquired about the program.[63] The nature of this game in question is interesting because it seizes on preconceived notions and goes a step beyond videos in the classical sense by allowing the user to virtually participate in the implementation of the games apparent message. "It's a horrible game," said the Rev. Timothy Simpson of the Christians Alliance for Progress. "You either kill or covert the other side. This is exactly what [how] the Osama bin Ladens of the world have portrayed us."[64] The producer of the game defended it for emphasizing "spiritual battles" over fighting with guns and giving "incentives to recruit believers instead of killing the forces of the Antichrist."[65]

Thus, the use of video formats and cyberspace by extremist groups promoting

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[60] Ibid.

[61] Ibid.

[62] Ibid.

[66] OSCE, *Protecting Human Rights While Combating the Use of the Internet for Terrorist Purposes*.

violence in the United States are very similar to efforts taken by their counterparts in the Middle East and South Asia. In both cases, violent extremists are shown to use videos and cyberspace in order to:

- ❏ inject ideological or religious rhetoric into political debates
- ❏ mold existing imagery from mainstream media to suit their purposes
- ❏ generate emotive responses from their target audiences to develop and/or amplify belief-driven senses of purpose
- ❏ protect and control channels of communication
- ❏ operate diffuse networks
- ❏ build an "army of believers"
- ❏ recruit operatives, especially young people, to commit violence
- ❏ provide operational intelligence and information
- ❏ intimidate their enemies
- ❏ raise funds.

Differences between the cases deal primarily with issues of context, timing, and the nature of political events. Beliefs and values do not appear to influence the methodology of violent extremists seeking to use these mediums. In both cases, the existence of repressed emotional discord with the current political system was a necessary precursor for the success of any of the previously mentioned initiatives. This reinforcement of pre-existing perceptions and beliefs is the prime motivation for violent extremists when using these mediums. Such activity can only be explained by the desire of violent extremists to maintain and enlarge the social movements from which they draw their support.

While recruitment may be an inevitable and key objective of violent extremists' use of video formats and cyberspace, these tools do not alone deliver the effective recruitment. There is a need for those attracted to be provided further indoctrination. Members of governments, civil society, and religious groups are now beginning to understand this phenomenon and are seeking ways to counteract the use of videos and cyberspace by violent extremists.

## POLICY RESPONSES EVALUATED

Public policy discourse on violent extremism more often than not characterizes the threats and has far less to say on policy responses. However, intergovernmental organizations (IGO's) and civil society have done considerable work on responding to the use of the internet and related video formats by violent extremists. Governments have been active in policy

analysis but are less well-placed to use the internet and video formats as creatively as civil society organizations.

## Responses by IGOs and civil society

The United Nations (UN) Security Council's Counterterrorism Committee has taken on a global assessment (albeit through the lens of counterterrorism), as has the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The OSCE has published a considerable number of papers based on workshops and seminars addressing the question of regulation and culminating in a massive 250 page report titled *Governing the Internet: Freedom and Regulation in the OSCE Region.* Additional white papers and working group results will be discussed below but the OSCE work takes a commendable position on reconciling conflicts between government intervention and individual rights and freedoms. It laid out some principles and tests for policy in countering violent extremism and terrorism:

- ❑ The right to freedom and the right to privacy are both qualified rights
- ❑ In restricting these rights:
  - - Is there a basis of the interference?
  - - Is there a recognized ground for restricting rights?
  - - Is it "necessary in a democratic society?
  - - Is it proportionate?[66]

The UN Counterterrorism Committee also has had relative success in developing an inventory of country specific measures to counter terrorism. Other reports and studies of interest are referenced in full in the bibliography of this policy paper. (See especially *NETWorked Radicalization; Protecting Human Rights While Combating the Use of Internet for Terrorist Purposes; US National Strategy for Public Diplomacy and Strategic Communication; U.S. House of Representatives Act 1955; United Nations Security Council Resolution 1735.)*

