

Explaining the Lack of an American Domestic Counter-radicalization Strategy

Lorenzo Vidino

Over the last ten years, many countries throughout the world have sharpened their approaches to countering extremism and terrorism. Basing their judgment on direct experience and academic studies, many governments have come to reject the more simplistic assumptions about radicalization. Few believe that terrorists are innately deviant, born destined to become terrorists or that once a terrorist, always a terrorist. On the contrary, it is widely believed that, in at least some cases, the radicalization process that leads people to carry out acts of politically motivated violence can be prevented or even reversed.

Working from these revised assumptions, several countries have created counter-radicalization programs that differ markedly in their extents and aims. Counter-radicalization commonly includes three types of programs, each with a distinctive objective: deradicalization, disengagement, and radicalization prevention.¹ Deradicalization measures seek to lead an already radicalized individual to abandon his or her militant views. Disengagement entails a less dramatic shift whereby an individual abandons involvement in a terrorist group or activities while perhaps retaining a radical worldview. Radicalization prevention measures seek to prevent the radicalization process from taking hold in the first place and generally target a segment of society rather than a specific individual.

Certain Muslim-majority countries, having been the first targets of al Qaeda or al Qaeda–inspired attacks, have been among the first to engineer counter-radicalization programs, focusing mostly on deradicalization and disengagement. The programs implemented in Saudi Arabia and Indonesia, for example, have attracted the attention of experts and policymakers for their innovative approaches. Various European countries have also invested significant financial and political resources to develop their own counter-radicalization strategies.²

Somewhat counter-intuitively, one country that has not developed a comprehensive counter-radicalization strategy is the United States. Since the attacks of September 11, 2001, the United States has unquestionably taken the lead in countering terrorism worldwide and has employed a variety of tools—from military to diplomatic—to pursue this goal with remarkable energy. Yet Washington has been surprisingly shy about devising a strategy to prevent extremism. Outside of its borders, however, the United States has occasionally attempted to devise counter-radicalization programs. Most famously, in 2006 General Douglas Stone instituted a program to de-radicalize political inmates inside American-run prisons in Iraq.³ And the United States has long been providing substantial financial support to counter-radicalization programs

¹ Tore Bjørgo and John Horgan, eds., *Leaving Terrorism Behind: Individual and Collective Disengagement* (London: Routledge, 2009).

² Lorenzo Vidino and James Brandon, *Countering Radicalization in Europe*, International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation, King's College London, 2012.

³ Douglas M. Stone, "Thinking Strategically about Terrorist Rehabilitation: Lessons from Iraq," in Lawrence Rubin, Rohan Gunaratna and Jolene Anne R. Jerard, eds., *Terrorist Rehabilitation and Counter-Radicalisation: New Approaches to Counter-terrorism* (Routledge, 2011).

implemented in various Asian and African countries. Domestically, however, the United States has been extremely reticent to engage in counter-radicalization activities.

US authorities, in fact, have yet to conceive any comprehensive policy that would preemptively tackle the issue of radicalization and prevent young American Muslims from embracing extremist ideas. Similarly, the government is not engaged in any deradicalization or disengagement activities. Unlike several European countries, which have invested substantial human, financial, and political capital in extensive, long-term, centrally-crafted counter-radicalization strategies with multi-agency implementation, the United States has little more than scattered initiatives that fail to amass into a well-designed plan. As of August 2014 there was no American equivalent to Prevent, one of the strands of CONTEST, the British government's counter-terrorism strategy. Rather, in the critical words of American academic Frank Cilluffo, there have been only "tactics masquerading as strategy."⁴ This paper seeks to analyze the concurrent reasons behind this American reluctance to add the "soft" elements of counter-radicalization to its domestic counterterrorism strategy.

Timid approaches

Technically, the United States does possess a domestic counter-radicalization strategy. In August 2011, the White House issued a paper entitled "Empowering local partners to prevent violent extremism in the United States, which outlined the country's plan to counter radicalization."⁵ The paper was followed in December 2011 by the release of another document entitled "Strategic implementation plan for empowering local partners to prevent violent extremism in the United States," which expanded on the previous document's provisions.⁶

The documents, however, outline initiatives that are not nearly as aggressive as those long implemented in Europe. Rather, most are limited to building an extensive knowledge base for understanding the radicalization process and engaging the American Muslim community. These two aspects are unquestionably important, and indeed all European counter-radicalization strategies similarly adopt them as cornerstones. But the American strategy stops short of outlining the many and more proactive and ambitious measures that characterize the European approach to counter-radicalization beyond research and engagement.

