



# COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM

## Lessons Learned

Jonathan R. Mroz



**EASTWEST INSTITUTE**  
*Forging Collective Action for a Safer and Better World*

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The EastWest Institute is an international, non-partisan, not-for-profit policy organization focused solely on confronting critical challenges that endanger peace. EWI was established in 1980 as a catalyst to build trust, develop leadership, and promote collaboration for positive change. The institute has offices in New York, Brussels, and Moscow.

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## Introduction

In his inaugural address, U.S. President Barack Obama told the Muslim world they would be judged by what they build, not what they destroy. But even if those who build far outnumber those who destroy, many governments and societies will continue to be confronted by the specter of violent extremism. The challenge they face is how to devise effective strategies to counter the extremists and encourage long-term solutions that go beyond merely containing the problem to addressing its root causes. This is the challenge we posed to a wide variety of participants in the EastWest Institute's Countering Violent Extremism Initiative.

In 2008, EWI's Countering Violent Extremism initiative began a concerted effort to engage youth, advocacy groups, religious organizations, and local religious leadership to gauge their understanding of violent extremism and to learn what they believe should be done to counter it. Throughout the course of the year, we received a wealth of information, opinions and advice that extends far beyond this report. Further study is needed, but is, unfortunately, beyond the scope of this EWI initiative.

As is all too well known, violent extremism is a long-standing and long-studied phenomenon in human history. There are few things that have not been said already. There is, however, a significant gap between what is being said and what is being done. This paper will show that violent extremism is a symptom of a much larger set of problems where solutions must come from concerted efforts by governments and societies worldwide. In order to set the stage, this report will first briefly review what policy experts have said and then review the feedback from people of faith and young people as to how, from their perspectives, solutions can be achieved.

Each specific case of violent extremism arises from a variety of unique factors. A review of cases would require voluminous study. Instead, we are focusing here on recommendations for governments and civil society that will help them work toward a better and safer world. Arguments from civil society and governments bear certain key similarities — both seek to enhance their own security and their own interests. This paper presents an overview of the “rationale” for violent extremism as presented by extremists and terrorists and civil societies' reactions to such explanations. It also explores what can be done about violent extremism, given that it cannot be easily defined, cannot only be combated ideologically, and cannot be combated through the use of force alone in any sort of sustainable way.

## Lessons from the Experts

Regardless of religion or culture, violent extremism exists when conditions are right for individuals to perceive it as rational. Religion or nationalism alone is not enough to drive someone to violence; self-interest is also a factor. A periodic global ranking undertaken by the Bertelsmann Foundation (the Bertelsmann Transformation Index, or BTI) that analyzes and evaluates development and transformation processes around the world concluded in its 2006 survey that “warlords at the Horn of Africa show little interest in realizing vague ideologies or religious fantasies, but want to control territories and take-over political power first and foremost for economic reasons. They seek instead to seize political power and control over territories for primarily economic reasons.”<sup>1</sup> The 2006 BTI made mention of another ongoing study currently under review that argues, “The bulk of militant Islamist terrorist organizations in East Africa are native to the area and operate with local agendas, often pursuing local, ethnic or clan-based objectives.”<sup>2</sup> This suggests that ideology alone may not lead to terrorism and that there are elements of economic and/or social deprivation at play. At the micro level, we can assume that there is a relationship between self-interest and violent extremism, but what about at the macro level?

The combination of weak states and competing interests creates a noxious mix of instability that can give rise to violent extremism. Political scientist Jonathan Goodhand reports that “[a]round 75% of the global arms trade is directed at poor countries.”<sup>3</sup> Beyond that, data from RAND and the Memorial Institute for the Prevention of Terrorism (MIPT) point to “three major zones of contemporary terrorism: Middle East and North Africa (MENA); South and Southeast Asia; and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).”<sup>4</sup> All three of these areas are of great strategic interest to global powers. After conducting a study comparing 147 states, political scientist Tatu Vanhanen offers an “argument... based on an evolutionary interpretation of politics, according to which politics can be conceived as a struggle for scarce resources.”<sup>5</sup> He goes on to say that “politics is for us a species-specific form

1 Aurel Croissant, “Political Violence, Terrorism, and Transformation to Democracy and Market Economy: Findings of the Bertelsmann Transformation Index 2006”, *Strategic Insights* (Center for Contemporary Conflict), IV (12), December 2005, 7. <http://www.ccc.nps.navy.mil/si/2005/Dec/croissant3Dec05.asp>.

2 Croissant, 7.

3 Jonathan Goodhand, “Enduring Disorder and Persistent Poverty: A Review of the linkages Between War and Chronic Poverty,” *World Development*, 31 (3), March 2003, 630.

4 Croissant, 6.

5 Tatu Vanhanen, *The Process of Democratization: A Comparative Study of 147 States, 1980-88* (New York: Crane Russak, 1990), 191.

of the struggle for survival.”<sup>6</sup> In almost every case where weak states exist, we tend to see the existence of political violence and, in some cases, terrorism. Internal weakness, then, becomes the concern of all states. When violent extremism is seen as inherently rational given the prevailing conditions, it becomes a global problem. And often those prevailing conditions have their roots outside of weak states’ borders.

Understanding the process of extremism devolving into violence requires understanding the psychology behind the process. One organization, Psychology Beyond Borders, held a gathering of 90 leading psychiatrists, psychologists, and academic experts in 2004 on fear, terror, and trauma, the first “International Assembly on Managing the Psychology of Fear and Terror.” In the subsequent white paper that highlighted best practices for allied health care professionals, it was noted that communities that suffer prolonged exposure to fear and terror experience all of the following: impairment of the immune system; non-clinical depression and anxiety; detrimental changes in eating patterns and subsequent health effects; increased levels of risk-seeking behavior; negative changes in morality; changes in self-identity; changes in cognitive scripts; feelings of survival guilt; secondary and/or severe trauma; and the inability to visualize a future.<sup>7</sup> External trauma can be one of the crucial factors that create perfect candidates for extremism.

Another related view, which emphasizes the role of trauma in producing irrational thoughts and behaviors, deserves particular attention. Dr. Ronald Ruden, a renowned physician and practicing MD with a Ph.D. in Philosophy, is preparing to publish the culmination of six years of intensive research into the biochemical physiology of the brain in his new book, *When the Past is Always Present*. In an interview earlier this year, he said that in evaluating trauma there must first be an event; second, the meaning of that event to the individual has to be measured; third, the neuro-chemical landscape of the brain (resilience or vulnerability to trauma/empathy) at the time of the event has to be measured; and finally, the subject’s perceived inability to escape the event has to be established. Dr. Ruden also said that only traumatization can produce chronic anger and hatred and this trauma can occur in a variety of ways to a variety of people. The subject can be a part of the event, witness the event, or be told about the event — and in all three cases, the subject can have high potential for traumatization. Thus, it is not just survivors of a bombing

raid who may be traumatized; the same can happen to those who watch the destruction on television.