While policy studies by relevant IGOs are of high value, the actual practical responses using the internet and video formats are less highly developed. Existing web-based platforms are either lacking in scope and timeliness or in legitimacy because of their association with one particular community, country, or region. Another significant weakness in existing systems is their narrow language base. There is no early warning and policy research network available in more than one or two languages. One of the best is that of the Anti-Defamation League, but it is not accessible in many world languages and its principal, though not exclusive focus, is protection of Jewish people. *The American Muslim*, an online 'journal' and much more, provides an excellent

set of resources on moderate Islam and the fight against extremism globally, though it is only available in English. The main website of Amnesty International carries four languages: English, Spanish, Arabic, and French, but this span of languages (four) is uncommon for such sites. In addition to its variety of publications, The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the OSCE operates an excellent data and resource website to 'promote tolerance and non-discrimination' that is directed against extremism of all forms. It operates in English and Russian.

As important as these groups are for specific sets of issues, the problem is that they do not take an all-encompassing approach to countering violent extremism effectively. For example, the Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI), a U.S. non-profit, offers one of the most visited sites and serves as a brains trust for web-based material, including videos, under its website MEMRI TV. It operates as a watchdog for public statements and media material made by extremists related to the Middle East. Such entities like MEMRI are not without their own bias and actually play a role in fueling the divisions in society by taking a region or culturally specific approach to holding violent extremists accountable for their actions. However, MEMRI does have the right model for the kind of initiative that may be needed. For instance, it may appeal to an even wider audience and have far more credibility if it were to offer English language reports (or other European language reports) on violent extremism and terrorism in those countries and translated them into Arabic, Farsi or Urdu.

Countering violent extremism depends on the easy circulation of ideas in a variety of languages, video formats, and other web-based tools appropriate to each threat and to those who might counter it. Civil society engagement of this relatively new field of study and evidence reporting on that activity suggests that no global web-based system supporting that fight exists providing a true global platform which simultaneously:
- ❑ operates in a wide range of languages;
- ❑ addresses a wide range of circumstances and threats; and
- ❑ emphasizes policy responses rather than policy dilemmas.

Additional anecdotal evidence was found when the author searched a popular video website, YouTube, and found that the key word search "extremism" yielded only 941 videos, "violent extremism" only 21 videos, and "countering extremism" two videos. Searches on "violent extremism" PLUS "policy responses" returned zero results. By contrast, "terrorism" yielded 20,000 videos, and "counterterrorism" 401 videos. On Google, terrorism yielded 56 million websites while counterterrorism yielded roughly 2.2 million hits.

The author draws two inferences from these results. First, the level of reporting on threats as opposed to responses reflects a similar rationale when addressing terrorism and extremism suggesting that public discourse is concerned primarily with the problem rather than the solution. At the same time we can see that the overall web-based public discourse on terrorism rather than extremism or violent extremism is far higher, which tells us that more needs to be done to delineate violent extremism and terrorism as well as delineate counter-strategies. Keeping in mind these results, it is important to understand the linkage of violent extremism and terrorism while viewing them as separate phenomena. Approaches to dealing with violent extremism and terrorism require different levels of engagement and different actions.

Clearly there is room for civil society groups to utilize the internet and related video formats to counter the message and tactics of violent extremists. In some cases we see unique examples of civil society taking upon itself the responsibility to provide free-of-cost translation of media material, articles, and internal thought leadership to policymakers.

Based on limited information, the author found that groups who do take a global approach to countering violent extremism do not have the same technical capacity or reach as others who are less ambitious.