The American focus exclusively on research and engagement is particularly evident in the work of the Department of Homeland Security, which in 2007 was designated by Congress as the lead department to counter radicalization.⁷ In February 2010, DHS Secretary Janet Napolitano tasked the Homeland Security Advisory Council's (HSAC) Countering Violent Extremism Working Group, comprised of chiefs of police, community leaders and security experts, with drafting recommendations on how DHS could better support "efforts to combat violent extremism

⁴ This point has often been made by George Washington University's Homeland Security Policy Institute director Frank Cilluffo in conversations with the author.

⁵ Available at http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/empowering_local_partners.pdf (accessed July 31, 2014).

⁶ Available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/sip-final.pdf> (accessed July 31, 2014).

⁷ Violent Radicalisation and Home-grown Terrorism Prevention Act of 2007 (H.Res. 1955).

domestically.”⁸ In August 2010, Napolitano announced a series of initiatives based on the HSAC’s Working Group recommendations.⁹

Many of these efforts focus on establishing a sound understanding of radicalization and disseminating such knowledge within the federal government and to law enforcement agencies at the state and local levels. Well before HSAC’s recommendations, DHS had been very active in conducting and funding extensive and methodologically varied studies of the American Muslim community and radicalization processes within it.¹⁰ Similarly, it has devoted extensive resources to studying various experiences of community policing from the United States and around the world, estimating that it holds vital lessons that can be used to counter radicalization.¹¹ The department has stressed the importance of sharing its gained expertise with as many partners as possible, conducting extensive training and information dissemination efforts focusing on partners at the local level.

The second tier of DHS’ strategy focuses on engaging the American Muslim community, which the 2010 National Security Strategy names America’s “best defense” against homegrown radicalization.¹² The DHS Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties (OCRCL) engages American Muslim, Arab, Sikh, Somali and South Asian community leaders on a regular basis to “build crucial channels of communication, by both educating DHS authorities about the concerns of communities affected by DHS activities and by giving those communities reliable information about US policies and procedures.”¹³ DHS is clear in stating that “[t]hese communities that may be targeted by violent extremist recruitment efforts are viewed not as the problem, but as solutions if they are appropriately engaged, supported, and included.”¹⁴

A crucial part of DHS’ stated approach is to frame engagement with these communities not solely through the lenses of terrorism and radicalization.¹⁵ Rather, engagement is viewed as a way for these communities to discuss issues such as civil rights, discrimination, and hate crimes.

⁸ Countering Violent Extremism Working Group’s recommendations, Homeland Security Advisory Council, Spring 2010, available at: http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/hsac_cve_working_group_recommendations.pdf (accessed August 1, 2014).

⁹ *Next Steps: Supporting Community-Based Efforts to Reduce Violent Crime*, DHS Fact Sheet, (available at: http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/fact_sheet_reduce_violent_crime_080310.pdf , accessed July 31, 2014).

¹⁰ Interview with Allison Smith, Program Lead for DHS’ Radicalization Research and Human Factors Division, Washington, November 2010.

¹¹ Rosemary Lark, Richard Rowe, and John Markey, *Community Policing Within Muslim Communities: An Overview and Annotated Bibliography of Open-Source Literature*, Homeland Security Institute, December 27, 2006, p. iii

¹² The United States National Security Strategy, May 2010, 19.

¹³ Testimony of Margo Schlanger, officer for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties, Department of Homeland Security, before the U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Homeland Security, Subcommittee on Intelligence, Information Sharing, and Terrorism Risk Assessment during the March 17, 2010, hearing *Working with Communities to Disrupt Terror Plots*.

¹⁴ Community Outreach and Engagement in the US, presentation by George Selim, DHS Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties, Brussels, October 15, 2010. Abstract available at <https://besafe.ibz.be/eu/ravipo/Pages/program-Workshops.aspx> (accessed August 4, 2014).

¹⁵ Testimony of Margo Schlanger, officer for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties, Department of Homeland Security, before the U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Homeland Security, Subcommittee on Intelligence, Information Sharing, and Terrorism Risk Assessment during the March 17, 2010, hearing *Working with Communities to Disrupt Terror Plots*.