Psychological arguments can account for an individual’s propensity to see extremism as rational, but what of the arguments of root causes? For many experts, the answer is economic. Jonathan Goodhand argues that there is a “growing body of work which examines poverty as an underlying *cause* of violent conflict.”<sup>8</sup> Albert Abadie argues in *Poverty, Political Freedom, and the Roots of Terrorism* that “the notion that poverty generates terrorism is consistent with the results of most of the literature on the economics of conflicts.”<sup>9</sup> This view is popular, but why? Some would argue that it is a natural outgrowth of functions of the state. Goodhand also says “poverty and poor social services can fuel conflict ‘from below’ just as it feeds into ‘top down’ violence,” and “historically, marginalized sections of a population have been likely to turn to organized banditry.”<sup>10</sup> If self-interest is a central component in violent extremism, then poverty will surely increase the likelihood of its actual occurrence. Goodhand tells us “most donor policy, for instance, tends to be underpinned by the assumption that poverty and social exclusion cause violent conflict.”<sup>11</sup>

Beyond poverty, socio-economic arguments are met with increasing interest. The developing world no longer sees Western liberalism and capitalism as the only economic model to adopt and, in fact, never did in most cases. One of the main issues facing the younger generations of Westerners is that they cannot recall a time when our way of life was not the premiere “game in town.” For the first time, easy access to the planet through technology and the relative decline of Western power is shedding light on this phenomenon. Howard Wiarda argues that “[l]iberalism and free associability have not been the sole, inevitable, or universal outcome of recent modernization processes; instead, corporatism and various mixed forms of state control/freedom have predominated.”<sup>12</sup> Beyond that, Wiarda tells us that “the Tocqueville model of multiple, *laissez-faire* associability that is at the heart of American political and public life does not apply, or applies only partially and in mixed form, in much of the Third World.”<sup>13</sup> So, what is

<sup>6</sup> Vanhanen, 191.

<sup>7</sup> Psychology Beyond Borders, “Managing the Psychology of Fear and Terror: Strategies for Governments, Service Providers, Communities and Individuals,” 2008, 7-8, <http://www.psychologybeyondborders.com/userfiles/file/PBB%20White%20Paper%20Revision.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> Goodhand, 629.

<sup>9</sup> Albert Abadie, “Poverty, Political Freedom, and the Roots of Terrorism,” October 2004, Harvard University and NBER, <http://ksghome.harvard.edu/~aabadie/povterr.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> Goodhand, 636.

<sup>11</sup> Goodhand, 629.

<sup>12</sup> Howard J. Wiarda, *Civil Society: The American Model and Third World Development* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2003), 4.

<sup>13</sup> Wiarda, 5.



good for the West may not be good for the “rest,” and, if the recent global economic crisis is any indication, it may not be as good for all of our citizens as previously thought. This is producing new models of societies in India, China, and the Islamic world. It would seem the issue is socio-economic, rather than purely economic, but we should first turn to the argument against economics as a root cause.

Some experts disagree that there is a causal relationship between poverty and terrorism. In an article published in the *Journal of Economic Perspectives* in 2003, Alan B. Krueger and Jitka Maleckova write, “Instead of viewing terrorism as a direct response to low market opportunities or lack of education, we suggest it is more accurately viewed as a response to political conditions and long-standing feelings of indignity and frustration [perceived or real] that have little to do with economics.”<sup>14</sup> Claude Berrebi, an economist at RAND, offers a direct challenge to Abadie’s claim when he says, “the correlation I find is that those with higher education and higher living standards are more likely to participate in terrorist activity.”<sup>15</sup> He continues, discussing the 9/11 hijackers, and cites, not unlike the contention above, that “they were not reckless young men facing dire economic conditions and dim prospects but men as old as 41 enjoying middle-class lives.”<sup>16</sup> But wouldn’t it make more sense to assume that the hijackers were affected psychologically and were hand-picked, precisely because they were relatively older, middle-class and, by every Western definition, normal? It would make sense for terrorists to seek out the best educated, third party traumatized, empathetic men or women who would be able to withstand and, in fact, avoid being profiled. Some of the most notorious terrorists live in locales like Monaco, drive fancy sport cars, and have European partners in order to avoid detection. To conduct an operation like 9/11, it would have been essential to look and feel normal. The reports of the hijackers drinking vodka (taboo in Islam) on the eve of the attacks demonstrate that they were conditioned to accept Western vices and lifestyle in order to pursue their mission. They were not driven by their own poverty, but the poverty of their compatriots was a sizable motive, albeit, not the only one.

There seems to be a consensus view among the dissenters. Bertelsmann data indicate that “the roots of terror-

ism and other forms of political violence as sociopolitical phenomena are always socioeconomic rather than purely economic.”<sup>17</sup> If economics and politics are inextricably linked, then there has to be an explanation for this relationship that does not point to economics as the sole cause of political violence or violent extremism.

A final argument that democracy can reduce or eradicate terrorism deserves some attention. In 2003, President Bush lamented, “[s]ixty years of Western nations excusing and accommodating the lack of freedom in the Middle East did nothing to make us safe.” According to RAND, this is when he transformed democracy promotion into a national security priority.<sup>18</sup> But proponents of democratic peace contend that “democracies that are able to avoid such disorder, while still remaining competitive and free democratic systems, are better performers than those that are dominated by violence or that restrict freedom in the name of order.”<sup>19</sup> The general thrust of the case for democracy promotion stems from the principle that democratic regimes will not fight with other democracies and will also produce fewer terrorists. In a recent RAND publication *More Freedom Less Terror?*, the authors argue “even if democracy, or its absence, cannot on its own explain levels of terrorism, we must recognize that a significant number of terrorist incidents around the globe — at least since the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 — occur and stem from largely undemocratic regions (specifically the Middle East and North Africa).”<sup>20</sup> The Bertelsmann report asserts that there is a “high correlation between political violence and the lack of democratic elements in a political system,” but contend that this is not the whole picture.<sup>21</sup> Their study argues that terrorism is a byproduct of a “low degree of trust in political authorities combined with a high degree of belief among dissident groups that the use of violence in the past has helped their course; semi-repressive political structures in intermediate political regimes; defects of the democratic order such as low accountability and shallow patterns of political representation; and state weakness.”<sup>22</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Alan B. Krueger and Jitka Maleckova, “Education, Poverty and Terrorism: Is There a Casual Connection?”, *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 17(4), Fall 2003, 119. <http://www.krueger.princeton.edu/terrorism2.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> Claude Berrebi, “Evidence About the Link Between Education, Poverty and Terrorism Among Palestinians,” Working Paper 856, Princeton University, Industrial Relations Section (September 2003), 2, <http://www.irs.princeton.edu/pubs/pdfs/477.pdf>.

