

Former chairmen of 9/11 Commission endorse ICSR-authored study on *Preventing Violent Radicalization in America*

Earlier today, the Bipartisan Policy Center in Washington DC released a groundbreaking report about *Preventing Violent Radicalization in America*. Authored by ICSR Director Peter Neumann, the study sets out a strategy for domestic counter-radicalization in the United States, and includes recommendations about ways to improve the government's messaging, outreach and engagement, and training activities.

The report was endorsed by the former chairmen of the 9/11 Commission, Governor Tom Kean and Congressman Lee Hamilton, and a dozen senior counterterrorism officials and experts, including two former U.S. Attorney Generals and a former Homeland Security Secretary.

The study aims to support U.S. government efforts to formulate a domestic counter-radicalization strategy. In December 2010, Attorney General Eric Holder told journalists that the terrorist threat to the American homeland had changed from “foreigners coming here to... people in the United States, American citizens.” A number of independent studies have confirmed this assessment. One of the most recent – published by the New America Foundation and Syracuse University – showed that “nearly half” of the 175 cases of al Qaeda-related homegrown terrorism since September 11, 2001 occurred in 2009 and 2010.

Preventing Violent Radicalization in America provides an overview of what is known about “homegrown” radicalization and counter-radicalization; other countries’ experiences with counter-radicalization programs; the uniquely American context for domestic counter-radicalization; and a strategic survey of existing efforts, including a summary of the emerging approach.

The study’s overall assessment is that many of the principles and assumptions that underpin current U.S. government thinking are fundamentally sound, and that policymakers are right to pursue a common sense approach that addresses the vulnerability but does not hype the threat.

To be fully effective, the administration’s forthcoming strategy should incorporate the following principles and recommendations:

- While the government must be careful not to meddle in religion, it should be robust in challenging al Qaeda’s propaganda. Communication with Muslim communities must include an “ask.”
- Outreach efforts need to reflect the diversity of Muslim communities, and must not rely on religious interlocutors alone. Muslim Americans need to be addressed as American citizens.
- Not all groups are appropriate as government partners. Officials should be taught to distinguish between community groups that can be “empowered” and those that should be merely “engaged.”
- Federal outreach programs should focus on galvanizing local activities. The new role of U.S.

Attorneys in this regard is positive, and should be institutionalized.

- Capacity-building must focus on places and populations “at risk,” and try to leverage existing government and private sector programs.
- The Departments of Homeland Security and Justice must overhaul their procedures for awarding training grants. More training needs to be offered on engagement, outreach, and cultural competency.
- Counter-radicalization requires strong leadership and coordination. The White House should lead the policy across government, and designate one agency that serves as the principal hub for collecting, disseminating, and evaluating best practices on counter-radicalization.
- Counterterrorism and counter-radicalization must be kept separate. None of the agencies that are mainly concerned with counterterrorism should play a dominant role in counter-radicalization.

Above all, *Preventing Violent Radicalization in America* calls on the government to be persistent. As the 9/11 Commission pointed out, making America safe from terrorism is a “generational challenge” and “the American people are entitled to expect their government to do its very best” in meeting it.

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