Perhaps one of the earliest faith-based initiatives was Religions for Peace, whose first convention was in Kyoto in 1970. The group's website firmly states: "we must regretfully accept that some groups within our religious communities have indeed sought to employ violence. We must reject this and recommit religions to the way of peace. Religious communities and leaders must stand up, speak out, and take action against the misuse of religion."[67] For its part, "Religions for Peace…fosters multi-religious collaboration harnessing the power of religious communities to transform conflict, build peace, and advance sustainable development."[68]

Some secular responses principally focus on a variety of youth-based initiatives orchestrated to help prevent recruitment by violent extremists. For instance, The Wolfensohn Center for Development at the Brookings Institution and the Dubai School of Government aim to promote economic support for youth in Egypt, Iran, Syria, and Morocco, in order to enhance understanding. Additionally, the Interfaith Youth Core, led by Eboo Patel, is a Chicago-based hub for youth-based, interfaith dialogue. Patel notes "religious totalitarians

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[67] Religions for Peace, "The Kyoto Declaration on Confronting Violence and Advancing Shared Security."
[68] Ibid.

want to spread the idea that a clash of civilizations is inevitable and that different religious societies are inherently at odds with each other, IYC can show examples of people of different faiths working together." Patel added "that's the highest level at which we can compete and win."[69]

An apt example of a secular response that partially relies on videos and cyberspace is The Parents Circle – Families Forum, part of the Israeli Palestinian Bereaved Families for Peace with offices in the United States, Israel, and Palestine. According to information posted on their website, the forum has a number of programs to connect families from both sides of the conflict in an effort to build understanding and facilitate communication. They have face-to-face reconciliation programs, public and media programs (including a television series, radio broadcasts, and lectures), as well as other member activities like workshops, training seminars, and summer youth camps.[70] Another example (that, incidentally, also deals with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict) is One Voice, a grassroots movement that has offices in the United States, Israel, Palestine, England, and Canada, and seeks to build civil society participation in Israel and Palestine. According to their website, a 2006-2007 program "What Are You Willing to Do?" encourages moderates to call for an effective solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In their "Eye-Opener" video, One Voice describes their recent initiative and challenges people in the region and around the world to become active in the process to achieve their common goal of a resolved conflict.[71]

## Responses by governments

In the case of the Greater Middle East, the responses have been largely in the domain of law enforcement and controls, with less attention paid to addressing possible distinctions between responses to extremist ideas and responses to the promotion or execution of terrorist acts. The net effect has been to give the appearance of either a "police-oriented approach" that focuses on catching criminals or an authoritarian approach that attempts to influence thought and action on the part of religious communities. While these approaches may have some benefits, the author believes that for governments seeking to counter the sources of violent extremism, making a call to action is more appropriate than trying to shape opinions.

The Iraqi government has taken a reactive approach and made use of extremist videos to fight crime by manipulating and repackaging this material

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[69] Ibid.
[70] Parents Circle – Families Forum, http://www.theparentscircle.com/about.asp.
[71] OneVoice Movement, http://www.silentnolonger.org.

to include their message. In one report of how Iraqi police use kidnappers' videos to fight crime, it was said that "officials in Mosul, short on manpower, hope the psychological force of the broadcasts will help undermine the insurgency, making its fighters appear weak and encouraging citizens to call up with their reactions or information about those still at large."[72] Additionally, "a program loosely based on "most wanted" crime shows in the United States is also being developed."[73]  Additionally, a report by the Iraqi Embassy of the UN to the Security Council's Counterterrorism Committee states, "media consciousness-raising shall be carried out through a declaration on freedom of religion, multiplicity of doctrines and cultural freedom broadcast via the visual media, satellite channels and Internet sites."[74]

In the case of Morocco, the *Los Angeles Times* (July 15, 2006) reported that the government was placing some 2,000 plasma televisions in mosques so that a more moderate version of Islam, one more in keeping with the views of King Mohammed VI, can be more easily disseminated. The article concluded, "This admittedly original approach to televangelism is meant to counterbalance the influence of hard-line imams and preachers, satellite stations from the Persian Gulf region and Middle Eastern DVD's that spread radical Islam."[75] Additionally, according to a report submitted by the Moroccan embassy to the Security Council's Counterterrorism Committee, Morrocan law states that, "advocacy of acts constituting terrorist offenses by speech, shouts or threats uttered in public places or meetings, or by writing and printed matter sold, distributed or offered for sale of exhibited in public places or meetings, or by public messages using various audiovisual and electronic media shall be punishable by two to six years' imprisonment and a fine of 10,000 to 200,000 dirhams."[76]