The reasoning behind this approach is that “by helping communities more fully engage with their government, DHS is also preempting alienation and creating buy-in to the broader shared responsibility of homeland security.”¹⁶ Moreover, DHS states that “local partnership efforts to address community issues and grievances...can be an empowering tool that generate[s] a greater role for communities to extend themselves to law enforcement and have great input in addressing violence and violent extremists.”¹⁷

OCRCL is behind several initiatives shaped by this view, from the National Security Internship Program, which provides summer internships at the DHS and the FBI for Arabic-speaking college students, to the Incident Community Coordination Team, a conference call mechanism to connect federal officials with key community leaders in case of an emergency so that both parties can easily communicate and express their points of view and concerns.¹⁸ It regularly organizes outreach efforts to various communities, focusing on demographic and ethnic groups deemed to be particularly at risk.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation has been similarly involved in engagement. Most of its field offices have established permanent Community Engagement Councils or Multi-Cultural Advisory Councils comprising of community leaders and featuring programs such as the Community Relations Executive Seminar Training (CREST) and the Adopt a School, and Junior Special Agent programs. The FBI’s Community Relations Unit has established a Specialized Community Outreach Team (SCOT) possessing the linguistic and cultural skills to reach out to specific communities. Pioneered in Minneapolis, SCOT has been recently deployed to various cities where al Shabaab militants were recruiting among the local Somali population.¹⁹

Extensive outreach effort takes place at the local level, where authorities are arguably better situated to monitor radicalization patterns and identify community leaders than is the federal government.²⁰ States with large Muslim populations like Michigan, Ohio, Illinois, California, Texas, New York, and New Jersey have established various mechanisms to engage their Muslim communities. And while neither can be said to have an actual counter-radicalization program, police forces in New York and Los Angeles have established relatively sophisticated initiatives to engage the large Muslim communities within their jurisdictions.²¹

¹⁶ Testimony of Department of Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano before the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, during the September 30, 2009 hearing *Eight Years after 9/11: Confronting the Terrorist Threat to the Homeland*.

¹⁷ Countering Violent Extremism Working Group’s recommendations, Homeland Security Advisory Council, Spring 2010, available at: http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/hsac_cve_working_group_recommendations.pdf (accessed August 4, 2014).

¹⁸ Testimony of Margo Schlanger, officer for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties, Department of Homeland Security, before the U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Homeland Security, Subcommittee on Intelligence, Information Sharing, and Terrorism Risk Assessment during the March 17, 2010, hearing *Working with Communities to Disrupt Terror Plots*.

¹⁹ Testimony of Robert S. Mueller III, Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, before the U.S. Senate, Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs, September 22, 2010.

²⁰ Interview with Arif Alikhan, Assistant Secretary for Policy Development at the United States Department of Homeland, Washington, February 2011.

²¹ Interview with Mitchell D. Silber, New York City Police Department’s director of intelligence analysis, New York, December 2010, Testimony of Michael P. Downing, Commanding Officer, Counter-Terrorism/Criminal

Explaining the reasons

Critics of the American approach have argued that, even though both research and engagement are crucially important tools, a substantive counter-radicalization strategy should also include more extensive initiatives and programs similar to those implemented by European authorities. Yet American authorities have been reluctant to devise this type of ambitious counterterrorism plan for a variety of reasons. This paper identifies eight of those reasons, and discusses them below:

1) Delay in the emergence of a domestic jihadist threat

American-based jihadi wannabes possessing quintessential home-grown characteristics were detected even before September 11, 2001, and in relatively larger numbers after that.²² Yet the widely held assumption among American policymakers and counter-terrorism professionals was that radicalization for the most part did not affect American Muslims, and when it did, it was only in sporadic cases. Tellingly, for many years following 9/11, the term “homegrown terrorism” was reserved, in American political parlance, solely for anti-government militias, white supremacists and eco-terrorist groups such as the Earth Liberation Front. Jihadists, even if American-born and possessing quintessential homegrown characteristics, were excluded from this category.

These dynamics changed when an unprecedented wave of arrests of American Muslims involved in terrorist activities began in early 2009. Between May 2009 and November 2010, American authorities witnessed the hatching of 22 terrorist plots by American citizens or permanent residents of the United States—two of which, the Fort Hood shooting and the shooting at a military recruiting center in Little Rock, Arkansas, were actually carried out and led to casualties.²³ More than 126 individuals, 50 of whom were American citizens, were indicted throughout the country for terrorist activities linked to Islamist extremism between 2008 and 2010.²⁴

Yet this American homegrown “mini-wave” appeared some five to eight years after a similar phenomenon had become visible in Europe. It is arguable that some US policymakers have not yet fully internalized the statistics and still perceive homegrown jihadism as a non-phenomenon in the United States. These dynamics constitute one factor explaining the American delay and reluctance to get into the counter-radicalization business.

