Commentary

Contentions

Islamism and the National Counterterrorism Strategy

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In World War II we fought the Nazis, and during the Cold War we fought the Communists. Today, however, we fight wars but are too constrained by political correctness to even define the enemy. When the Obama administration released its National Strategy for Counterterrorism (NSCT) last month, it acknowledged that there was an ideological component to terrorism, but it refused to define it. As the American Islamic Forum for Democracy's head M. Zuhdi Jasser noted, "In order to actually counter this ideology, our government must take the additional step of identifying it for what it is: a militant form of political Islam, or 'Islamism.' Although the NSCT uses the term ideology 20 times within a 17-page document, its failure to identify the exact nature of this ideology suggests a continued unwillingness to confront the root cause of terrorism."

Enter the American Islamic Leadership Coalition, which issued a statement today that identified clear-headed improvements necessary if the United States hopes to counter terrorism effectively:

If we ever truly hope to defeat Islamist terrorism we have to recognize that the battle is first and foremost ideological. But we must also recognize the deep diversity of the Muslim community, and we must identify our counter-terrorism partners by the ideological positions of their organizations.

For too long, both under President Obama and the Bush and Clinton administrations preceding him, the squeaky wheel got the grease. Groups like the Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR) and the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) spoke the loudest, screamed Islamophobia, and became the center for U.S. government engagement. But rather than address the problems of certain Islamic exegesis legitimizing terrorism, they obfuscated and sought to blunt any incisive discussions which might associate Muslim Brotherhood interpretations of Islam with the enabling of terrorism. It is time to recognize that the American Muslim community is diverse. Some groups are forces for good, and others are not. We should work with those groups which embrace American values of tolerance and liberty first and foremost.

The American Islamic Leadership Coalition continued with specific recommendations for a revised National Strategy for Counterterrorism:

- Clearly and publicly define the ideology of al-Qaeda and the terror organizations that we seek to defeat;
- Distinguish between the religion of Islam and Islamist ideology ("a distorted interpretation of Islam"), whose adherents seek to conflate their own theocratic, statist agenda with Islam itself;
- Acknowledge the diversity of American Muslims, and recognize that genuinely pluralistic, tolerant and spiritual Muslim leaders possess the theological legitimacy, authority and credibility required to counter Islamist ideology and movements *from within Islam*, and should be encouraged and supported in their efforts to do so;
- Engage non-Islamist Muslim groups to help develop and implement effective counter-radicalization programs that affirm the principles of liberty and individual rights;
- Facilitate the production of compelling content ("narratives") and their distribution, through proactive use of the Internet, which is one of al-Qaeda's primary means of ideological indoctrination and recruitment;
- Support the development of robust, on-the-ground efforts to expose the brutal reality of Islamist oppression, violence and terror, and contrast it with American values.

Let's hope someone in the White House is listening so the United States can avoid, in the parlance of the Obama administration, any further "man-made disasters."

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