A report to the Counterterrorism Committee by Kuwait states," The Kuwaiti Penal Codes criminalizes inciting or aiding in the commission of a criminal act in keeping with the criminalization of the act itself. The ministries concerned monitor religious sermons, schools, universities and the media in order to prevent the incitement to commit terrorist acts."[77] The Egyptian government is also reportedly "curbing the activities of terrorist elements and organizations designed to attract and recruit citizens to their movements or to incite them to commit terrorist acts," and, "strengthening measures to monitor the Internet

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[72] Christine Hauser, "Iraqi Police Use Kidnappers' Videos to Fight Crime," *New York Times*, February 5, 2005, Late Edition (East Coast) http://www.proquest.com.
[73] Ibid.
[74] UN Counter-Terrorism Committee, *List of steps taken, 3*.
[75] Bart Schut, "Morocco tries televangelism," *Los Angeles Times*, July 15, 2006, B17.
[76] UN Counter-Terrorism Committee, *Report Sheet,* 3.
[77] UN Counter-Terrorism Committee, *Fifth supplementary response of the State of Kuwait,* 11.

with a view to prevent its use by terrorist organizations for recruitment operations or for incitement to commit terrorist acts."[78]

For Algeria, a similar report to the UN Counterterrorism Committee states "in light of the danger posed by the use of new communication technologies, including the Internet, which can convey messages that advocate hatred and violent radicalization, action has been taken and measures adopted in order to protect the public, and particularly young people, from this phenomenon," while, "enacting a legal framework for the right of asylum and the protection of freedom of expression, including through the Internet, in order to prevent them from being misused in the services of terrorist plots."[79] Finally, in Jordan, King Abdullah is promoting Jordan's education system as a key weapon in fighting extremism and the "negative rejection of other cultures."[80]

In the United States, the law enforcement approach has been dominant but there appear to be some differences in how the federal government approaches violent extremists at home and overseas.

The United States Congress has been considering legislation calling for the establishment, "within the legislative branch of the Government the National Commission on the Prevention of Violent Radicalization and Homegrown Terrorism," at a "university-based Center of Excellence for the Study of Violent Radicalization and Homegrown Terrorism in the United States."[81] This House of Representatives bill states "it shall be the purpose of the Center to study the social, criminal, political, psychological, and economic roots of violent radicalization and homegrown terrorism in the United States and methods that can be utilized by Federal, State, local, and tribal homeland security officials to mitigate violent radicalization and homegrown terrorism." [82] A similar Senate bill expresses, "its deep concern about criminal misuse of the internet by Al-Qaida, Usama bin Laden, and the Taliban, and other individuals, groups, undertakings, and entities associated with them, in furtherance of terrorist acts."[83]

The House of Representatives bill notes: "the internet has aided in facilitating violent radicalization, ideologically based violence, the homegrown terrorism process in the United States by providing access to broad and constant

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[78] UN Counter-Terrorism Committee, *Response to enquiries regarding the fifth Egyptian report, 12.*
[79] UN Counter-Terrorism Committee, *Algeria's national report,* 10.
[80] "King says sound education system key to meeting challenges," *Knight Ridder Tribune Business News,* August 19, 2007. http://www.proquest.com/.
[81] H.R. 1955, 110th Cong., 1st sess. (October 23, 2007): p.10.
[82] Ibid.
[83] UN S. Res. 1735 (December 22, 2006): p. 2.