<sup>16</sup> Berrebi, 4.

<sup>17</sup> Croissant, 11.

<sup>18</sup> Dalia Dassa Kaye, Frederic Wehrey, Audra K. Grant, Dale Stahl, *More Freedom, Less Terror? Liberalization and Political Violence in the Arab World* (RAND Corporation, 2008), iii, [http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2008/RAND\\_MG772.pdf](http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2008/RAND_MG772.pdf).

<sup>19</sup> G. Bingham Powell, *Contemporary Democracies: Participation, Stability, and Violence* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1982), 9.

<sup>20</sup> Kaye, Wehrey, Grant and Stahl, xiv.

<sup>21</sup> Verlag Bertelsmann Stiftung, “Violence, Extremism and Transformation,” 2006, 9, [http://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/bst/en/media/xcms\\_bst\\_dms\\_19386\\_19436\\_2.pdf](http://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/bst/en/media/xcms_bst_dms_19386_19436_2.pdf).

<sup>22</sup> Croissant, 11.

A different conclusion is that it is not undemocratic governments but weak governments that create violent extremism. Alternatively, perhaps a lack of democracy is not an underlying cause, but a symptom of ingrained and sustained violence. Empirical data from Bertelsmann have shown that “countries torn apart by collective violence, political extremism and moribund state systems are the most unlikely candidates for viable democracy and sustainable development.”<sup>23</sup> Kaye, Stahl, et al, conclude that, “rule of law and human rights are particularly critical factors in influencing calculations regarding political violence.”<sup>24</sup> The BTI also tells us that, “many quantitative studies indicate that the transition from authoritarianism to democracy (and vice versa) bears an enormous potential for the sudden eruption of violent political conflicts.”<sup>25</sup> Indeed, 2006 BTI data would “also suggest that armed conflicts in autocracies and moderate autocracies are more violent than those in defective democracies.”<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, promoting democracy with force may only exacerbate a violent political situation. In its amended report of 2008, Bertelsmann argues that “despite all efforts, Afghanistan and Iraq remain two catastrophic examples of failed international politics. They show that attempts to force democratization upon a country are doomed to fail when the requisite structural conditions are not taken into consideration.”<sup>27</sup> Democracy at gunpoint cannot and will not work as it undermines the very concepts of liberty that Western governments claim to uphold. Ultimately, the “BTI 2006 study shows that collective violence and political extremism per se are not caused by any single fact.”<sup>28</sup>

Some political scientists point out that authoritarian governments can on occasion crack down on terrorism effectively. “The repressive practices commonly adopted by autocratic regimes to eliminate political dissent may help to keep terrorism at bay,” Abadie writes.<sup>29</sup> He also notes that “intermediate levels of political freedom are often experienced during times of political transitions, when governments are weak and political instability is elevated, so conditions are more favorable for the appearance of terrorism.”<sup>30</sup> But it is no surprise then that many

<sup>23</sup> Croissant, 9.

<sup>24</sup> Kaye, Wehrey, Grant, and Stahl, 170.

<sup>25</sup> Croissant, 9.

<sup>26</sup> Croissant, 9.

<sup>27</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, *Bertelsmann Transformation Index 2008: Political Management in International Comparison*, 4, [http://www.bertelsmann-transformation-index.de/fileadmin/pdf/Anlagen\\_BTI\\_2008/BTI\\_2008\\_Brochure\\_EN.pdf](http://www.bertelsmann-transformation-index.de/fileadmin/pdf/Anlagen_BTI_2008/BTI_2008_Brochure_EN.pdf).

<sup>28</sup> Croissant, 10.

<sup>29</sup> Abadie, 8.

<sup>30</sup> Abadie, 8.

in the West recoil at putatively democratic processes that look suspiciously authoritarian and may propel extremists into power in the long run. “As civil society has begun to emerge in the Middle East, it has taken a form that most Westerners are quite uncomfortable with.”<sup>31</sup>

Violent extremism has always existed; it has been and will continue to be difficult to eradicate. To reduce and mitigate it, we need to start paying attention to the involvement of governments in the affairs of other states. Violent extremism is not created in a vacuum, nor is it random or accidental. All the factors discussed above, and many others, play a role in radicalizing communities. But the views of experts are not the only angle on the issue. To better understand how communities become radicalized, EWI spent a year probing two communities in the United States prone to radicalization: faith communities and young people. An in-depth discussion of their ideas and voices has been of enormous value to understanding how violent extremism takes root and how to counter it.

## Lessons from People of Faith

Last year, the EastWest Institute held focus groups with faith communities in cooperation with Virginia Commonwealth University; the Arsha Bodha Center in Somerset, New Jersey; the Southern Baptist community in Birmingham, Alabama; the Islamic Speakers Bureau of Atlanta; and The Episcopal Church of St. Luke and St. Paul of Charleston, S.C. We also participated in a major meeting of religious leadership called Gathering the Spiritual Voice of America in Aspen, Colorado. First and foremost, these are truly successful communities. They are unwavering in consistency and conviction while retaining a level of openness and flexibility that makes sustained dialogue and negotiation possible.

EWI asked each group five basic questions (with minor alterations depending on whom we were addressing):

- What is violent extremism?
- How can government work with religious communities and civil society to foster a common vision for peace and security?
- How can religious communities work with government and each other to foster a common vision of peace and security?

<sup>31</sup> Wiarda, 14.

- What barriers exist to creating a common vision of peace and security?
- What immediate actions could be taken in your community?

We approached each community as an independent entity, not as representative or a subset of any larger religious organization, but the bounds between interfaith and intrafaith cooperation and dialogue are not clear-cut. Southern Baptists in Birmingham Alabama were quick to mention that each church is an autonomous entity, even within their denomination. At a session dedicated to different Muslim voices, however, one participant referred to a spiritual connection between all Muslims, and another mentioned that Islam takes a very different approach to faith leadership than what is common in the West.<sup>32</sup>

It was not the differences but the similarities that were highly significant. The first thing we heard from just about every group we spoke to was their conviction that religion plays a very small role in violent extremism. There was not a single instance of a participant in any of these numerous dialogues pointing to religion as the core issue. Most religious and community leaders understood that numerous other issues outside the realm of established faith play a role in radicalizing communities. These elders cared about young people, not just in their communities but worldwide, and were deeply contemplative in their approach to conflict resolution. Mainstream religious leadership were able to look beyond self interest and look at the world holistically, in a way policymakers and government do not. However, they did not ignore the role of religion. As one participant noted, “Extremists think that if you don’t believe that truth you don’t deserve to exist — religion plays a role in defining that truth.”<sup>33</sup>

Religious leaders saw faith, in its politicized form, demoted to a propaganda tool. While there is a common avoidance of equating faith and ideology, there was an understanding that those who manipulate religion for political or other aims are in fact ideological rather than religious. Beyond this observation, a desire to look inward was fairly consistent, given our desire to meet with communities individually and given the fact that they recognized the need to do so. A British pastor asserted that when it comes

to defining the terms violence and extremism, “it is easier to recognize it in an adversary rather than yourself.”<sup>34</sup>

An imam told EWI “we are in dire need of reference and/or definitions of terms like violent extremism, extremism, and terrorism.”<sup>35</sup> Another Muslim participant noted that the term “moderate” has negative connotations in Islamic communities.<sup>36</sup> This was likely due to the fact that in many communities this term is equated with capitulation to non-religious ideas or ideals that are not shared by these communities. Religious leadership generally recognized that extremism is an arbitrary term that does not adequately define the broad spectrum of social and political problems facing communities. Defining extremism goes far beyond understanding each other and ourselves; developing a definition requires looking past religious and philosophical beliefs and embracing hard facts.