Intelligence Bureau, Los Angeles Police Department, before the U.S. Senate, Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, October 30, 2007.

²² Lorenzo Vidino, “Homegrown Jihadist Terrorism in the United States: A New and Occasional Phenomenon?” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Vol. 32 Iss. 1 (January 2009); and William Rosenau and Sara Daly, “American Journeys to Jihad: U.S. Extremists and Foreign Conflicts During the 1980s and 1990s,” *CTC Sentinel*, Vol. 3 Iss. 8 (August 2010).

²³ *American Jihadist Terrorism: Combating a Complex Threat*, report by Jerome P. Bjelopera and Mark A. Randol for the Congressional Research Service, September 20, 2010, 1; for another calculation of the spike in cases in the United States, see Brian Michael Jenkins, *Would-Be Warriors: Incidents of Jihadist Terrorist Radicalization in the United States since September 11, 2001* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2010).

²⁴ Jack Cloherty and Pierre Thomas, “Attorney General’s Blunt Warning on Terror Attacks,” *ABC News*, December 21, 2010. Available at: <http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/attorney-general-eric-holders-blunt-warning-terror-attacks/story?id=12444727&tqkw=&tqshow=GMA&tqkw=&tqshow=GMA> (accessed January 31, 2011).

2) Belief that American Muslims' good integration serves as an antidote to radicalization

During the 2000s, before cases of homegrown jihadism appeared in the United States, it was widely argued in American counterterrorism circles that homegrown terrorism of jihadi inspiration was a uniquely European problem, a direct consequence of Europe's failed integration policies. Radicalization, argued this narrative, is the inevitable by-product of the unemployment, social segregation, poor education and widespread discrimination plaguing European Muslim communities. American Muslims, on the other hand, enjoy economic and educational achievements that put them in the top tier of American society.²⁵ Well-integrated and often living in affluent suburbs rather than poor ethnic enclaves, American Muslims have also largely been spared from the cultural tensions, such as feuds over the veil in public schools or controversies over the construction of mosques, that have marred the experiences of their European co-religionaries. This sense of exclusion from mainstream society is traditionally cited as one of the factors driving some European Muslims to radicalize, while the more inclusive nature of American society is credited with preventing American Muslims from undergoing the same process.

To some degree, these assumptions have been shattered. First, the many cases of American jihadists have burst the bubble of thinking that American Muslims are immune to radicalization. Second, many of the assumptions closely linking radicalization to a lack of integration have been severely questioned (both in the United States and Europe). Nonetheless, the belief that programs like Prevent, at least in their previous incarnations, were largely social engineering programs aimed at correcting the severe exclusion problems plaguing cross sections of European Muslim communities led American authorities to think they did not need to apply that model at home, given their well-integrated Muslim populations.

3) Faith in "hard" counterterrorism tactics

Although only rarely applying at home the military and extrajudicial tools used overseas, since 9/11 American authorities have adopted a remarkably aggressive posture towards individuals and clusters associated with terrorism of jihadi inspiration operating on American soil.²⁶ The 2001 Patriot Act granted the US government extensive surveillance powers and significantly decreased the separation between investigators and intelligence agencies. Moreover, authorities have often employed the so-called Al Capone law enforcement technique, arresting suspected terrorists for immigration, financial, or other non-terrorism-related offenses in order to neutralize those for whom they did not possess enough evidence to convict of terrorism.²⁷

²⁵ According to a Pew Research Center study, the average American Muslim household's income is equal to, if not higher, than the average American's. See Pew 2007: 24-25.

²⁶ Cases like those of Ali al Marri, a Qatari national arrested in Peoria in the wake of 9/11, and Jose Padilla, a US citizen linked to Khalid Sheik Mohammed, who were detained without charges for years in a military prison before being tried in the civilian court system have been exceptions. The vast majority of terrorism suspects apprehended within the United States since 9/11 have been granted due process rights.

²⁷ The term, commonly used by American law enforcement practitioners, owes its origin to the fact that infamous 1920s Chicago mobster Al Capone was never convicted for his well known criminal activities, of which authorities never possessed enough evidence to stand in court, but, rather, simply for tax evasion.