streams of terrorist-related propaganda to United States citizens;" "preventing the potential rise of self radicalized unaffiliated terrorists domestically cannot be easily accomplished solely through traditional Federal intelligence or law enforcement efforts, and can benefit from the incorporation of State and local efforts."[84] The bill does say that "individuals prone to violent radicalization, homegrown terrorism, and ideologically based violence span all races, ethnicities, and religious beliefs, and individuals should not be targeted based solely of race, ethnicity, or religion," and that "certain governments, including the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia have significant experience with homegrown terrorism and the United States can benefit from lessons learned by those nations."[85]

What we can glean from this deliberation is that there is a rising understanding of the challenges of violent extremism in the United States and a clear understanding of the problem as a truly global threat. The bills have caused much uproar in conservative and liberal circles in the United States because of the potential for the government to assign ideological motivation to a criminal act. In fact, it has been mentioned on the Internet as the "thought crime" legislation because of its perceived vagueness and room for wide interpretation. Nevertheless, the legislation specifically states that no violations of the U.S. constitution will be made.

The other main government response in the United States has been reform and engagement with civil society, particularly in the areas of education and youth outreach. A joint project developed between the State Department and the U.S. Center for Public Diplomacy attempted to develop ideas on how to counter violent extremists using media. This center, according to Karen Hughes, Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs at the time of the center's creation, is well staffed for the job at hand. According to their mission, "outreach through foreign media should be considered a basic work requirement of USG officials to the greatest extent possible…USG officials should make appearances on television news and information shows a special priority."[86] Additionally, the State Department promotes interagency cooperation to promote a series of choice points too numerous to mention here while perhaps more importantly, mentions that "greater focus should be placed on three major areas that human beings across the world care about: health, education, and economic opportunity."[87] Notably, under their general

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[84] H.R. 1955, 110th Cong., 1st sess. (October 23, 2007): p. 3.
[85] Ibid.
[86] U.S. National Strategy for Public Diplomacy and Strategic Communication, June 2007, http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/87427.pdf.
[87] Ibid.

communication guidelines, the Strategic Communication and Policy Coordinating Committee notes that U.S. officials should, "use caution when dealing with faith issues in the public square."[88]

The State Department employees tasked to the center have an understanding of the Middle East and are culturally sensitive to its Muslim and Middle Eastern audiences.[89] Said Hughes: "we try to focus these programs in areas of disadvantaged youth that are both vulnerable to radical recruitment but also where they don't typically have these kinds of opportunities."[90] Other joint efforts by government and civil society to work together on projects like the Voice of America[91] and youth outreach are helpful responses. The United Kingdom has launched a well-publicized campaign of working directly with moderate Muslim community leaders to promote moderate teachings and civic values. As reported in *The Guardian*, "initiatives launched by the Department of Communities and Local Government range from encouraging the teaching of citizenship in Islamic religious schools to creating a [600,000 GBP] faith and social cohesion unit. The unit plans to work with religious institutions, with the aim of preventing extremist groups from taking over mosques."[92]

One of the leading experts on the use of the Internet by terrorists, Evan Kohlmann, has called for the U.S. government and other threatened countries to develop a workable strategy that would combine a more active approach to Internet surveillance with reforms to intelligence and law enforcement agencies."[93] Some analysts fear that the United States is not effectively using cyberspace to fight back in the ongoing war of ideas against extremists.[94] A final interesting example is the Tranquility Campaign, a government-supported effort where "volunteers including scholars of religion, psychiatrists, and sociologists have visited websites, chat rooms and forums to engage in dialogue with extremists."[95] Nearly 700 individuals, according to government figures, have "recanted their beliefs as a result."[96]

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[88] Ibid.

[89] Mona Ghuneim, "US Public Diplomacy Chief 'Waging Peace' With New Initiatives," *Voice of America News,* September 28, 2007. http://www.voanews.com/english/2007-09-28-voa69.cfm.

[90] Ibid.

[91] Voice of America has always promoted moderation and pro-American ideas using all the means of communication available to them and easily accessible to their target audience.

[92] Tania Branigan, "Kelly launches bid to win over Muslims and fight extremism," *The Guardian*, April 6, 2007. http://www.proquest.com/.