Religious leaders were particularly anxious to articulate the difference between general extremism, violent extremism, and general violence. Violence was seen as a concrete, universal concept, but extremism proved harder to define. One minister from South Carolina, citing the historical and present challenges facing his congregation, told us “violence is something that we can define but defining extremism is difficult — I know what violence is but not extremism. What you might consider extremism I might not consider extremism.”<sup>37</sup> Extremism takes many forms, not all of which are violent. One Muslim participant made reference to Tibetan and Indian society, noting “the Dalai Lama and Gandhi might be considered moderate while their societies would be considered extremist.”<sup>38</sup> Another participant suggested that “we tag ‘extremist’ on to alienate people, separate other people from these people and this tends to have a strong Western connotation.”<sup>39</sup> There was an understanding that the Western world defines extremism arbitrarily. The same can be said for the East or anywhere else as the definition itself can provide those who use it with some of the tools necessary to get what they

<sup>32</sup> Building a Platform for Moderates III: Reconciling Religious Wisdom and Public Life in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Georgia Institute of Technology, Atlanta GA, EWI Event, March 2007.

<sup>33</sup> Global Youth Collaborative Workshop on Peace and Security, Lutheran Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, PA, EWI Event, November 18, 2008.

<sup>34</sup> Colloquium of the Faith and Diplomacy Task Force, Charleston, South Carolina, EWI Event, November 3, 2008.

<sup>35</sup> Building a Platform for Moderates III: Reconciling Religious Wisdom and Public Life in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Georgia Institute of Technology, Atlanta GA, EWI Event, March 2007.

<sup>36</sup> Building a Platform for Moderates III: Reconciling Religious Wisdom and Public Life in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Georgia Institute of Technology, Atlanta GA, EWI Event, March 2007.

<sup>37</sup> Colloquium of the Faith and Diplomacy Task Force, Charleston, South Carolina, EWI Event, November 3, 2008.

<sup>38</sup> Building a Platform for Moderates III: Reconciling Religious Wisdom and Public Life in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Georgia Institute of Technology, Atlanta GA, EWI Event, March 2007.

<sup>39</sup> Global Youth Collaborative on Peace and Security, Seton Hall University, South Orange, NJ, EWI Event, November 19, 2008.

want. It would appear then that counter-radicalization and counter-ideology are indeed political in nature and are based, once again, on self interest.

It should not come as a surprise that some faith communities believe that one possible step toward alleviating violent extremism is to give ethics a greater role in public life. A participant said that in order to do so, “we need to create the space to allow for the idea that these extremist views with regards to violence don’t have to exist.” He added, “Building positive communities makes the world a safer and better place but to do so requires a change in ethics.”<sup>40</sup> Unethical government practices were seen as a major contributing factor to creating radical, extremist communities, as well as a means for extremists to justify their claims of moral superiority. One Christian elder noted that when people are oppressed and feel threatened by the state, they are prone to extremism. When economic or political situations add to conflict, we see a “power struggle that contributes a great deal to the lengths people may be willing to go to.”<sup>41</sup>

However, this had less to do with sectarian issues than temporal affairs affecting these groups. It’s a matter of extremists claiming religious legitimacy for their political ends. The Hindu community’s perspective on extremism was particularly interesting. First, they argued that non-violent forms of extremism, such as aid dependent on religious conversion and indoctrination (i.e. food aid, shelter and clean water dependent on conversion) were just as dangerous to human safety as violent extremism. In an example of how fluid the idea of extremism can be, one Hindu participant mentioned “free market thinking as an ideology, filled with unquestioned assumptions.” This allows extremists “to exploit fear, poverty, historical oppression, and unverifiable concepts such as miracles to spread their ideologies,” he said.<sup>42</sup>

At the core of most religious leaders’ convictions was a desire for peace and justice, the lack of which was collectively seen as a core deficiency across the globe. One Muslim participant noted that “peace and justice vs. peace and security was a more appropriate and desirable goal for Muslims.”<sup>43</sup> Another imam noted that “the voice of the

oppressed...will always be different than the voice of the ruler.”<sup>44</sup> Still another imam noted that he could not preach submission to injustice, as this is a fundamental taboo in Islam.<sup>45</sup> Where religion and politics intersect, it becomes evident that there is also a serious problem that exists not only when government gets involved in faith issues, but when government starts to define religion. One Jewish theologian talked about the dangers of the state treating religions as monolithic, and cited “the example of attempts to modernize African Jewry by European Jewry in the 20<sup>th</sup> century [as] a good example of why a holistic view of any faith is important.”<sup>46</sup> By and large, government was seen as a barrier at times because it did not understand its own society, and the interests of the state often come into conflict with the interests of faith communities. The two are rarely conjoined.

Another issue that came into play is that there first has to be the understanding of “intra-faith” dynamics, which are a lot more sophisticated and diverse than we might think. Take, for example, a Roman Catholic Mass. In my own community, the Church of St. John the Divine offers mass in English and Spanish, normally back to back, with different priests saying different things and with entirely different communities in attendance, even though they live in close proximity. The division is not faith, but language and culture. Roman Catholics receiving mass in Spanish hear very different sermons. Hence, we have to view particular denominations as pluralistic already. We have already established that we approached communities as distinct entities. Change has to come from within these communities.

Our initial research showed that governments must allow civil society and religious leadership to take on the responsibility of countering violent extremism, because governments generally prove ill-suited to it. The reaction from civil society was that we were half right. On the one hand, government does need to take a step back and allow religious communities to engage each other in a free and open atmosphere; on the other hand, it needs to actively ensure that that liberty, freedom, and prosperity create the conditions for civil society to take root, grow, and develop where it does not exist. Despite setbacks and the shortcomings of government in other societies, a pro-

<sup>40</sup> Building a Platform for Moderates II: Reconciling Religious Wisdom and Public Life in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Chicago, IL, EWI Event, February 11, 2008.

<sup>41</sup> Global Youth Collaborative Workshop on Peace and Security, Lutheran Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, PA, EWI Event, November 18, 2008.

<sup>42</sup> EWI and Hindu Collective Initiative Move Towards a Global Platform for Moderates, Somerset, NJ, EWI Event, November 22, 2008.

<sup>43</sup> Building a Platform for Moderates III: Reconciling Religious Wisdom and Public Life in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Georgia Institute of Technology, Atlanta GA, EWI Event, March 2007.

<sup>44</sup> Building a Platform for Moderates III: Reconciling Religious Wisdom and Public Life in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Georgia Institute of Technology, Atlanta GA, EWI Event, March 2007.

<sup>45</sup> Building a Platform for Moderates III: Reconciling Religious Wisdom and Public Life in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Georgia Institute of Technology, Atlanta GA, EWI Event, March 2007.

<sup>46</sup> Building a Platform for Moderates II: Reconciling Religious Wisdom and Public Life in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Chicago, IL, EWI Event, February 11, 2008.

found discussion is taking place between faith leaders in the United States and it was exciting and reassuring to see them engage openly. Religious communities and civil society as a whole saw dialogue as a useful reconciliation tool in its own right, and the need to reframe a “war of ideas” into a “sharing of ideas” was seen as a relevant and important goal. It was noted, however, that introspection and freedom of speech was a luxury in American public life that often doesn’t exist elsewhere.

In the United States, interaction between religious groups was seen as the key way to promote peace and justice and reduce radicalization. But religious leaders also run the risk of alienating their own communities by cooperating with others. One of the main reactions to our *Abrahamic Faiths* report was that it was too Western. The case study in that report of Muslims in the United Kingdom was considered Western and we were called upon by many scholars, including the Grand Mufti of Egypt, to develop a similar report on Eastern religions and philosophies, which we have yet to do. Hindu participants underscored this request and suggested that values, rather than religion, are the most appropriate counter to violent extremism, since religion, like extremism, is a subjective and arguably Western construct. They agreed that differences between religions are given far more prominence than their similarities, and that these similarities can create the foundation for discussion and action.<sup>47</sup> For example, one Christian minister asked how we can talk to people like Hindus who worship multiple Gods, while the Hindus we spoke to stressed the connectivity of their deities as part of one supreme divine being. Understanding the nuances of religion is a worthy goal, but there are benefits in beginning with a discussion on values.

When it came to values, one Christian participant said that we need to respect each other’s sanctity and, regardless of religion, tell others that we believe: “In the end God will say you are welcome into heaven.”<sup>48</sup> Such openness does not come easily or cheaply, and requires a huge amount of internal reconciliation and work “within the faith.” One Christian minister added that in the United States, “we are very fortunate that we have a broad crossover of different faiths and can ask them to interact with each other,” while acknowledging, “we realize there is an inherent difficulty because we are asking ministers and rabbis to potentially inflame their own communities by opening themselves up to a more accepting

way of life.”<sup>49</sup> This is a much bigger obstacle to overcome than policymakers understand. The way radicalization is ingrained in societies makes it difficult for responsible faith leaders to talk to their communities without opening themselves up to criticism and claims, by extremists, of apostasy. However, it is this kind of introspection and the dissemination of holistic views of faith that is needed to fight against the radical forces that exist within each faith.

The vast majority of those I spoke to did not view introspection as antithetical to their faith. A Southern reverend contended that, “the way Christians have often lived out their call to missionary has in fact contradicted that very basic definition of what it means to call oneself Christian.” Calling it a shameful paradox, he added, “acknowledging the history of extremism and violence to impose a Christian worldview or an institutionalization of Christianity...is where I have to begin in a conversation like this.”<sup>50</sup> On the part of some Muslims, another participant identified a perceived, “general feeling that the world has changed and that this change demands a reinterpretation of Islam.” He added, “that this is very offensive this idea of a renaissance or reformation of Islam.”<sup>51</sup> Qualifying this statement, another Muslim participant declared, “Extremism is selective and extremists don’t read the whole book.”<sup>52</sup> In other words, Muslims are also willing to acknowledge that it is Muslims, not Islam, who commit unholy acts. They suggest the need to embrace faith in its entirety as a way of avoiding radical interpretations of doctrine. In addition, one Muslim participant told us that Muslims must say to themselves and others, “what if you are wrong,” and noted, in an apparent affront to *takfiri*<sup>53</sup> ideology, that it is against Islam to call a believer a disbeliever.<sup>54</sup>

This is highly significant as the Amman Message and other Islamic initiatives in the Middle East have also begun to speak out against *takfir*. However, not all religious

<sup>47</sup> EWI and Hindu Collective Initiative Move Towards a Global Platform for Moderates, Somerset, NJ, EWI Event, November 22, 2008.

<sup>48</sup> Colloquium of the Faith and Diplomacy Task Force, Charleston, South Carolina, EWI Event, November 3, 2008.

<sup>49</sup> Colloquium of the Faith and Diplomacy Task Force, Charleston, South Carolina, EWI Event, November 3, 2008.

<sup>50</sup> Colloquium of the Faith and Diplomacy Task Force, Charleston, South Carolina, EWI Event, November 3, 2008.

<sup>51</sup> Building a Platform for Moderates III: Reconciling Religious Wisdom and Public Life in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Georgia Institute of Technology, Atlanta GA, EWI Event, March 2007.

<sup>52</sup> Building a Platform for Moderates III: Reconciling Religious Wisdom and Public Life in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Georgia Institute of Technology, Atlanta GA, EWI Event, March 2007.

<sup>53</sup> Roughly translated as apostasy, *takfir* was practiced by the first Caliph, Abu Bakr, and can be applied to Muslims who declare themselves unbelievers. It is now often used by fundamentalist sects to separate Muslims who disagree with them from their faith.

<sup>54</sup> Building a Platform for Moderates III: Reconciling Religious Wisdom and Public Life in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Georgia Institute of Technology, Atlanta GA, EWI Event, March 2007.

leaders took such a broad view. Another Muslim participant said that whenever he engages in a debate, he says he is right with a small possibility that he is wrong, and vice-versa for the other party. One group of participants in Charleston, South Carolina concluded, “Only members of a particular faith group can address issues of violent extremism in their own community effectively.”<sup>55</sup>

Religious communities operate naturally at the grassroots level, and there was no call among religious leadership for top religious leaders to take a stand on the issues discussed. Instead, it was suggested that they should play a more positive and inclusive role in building civil society. Grassroots activism, resilience, and vigilance among moderate religious communities have far-reaching implications for pluralist societies such as the United States. Terrorist groups also reach out to every level of society, so it is crucial that any discussion “begins in the community at the lowest possible level.”<sup>56</sup> Additionally, one Muslim participant noted, “inclusive societies must be created to host these faiths,” and cited America’s potential to become “the first truly pluralistic society in the world.”<sup>57</sup> A Muslim participant from another session agreed: “National identity and citizenship access are important issues to address. American Muslims and other faith groups need to capitalize on civil participation.”<sup>58</sup> Finally, one participant noted that we may never reach an extremist but we will reach the masses in the church, neighborhoods, or on the street.<sup>59</sup>

Some of our religious hosts offered up their community centers as safe spaces for these dialogues to take place. Such dialogue, it was noted by one Christian theologian, should again start from the bottom and work to the top, and programs should start within local communities and churches.<sup>60</sup> Overall, there was an understanding that community involvement can only take the process so far, and that other economic, political and social issues need to be addressed. The responses we got from religious communities in the United States reflected a deep desire to

work with one another, but they were all admittedly communities of moderates.