[93] Kohlmann, "The Real Online Terrorist."

[94] Christopher Dickey, "Internet Imams: Inside the Cyber-Jihad; Are we in danger of losing the war of ideas on the Web," *Newsweek*, July 30, 2007, 29. http://www.proquest.com/.

[95] Cilluffo et al, "NETworked Radicalization: A Counter Strategy," 13.

[96] Ibid.

A small but interesting example from Iraq provides an unusual counterpoint: extremist videos have been used directly to defeat terrorist action. John Diamond of *USA Today* reports "videotapes of insurgent attacks in Iraq have become a potent propaganda tool for militant Islamists but also a handy training tool for U.S. forces, according to Army briefing documents being given to U.S. officers deploying for Iraq."[97] Retired Sgt Lawrence Hoague, a former Infantry Company's NBC NCO and Unit Public Affairs Representative of the U.S. Army National Guard, explained, "the reason they [the Army] use the tapes is because we trained many of these guys in the past—it helps the Army to know what tactics they have developed and we can do this by analyzing the videos they make of training camps and weapons manufacture."[98] Oddly enough, violent extremist groups, as mentioned, utilized this same tactical advantage.

**Going beyond existing policy responses**

Government approaches to combating extremism tend to be focused either on military and political responses to extremist groups, with a primary focus on the Greater Middle East, or on censorship in order to prevent violent extremist views from being disseminated. Our research has indicated that responses to Christian and other forms of violent extremists who use videos and cyberspace for ideological and operational purposes are sorely lacking, or at least have dropped significantly since 9/11. Debates on censorship and control of media outlets have the potential to infringe upon rights and freedoms that have clearly been stated above by the OSCE. While some have called for engaging in a "war of ideas," this approach is incomplete because it does not directly challenge the methodology of violent extremists and terrorists, nor does it combat violent extremists' desire for the mass-mobilization of societies they seek to influence.

In the case of civil society, we find that there is a rather large impetus to engage education, youth outreach, and inter-religious dialogue initiatives. EWI's Kathryn Davis Peace and Security Fellow, Stephen Tankel, argues for enhanced "intra-faith" dialogue as a precursor to true interfaith dialogue.[99] Civil society attempts to challenge extremism should be applauded but a concise and well-developed plan of attack for utilizing videos and cyberspace has not been accomplished. Additionally, many civil society groups and initiatives are

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[97] John Diamond, "Insurgents give U.S. Valuable Training Tool; Video of Attacks Provides Up-Close Look at Fighter's Tactics and Capabilities" [Final Edition], *USA Today*, January 26, 2006. http://www.proquest.com.
[98] Interview with Sgt. Lawrence Hoague, October 2, 2007.
[99] Tankel et al., *Countering Violent Extremism: Lessons from the Abrahamic Faiths*.

preoccupied with education and anti-recruitment initiatives and have a hard time countering the potency of violent extremists' use of videos and cyberspace to introduce belief-driven rhetoric in a political context; a potency that plays upon global citizens' repressed discord with their current political system. Last but not least, civil society groups that do provide virtual platforms to counter extremism do not approach extremism from a global level and have been unable to strip themselves of biases in some cases to approach the issue of violent extremism from a position of objectivity.

This study concludes that even in cases where videos and cyberspace are used to counter extremism, there has yet to be a clear and concise framework, model, or set of initiatives that can facilitate this process on a global level. The UN Counterterrorism Committee of the Security Council only lightly touches on this issue albeit with the correct multilateral approach. Social society examples like MEMRI have created the necessary infrastructure to counter violent extremism but the substance and perspective of these groups is too limited. That said, it should be noted that efforts to engage in countering violent extremism using the same mediums in the same ways require careful planning and structure as well as a clear commitment to avoiding the presentation of a specific set of values or beliefs.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Violent extremist groups have, through video and cyberspace, developed highly sophisticated diffuse networks that are hard to track and even harder to control. Other uses of video and cyberspace abuse by violent extremists have been reviewed in this paper. They require common collaborative responses by the international community. Cyberspace and associated video formats are ultimately a neutral vehicle for the rapid transfer of ideas, beliefs, and agendas. Forces of moderation, integration, and education can also use these same media to promote peace, security, and prosperity—and thereby to counter the extremists promoting violence.