## Lessons From Young People

The current global recession has given today’s generation of young Americans and Europeans a taste of what much of the world has been talking about and experiencing every day — the harsh reality of uncertainty and instability. The good news is that EWI heard from hundreds of young people in America (and, via exchange students and those seeking a new life in America, other parts of the world) who were disillusioned but committed to core values like peace and justice. Last year, the EastWest Institute reached out to America’s youth online and in the classroom. What we learned was that, like previous generations, today’s young people understand political violence and militant extremism better than the policy community because they are likely to be more personally connected to the sources and effects of extremism and radicalism. The difference between today and yesterday is that it is often the ultra-conservative forces in the world that, like the secular Marxists of the past, are claiming that their ideology justifies violent acts. Today, young people in the liberal mainstream are trying to turn the tide against radicalism. Pioneers like Eboo Patel, Ed Husain, Maaajid Nawaz, Stephanie Rudat, Jared Cohen, Mona Eltanhaw, Simon Shyrzdyan, Oscar Gueverra, and many more are a new breed of social change agents and have been monitoring and catalyzing these developments.

We began our journey at Eboo Patel’s organization, the Interfaith Youth Corps, in Chicago in January 2008. There, a group of students from different faiths convened to discuss the challenges of violent extremism, and the options available to young people. Beginning in the Fall of 2008, we duplicated this process at the Lutheran Theological Seminary, Yale University, Seton Hall University, and Marymount Manhattan College, where we engaged directly with American and international students. We also held one session at which students were able to interact with panelists at Virginia Commonwealth University and another by convening members through a Facebook group. This process took place during the Obama campaign and the final year of Bush’s presidency. While American students were particularly concerned with the change in administration and the challenges of the prior eight years, international students also offered a global perspective.

<sup>55</sup> Colloquium of the Faith and Diplomacy Task Force, Charleston, South Carolina, EWI Event, November 3, 2008.

<sup>56</sup> Colloquium of the Faith and Diplomacy Task Force, Charleston, South Carolina, EWI Event, November 3, 2008.

<sup>57</sup> Building a Platform for Moderates III: Reconciling Religious Wisdom and Public Life in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Georgia Institute of Technology, Atlanta GA, EWI Event, March 2007.

<sup>58</sup> Building a Platform for Moderates II: Reconciling Religious Wisdom and Public Life in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Chicago, IL, EWI Event, February 11, 2008.

<sup>59</sup> Colloquium of the Faith and Diplomacy Task Force, Charleston, South Carolina, EWI Event, November 3, 2008.

<sup>60</sup> Global Youth Collaborative Workshop on Peace and Security, Lutheran Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, PA, EWI Event, November 18, 2008.

We learned that the four primary influences on the opinions and interests of young people are media, education, religion, and the political, economic and social strains facing their daily lives. These core issues are vast and diverse. Of fundamental importance is the fact that the means and reasons for demanding social change are different than in the past. For the first time, collective action has found a safe space in societies' mainstream, facilitated largely by the worldwide web.

Whether extremism is bred from the left or right of the political spectrum, or even without regard to the political spectrum, in the United States extremism is sprouting roots in those communities that feel the most threatened or insecure, regardless of platform or ethnicity. It is easy to realize that radicalization in any community begins with insecurity. Additionally, media and easy flow of communications has created a virtual global village. As people, most often young people, become increasingly connected in the West, ideology becomes easier to disseminate. EWI's publication *Countering Violent Extremism: Videopower and Cyberspace* outlined the similarities in media usage between extremist groups and political campaigns. Cyberspace provides an ideal environment for both discussing real world issues and promoting extremist agendas or ideologies. While real world issues like poverty and political freedom were at the core of recruitment of young people to various groups and causes, ideology also plays a role. At the Alliance of Youth Movement's summit, the case was made that media is only as good as the message behind it and collective action depends on powerful messages. In this case, these messages are ideological.

Students generally had a good ability to identify with and explain violent extremist behavior. As one student from Philadelphia stated, "Violent extremism is a form of extreme insecurity."<sup>61</sup> In other words, it thrives on the absence of social, economic, and political opportunities for growth and advancement. One Muslim from Chicago aptly stated, "The first step towards violent extremism and radicalization is alienation."<sup>62</sup> Many young people agreed that the desire to bolster one's own security by threatening others' was a core driver toward violent extremism. Students also tend to internalize, rather than intellectualize, the problems they observe in the world — they identify with radical youth advocates. These students are more likely to

understand some rationale behind violent extremism, and therefore more susceptible to recruitment by extremists.

Ideology is not created in a vacuum. Being able to see the world for what it really is, and not being able to do anything about it, creates a perceived sense of hopelessness and also a diminished sense of self that fosters radicalization. Violent extremism tends to be viewed by today's youth as the desperate last resort of youth advocates and it is this mentality that is manipulated by extremists. In addition, when ideology is violent it creates a cyclical effect.

How so? Terrorist organizations have been catering to young people's desire to fit in and capitalizing on the kind of psychological trauma produced by poverty and the violence of state actors. They provide money and other incentives for the families of suicide bombers. The abduction of children in Sri Lanka, Colombia, and the many conflict zones in Africa has given rise to child soldiers who live in camps where reeducation and a sense of belonging, on which their survival depends, is grafted onto them by their "commanders." They are forced into a situation where they must comply with the ideology of their captors in order to survive. Gangs in the United States share similar patterns of forced indoctrination and peer pressure. One young Muslim student from New York stated, "Violent extremism is when there is a misinterpretation of values and beliefs — physical violence can be a part of the rhetoric that befalls all religions and cultures."<sup>63</sup> A bold statement, reinforced by a young man from Texas who said that "it is the beliefs of a society that justifies us versus them...whether religion or patriotism; having a system of beliefs justifies this [mentality] because it is your set of beliefs."<sup>64</sup> Whatever gangs, extremists, or terrorists are teaching our young people, the fact remains that they would not be able to get away with it unless they capitalized on the ills of society.

For extremism that arises from traditional groups, family is a very influential factor, and mitigating extremist tendencies in youth from traditional backgrounds will require engaging older segments of the community as well. Devotion to family penetrates every faith or traditional society in the world. Extremists are able in many cases to capitalize on the natural human desire for family and invite themselves to the dinner table, literally. The desire to give children a religious education can be interpreted as showing that parents have acceded to indoctrination to some degree, and that indoctrination is not entirely

<sup>61</sup> Global Youth Collaborative Workshop on Peace and Security, Lutheran Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, PA, EWI Event, November 18, 2008.

<sup>62</sup> Building a Platform for Moderates II: Reconciling Religious Wisdom and Public Life in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Chicago, IL, EWI Event, February 11, 2008.

<sup>63</sup> The Countering Violent Extremism Initiative: Global Youth Collaborative on Peace and Security Strategy Meetings, EWI Event, August 8, 2008.

<sup>64</sup> Global Youth Collaborative on Peace and Security, Seton Hall University, South Orange, NJ, EWI Event, November 19, 2008.

up to the parents but they are in a position to approve or disapprove of it. One student argued for the importance of “engaging some of the older population in what the youth are doing and having them be okay with it so they know that what they [young people] are doing isn’t shunned by the community.”<sup>65</sup> Another student noted that, “programs are great but it’s up to our parents to instill beliefs and values.”<sup>66</sup> The values and traditions of society play a major role in shaping the belief system of young people.

That governments seem out of touch with young people from traditional backgrounds makes matters worse. One student even called for the “dis-involvement of youth in politics because the government doesn’t care anymore,”<sup>67</sup> and a young Egyptian living in New York noted that in Egypt, the Minister of Education could not respond when he asked him why underground extremism exists.<sup>68</sup> Extremists will cater to the deepest desires of young people: belonging, self-worth, family honor, security, and will tailor designer ideologies, whatever it takes. At the core of extremist strategy is the ability to coerce young people into believing that evil for the greater good is justified. The goal of winning the hearts and minds of young people is half right; it’s not a question of winning their minds at all, it is a matter of winning their hearts. It is not the intellect of young people but their morality that becomes warped, and oftentimes the rational decision is an immoral one. This is exactly the kind of scenario that extremists want to create. One student told us that extremists say, “when people die, people will listen and take heed.”<sup>69</sup> In areas where economic and political freedoms are a rare occurrence, the combination of being heard and knowing your family will be protected is a huge incentive to commit violence.

So how do we deal with this issue? Students argued, almost unanimously, that dealing with hard issues like poverty and education was far more important than trying to send messages. One student claimed, “the [U.S.] Government had essentially tried to price what would it cost to solve the water problem in Africa, around \$150 billion, but could not decide on where the money was going to come from,” but then said, “last year (2007) Americans

spent \$400 billion on Christmas.” He suggested that civil society should be “contributing to projects overseas that will save lives.”<sup>70</sup> Another student from Mexico added the importance of avoiding topical solutions, and said, for instance, “sometimes they can be a fairy tale [when] NGO’s go to an underdeveloped place and have a soccer match. Two months later it’s gone, just a memory, and in many cases, [the people] go right back to extreme poverty.”<sup>71</sup> In other words, the student was pointing to the perception that there is no visibly sustained engagement by civil society, never mind governments in foreign countries. Another student agreed and added, “Societies that have access to education are less likely to commit acts of violence and are usually better off.”<sup>72</sup> Still, another student and former development worker in Africa noted the negativity of a top down approach in countering violent extremism. She said, “You have to come from the bottom up and involve people so they have a sense of ownership,” and “give them hope to create an environment of peace.”<sup>73</sup>

There seemed to be an understanding that extremists are better at reaching out to young people than governments and civil societies are. As many experts have observed, one of the main ways they do so is through the education system providing alternative education for already traditional communities. There was little value seen in continuing the habit of bringing moderates, intellectuals and elites (as evidenced by the massive conference circuit of think-tanks and NGOs) to the table as they hold little sway with their host societies in many cases. One participant stated, “We need extremists speaking to extremists.”<sup>74</sup> This is a particularly difficult idea for policymakers to understand. But it’s worth recalling the success of the Dayton and Good Friday Accords, where extremists sat at the table under the watchful eye of multilateral arbitrators.

As for the United States, students called for more government sponsorship of youth interests, including far better language training programs. One student called for required courses for all students of law and international relations “to focus on all the UN languages.”<sup>75</sup> There was

<sup>65</sup> Global Youth Collaborative on Peace and Security, Seton Hall University, South Orange, NJ, EWI Event, November 19, 2008.

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<sup>67</sup> Global Youth Collaborative on Peace and Security, Seton Hall University, South Orange, NJ, EWI Event, November 19, 2008.

<sup>68</sup> The Countering Violent Extremism Initiative: Global Youth Collaborative on Peace and Security Strategy Meeting, EWI Event, August 8, 2008.

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<sup>70</sup> Global Youth Collaborative Workshop on Peace and Security, Lutheran Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, PA, EWI Event, November 18, 2008.

<sup>71</sup> Global Youth Collaborative on Peace and Security Seton Hall University, South Orange, NJ, EWI Event, November 19, 2008.

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<sup>75</sup> Global Youth Collaborative on Peace and Security, Seton Hall University, South Orange, NJ, EWI Event, November 19, 2008.



a call from students, from the United States and abroad, for government funded youth programs, leadership camps, and music nights; positive outcomes were expected if, as one student claimed, the government would “just sponsor the youth.”<sup>76</sup> Positive engagement by the government was seen as lacking and desperately needed in the United States, never mind abroad.

Education was seen as a form of communication, and the ability and desire to communicate was seen as extremely important. One student called for Americans to begin this at home, and, “expand education to include non-violent models to address differences and conflicts.”<sup>77</sup> Another student mentioned that, “education means getting rid of isolation.”<sup>78</sup>

Students discussed religion primarily within the framework of education and communication. A young Muslim participant noted that, “people of faith need not simply praise themselves, but be willing to open up to hard questions and engage in real dialogue.”<sup>79</sup> Another Muslim participant from the same group added, “defensive ‘reactivism’ for young Muslims exists and we should not ever be in a situation where young Muslims or those of any other faith feel that violence is good.” He added, “People who engage in efforts to prevent this kind of perception in youth from within faith communities are not extremists but part of the solution.”<sup>80</sup> Another student concluded, “it is important for religious leaders to take a stand on violent extremism, but equally important is how we define communities and how we empower communities not just leadership.”<sup>81</sup>

Today’s youth demonstrated a profound understanding of the proverbial “bag of goods” being peddled to them by both extremists and, if we are to be totally transparent, governments. My research concludes that, in order to succeed, public diplomacy and outreach initiatives must be coupled with real incentives for non-violence, and real progress toward solving key issues. Today’s young people require serious reforms in the areas of education and social welfare, both in the U.S. and abroad, and, more important,

they understand this necessity. Without results in at least these areas, youth who are susceptible to extremist ideologies will have little incentive not to follow them.