The recommendations below are meant to demonstrate how government and civil society can work independently and together on this undertaking. Key to any strategy seeking to counter extremism is the ability to reach the same audiences targeted by violent extremists. Because many different audiences are involved, there can be no broad assumptions in any video and cyberspace strategy. Additionally, it is important to avoid getting lost in debates on values, perceptions, or beliefs as those debates can only fuel negative sentiments and alienate the audiences we are trying to reach. Sophisticated treatment of common issues such as fear, hate and prevalence of violence, may be a

better strategy because such an approach has the potential to create an inclusive atmosphere. If we focus on similarities, rather than differences, violent extremists will find it increasingly difficult to inflame divisions.

## For Governments and Civil Society

*Distinguish sharply between the strategies needed to fight web-based aspects of terrorist operations and the quite different strategies that can be used to counter violent extremism.*

Responses need to be compartmentalized according to their relevance to ideology on the one hand or, on the other, explicit calls for violence and direct support of terrorist acts. While particular acts of terrorism and social movements of violent extremism are far from mutually exclusive phenomena, responses to them should be clearly distinguished.

Governments and civil society should not engage in attempts to censor or silence violent extremists by taking control of cyberspace. Violent extremists will only circumvent such attempts in the future and the problem will perpetuate. Rather, governments and civil society can develop new plans and initiatives towards addressing internal grievances and "beat extremists at their own game" by offering clear-cut, and well-developed plans for the future within their own societies. Governments and civil society have the capacity to disseminate this "vision" with relative ease through cyberspace and video, and should use this capacity to wage a positive campaign against violent extremists, one that is not reactive but proactive.

The tactical advantage of monitoring violent extremists' activity on the web should remain a task for global law enforcement agencies. Much credit should be given to these agencies for mitigating the damage from and the potential for terrorist attacks.

Civil society should also take a proactive, rather than reactive, approach to extremist abuse of videos and cyberspace by developing new programming, television channels, radio stations, websites and the like, in order to present a platform for internal and pluralist dialogue.

*Exploit and Support EWI's International Action Platform to Counter Extremism*

Civil society organizations like the EastWest Institute are uniquely situated to operate as a neutral nexus or focal point for religious groups, civil society, and governments to converge in countering violent extremism. Much of the policy work envisioned for EWI's Countering Violent Extremism Initiative seeks to develop these links and report on them broadly using videos and cyberspace. A wealth of video, print and other internet-related material useful in the fight

against violent extremism through these and other mechanisms, but it has not been brought together in any systematic way for global influence. More material needs to be created. The EastWest Institute is promoting an *International Action Platform* to counter violent extremism in these ways. Using this International Action Platform, EWI hopes to:

- ❑ build trust and popularize youth initiatives
- ❑ provide early warning and policy analysis on responses to the growth or emergence of violent extremism
- ❑ promote the use of videos and the exploitation of web-based media to counter violent extremism
- ❑ generate a more productive debate on reconciling the conflicts between hate crimes legislation and basic rights.

## *Build Trust Among Communities With High Concentrations of Extremists*

Governments and policymakers should enhance their cyberspace and video credibility by keeping promises they make to their audiences. When a government widely disseminates the message that it is going to reassess the issue of poverty in a certain province, or act as an "honest broker" for Middle East Peace talks, people need to believe what they are seeing. In order to create an army of believers in peace, tolerance, and global prosperity, we must first build trust in communities we are seeking to influence. To do so requires actions as well as deeds—and cyberspace offers a compelling medium for government to promote its activities and efforts.