<sup>76</sup> Global Youth Collaborative on Peace and Security, Seton Hall University, South Orange, NJ, EWI Event, November 19, 2008.

<sup>77</sup> Global Youth Collaborative Workshop on Peace and Security, Lutheran Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, PA, EWI Event, November 18, 2008.

<sup>78</sup> Global Youth Collaborative on Peace and Security, Seton Hall University, South Orange, NJ, EWI Event, November 19, 2008.

<sup>79</sup> Building a Platform for Moderates II: Reconciling Religious Wisdom and Public Life in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Chicago, IL, EWI Event, February 11, 2008.

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## Lessons Learned

Violent extremism is not caused by any single factor. Rather it a combination of societal ills and feelings of personal powerlessness that leads people to violence. Beyond that, the presentation of radicalism as mainstream, logical, and opportune presents a clear and present danger to global security. There is some consensus among experts, religious communities, and young people: real change is critical, and stagnation and seemingly intractable problems give rise to radicalism. The following conclusions were observed:

- Civil society activists agreed that religion was not the problem, at least as a stand-alone root cause. Truly religious people, those who put their faith in God and not politics, are not bound by self-interest and hence, like families, are responsible for developing constructive and peaceful environments for children, no matter what obstacles they face.
- Civil society had difficulty defining itself and the very notion of civil society, in the Western sense, was the topic of intense debate with a general consensus emerging that civil society does not exist in most of the developing world.
- Political extremists and terrorists are very good at manipulating the ills of society to reflect and promote their own agendas. Countering their manipulation is less productive than attempting to remove society's ills.
- Efforts to engage in public diplomacy have to be coupled with the more important task of addressing numerous real problems - for example, poverty, border management, and political, civil, and religious rights.
- There is no "war of ideas," only violent competing interests. Today's "village" is global and in a world of increasing interdependence, political violence represents a failure to manage global interests in a way that is comprehensive and conducive to everyone's security. Strong and weak countries alike need to limit their pursuit of self-interest at each other's expense in order to maximize the likelihood of peace and prosperity. This is particularly true for states torn by conflict and susceptible to transnational terrorism.
- If managing terrorism and political violence is a desirable goal then topical solutions to pervasive problems like poverty and political freedom will not work. Governments must also work with their

counterparts in the private sector to streamline their objectives and avoid conflict.

## Recommendations

We offer the following recommendations to governments, civil society, and young people. At the core of these recommendations are ideals and ethics vital to global and regional security.

### For All Stakeholders

- Develop a "Glossary of Terms" that defines extremism, terrorism, violent extremism, radicalization, and political violence; attempt to reach a worldwide consensus through information sharing.
- Work to generate a sustained movement emphasizing global rather than national interests. In today's interdependent world, the ideas and conditions of others cannot be ignored. We must all work together.
- Create and build on worldwide action platforms for human development goals and the environment. Seek to make the world better, for the sake of doing so. This will mitigate the root causes for radicalization and will lead to a natural enhancement of security in place of a superficial and unsustainable one.
- Commission more research in areas of protracted conflict and the non-Western world at large and procure the funds to make this happen. Due to a lack of funds, EWI cannot continue in this role. But other organizations should pick up where EWI left off and continue working directly with local communities to develop a solid understanding of the roots of radicalization. What we learned from U.S. civil society was markedly different from what we might have learned in the developing world. Another organization must take the lead to ensure that impoverished young people and religious communities are given a voice in the halls of power.

### For Governments

- Develop strategies to improve the economic, social, and political conditions of your countries in order to combat radicalization more effectively. Recognize that action is far more effective than rhetoric.
- Use multiparty platforms such as the United Nations,

the World Health Organization, and other international organizations to present clear and measurable positive changes in society. Assuming the mantle of legitimate governance requires assuming the mantle of responsibility first and all states have a stake in the success and failure of each other.

- Remain consistent regarding law enforcement, counterterrorism, and sustainable development projects. Place counter-radicalization policies in the context of political and economic investments in weak states. Do not be superficial in your approaches.
- Combat the desire for self-interested engagement in violence by providing productive opportunities for young people, such as education and job training and actual employment.
- Ensure that public diplomacy and hard power approaches to counter-radicalization are consistent with your values, ideals, and ethics. Do not allow extremists to acquire ammunition from your misdeeds.

## For Religious Communities in the West

- Tell your children that dialogue and engagement with people of other cultures is both desirable and natural. Work to combat xenophobia.
- Highlight opportunities for scholarship and create them where they do not exist. Work with secular counterparts to create curricula that are inclusive and not demeaning of any particular viewpoint. Allow students to come to their own conclusions.
- Do not allow extremists to mingle with your communities without the supervision of respected and pro-peace leadership. This does not mean separating extremists out from the faith but rather restricting their influence by becoming more proactive about your own.
- Work to provide traditional or religious education that offers considerable information about other faiths. Learning from others is important and avoiding monolithic education is important. Teach evolution, even if you disagree with it and teach creationism, even if you disagree with it.
- Work within your communities to develop a holistic view of your faith. A starting point would be to make sure every member of your parish can read, write, and interpret religious texts for themselves.
- When engaging in dialogue with other faiths, religious leaders should focus on very basic and core issues. Those include feeding our young, caring for

the sick, ending world hunger, protecting our ecology and, above all, the preservation of human life. Never promote a set of “universal” ideas outside the most basic human needs, but rather use fundamental values from each society to promote basic human needs. Not doing so will only lead to disagreement and conflict.

## For Young People in the West

- Become scholars, not fighters, and be thankful for the opportunity to do so. The pen is in fact mightier than the sword. It is challenging, but work to become agents of positive change and avoid getting frustrated. The world isn’t going to get any easier. It will be harder, the struggle will be intense — stay steadfast and vigilant.
- Be careful about who guides you — seek mentorship from people who desire peace, prosperity, and a world that does not hold one set of ideals above the next.
- Embrace new media and get active. Use all the tools at your disposal to ensure that moderation remains in the mainstream. As Al Gore said in his film *An Inconvenient Truth*, “if they [your elected officials] don’t listen, run for office.” Also, when people don’t listen, go public. Use tools like the Alliance of Youth Movements Hub and Facebook to get your message out and learn from each other in coffee shops and bookstores across the country. Demand your freedom to peaceful assembly and protest. Demand free speech and all elements of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. They are rights but they are not guaranteed. Without them, the only recourse remaining is violence.
- Demand results from your local, regional, and state governments in areas of interest to you. As this paper has shown, being young doesn’t make you naive — you are actually better suited to understand and shape the future because you will have to live in that world. Nothing will be given to you — you have to take it.

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\* Deceased





## EASTWEST INSTITUTE

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