## *Popularize Youth Initiatives*

One of the most commonly cited avenues of policy response for countering violent extremism is addressing the recruitment of youth. This paper, as well as previous EWI work,[100] has shown that a large portion of initial indoctrination of young people takes place on the internet and through audio and video productions. This brief recommends that the same catchy and appealing formats and genres with alternate messages should be utilized and widely disseminated to schools and youth groups to send a variety of messages promoting key counter strategies. Religious groups should certainly get involved in such work. Mass-mobilization and grass roots efforts in various regions, like those of OneVoice, an initiative for Israeli-Palestinian Peace (www.silentnolonger.org), should be expanded upon and further developed to create new common agendas for communities with seemingly divergent interests. The popularization of violence as opposed to non-violence must be reversed and peacemaking must become as cool an entertainment subject for

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[100] Ibid.

youth as "war stories" now are.

**For Media Owners**

*Create a Media Leadership Forum*

Global media leaders are perhaps the best-equipped members of civil society to permeate public consciousness internationally. Leadership by media owners and senior journalists has the ability to drive public discourse on strategies needed to counter violent extremism among peoples of different faiths, cultures, beliefs, ethnicities, and language groups. Legitimate concerns have been raised about pursuit of profit through uncritical transmission of news footage of violence, of creative formats portraying violence and of pejorative discourse and debates by a variety of news channels as well as within various outlets of the entertainment industry.

*Promote the Activities of Those Who Speak Out Against Violent Extremism*

Mass media coverage of people who speak out against extremism has been significantly less visible than coverage that deliberately or unwittingly promotes it. This situation is widely understood and is to some degree understandable. An attack by extremists is not as newsworthy as non-violent counter-statement. But we need to continue searching for appropriate mechanisms to compensate for this phenomenon. Media leaders need to find mechanisms that suit their industry profile to achieve this goal.

*Discourage Avoidable Practices that Popularize Violence*

Similarly, major media stakeholders need to find appropriate mechanisms to discourage the sensationalization of violence in the name of ratings or profits. This can only be done through progressive consultations across industry sectors on a global basis and through mechanisms like a voluntary code of conduct. The process will be complex and drawn out. Media leaders must be called to account to begin taking such steps.

*Exploit consumer interest in violence to generate ways of enhancing interest in non-violent approaches*

Popularization of creative video formats portraying significant levels of violence has blurred the lines between such activities and entertainment. War movies and violent musical lyrics (as well as video games) have long been blamed as sources of violence in the United States and elsewhere. Hollywood knows that violence sells and they seek to exploit this phenomenon, but movie makers in many other countries (and elsewhere in the United States) do not

follow this trend. Music and movie producers and studio owners should develop material that is appealing to a broad audience but which situates violence in ways that do not mask or conceal its destructive effects.

## For Internet Service Providers

*Support the detection and prevention of terrorist acts rather then censorship of extremist ideas that fall outside the framework of blatant calls for violence*

Internet service providers and video web sites (like Google Video or YouTube) have a very difficult time monitoring possible breaches of copyrighted in the posting of material through their services. Much of the material and content of these sites is naturally generated and developed by amateur groups or individuals who are often working and developing this material from personal computers here and abroad. Technologically inclined violent extremists can easily spoof or fake their IP their address, set up faulty mirrors, and remain anonymous without the existence of heavy government intervention or censorship. Even if it were desirable, there is little reason to believe that they can play any effective role in monitoring content from the point of view of whether or not it carries ideas supporting extremist activity.

Since violent extremists, like hackers, will continue to be able to circumvent the law, as well as rules and restrictions set up by the sites themselves, ISPs should continue to work with government to track down those who post imminent threats to peace and security through the form of terrorist acts. Recognizing the difficulty of authenticating identities on the Web, ISP's should focus their attention on continuing to work with government agencies but draw a clear line between extremism and terrorism in order to avoid providing violent extremists with additional ammunition through the form of attempted censorship, monitoring, or oversight.

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