Most controversially, they have increasingly resorted to using *agents provocateurs*. US counterterrorism officials—operating under the assumption that certain individuals espousing jihadi ideologies are likely to eventually carry out acts of violence—have sometimes resorted to catalyzing an individual's passage from radicalization to action. Since 9/11, the FBI has used *agents provocateurs* to approach known radicals, many of whom have been unaffiliated wannabes, leading them to believe the agents belong to al-Qaeda or affiliated groups. Under the strict direction of the FBI, the *agents provocateurs* encourage their targets either to plan attacks or to provide material support to terrorist organizations.

These tactics, employed with similar enthusiasm by both the Bush and the Obama administrations, have been extensively criticized by many who argue they infringe on civil liberties and create tensions with Muslim communities.²⁸ Yet their effectiveness, at least in terms of incarcerating targets, is undisputable. A deep belief in the effectiveness of these measures has led many in the US counterterrorism community to argue that other, “softer” measures are not necessary.

4) Massive bureaucratic structure

The massive size of the United States and of its bureaucratic apparatus resulting from the overlap of federal, state, and local jurisdictions, creates an additional obstacle to the implementation of a comprehensive counter-radicalization strategy. Coordinating the activities of more than 17,000 law enforcement agencies working on terrorism-related matters throughout the country is understandably a daunting task.²⁹

The problem was critically highlighted in an influential report penned by Bruce Hoffman and Peter Bergen in 2010: “It is fundamentally troubling, given this collection of new threats and new adversaries directly targeting America, that there remains no federal government agency or department specifically charged with identifying radicalization and interdicting the recruitment of U.S. citizens or residents for terrorism.” The report went on to quote a senior intelligence analyst lamenting that “[t]here’s no lead agency or person. There are First Amendment issues we’re cognizant of. It’s not a crime to radicalize, only when it turns to violence. There are groups of people looking at different aspects of counter-radicalization. [But it] has to be integrated across agencies, across levels of government, public-private cooperation—which, unfortunately, it is not.”³⁰

The criticism is shared by many, but it must be noted that some see this lack of centralized leadership on the subject as an asset rather than a liability. That is the opinion, for example, of Michael Leiter, the former director of the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC). “There is not, nor should there be, a single organization within the US government that is responsible for

²⁸ See Jerry Markon, “Mosque Infiltration Feeds Muslims' Distrust of FBI,” *Washington Post*, December 5, 2010.

²⁹ *American Jihadist Terrorism: Combating a Complex Threat*, report by Jerome P. Bjelopera and Mark A. Randol for the Congressional Research Service, September 20, 2010, 42; Government Accountability Office (GAO), “Managing for Results: Barriers to Interagency Coordination,” 14.

GAO-06-15 and GAO/GGD-00-106, (Washington, D.C.: March 29, 2000), 6-7, available at <http://www.gao.gov/archive/2000/gg00106.pdf> (accessed February 2, 2011).

³⁰ Bruce Hoffman and Peter Bergen, *Assessing the Terrorist Threat: A Report of the Bipartisan Policy Center's National Security Preparedness Group*, September 10, 2010, 29.

implementing that counter-radicalization program,” argued Leiter during a speech in 2010. “And the reason is quite simple. No organization within the U.S. government has all of the tools necessary to effectively counter radicalization. The federal government cannot utilize or cannot employ all the pieces that need to be employed. Again, we have to rely on state and local governments and non-governmental entities to engage in this effort at counter-radicalization. So I think there is a single place for strategy. There is a single place for coordination. There is not, nor should there be, a single organization responsible for implementation of each of those pieces.”³¹

5) Separation of church and state

Deep political, cultural, and constitutional issues have also played an important role in determining the American reluctance to experiment with domestic counter-radicalization, with the constitutionally-sanctioned principle of separation of church and state arguably being one of the main ones. The concept is so revered and politically sensitive that US authorities tend to be extremely reluctant to engage in any activity that could give the impression that they are blurring that line.

While many counter-radicalization activities have nothing to do with religion, it is inevitable that in programs dealing with jihadist extremism, issues related to Islam would appear on occasion. Some European programs like "The Radical Middle Way," which is funded by the British government and supports religiously-focused talks given by Islamic scholars for audiences of potentially at-risk Muslim youth, focus almost entirely on religion and would therefore be difficult to replicate as government-funded projects in the United States.³² American authorities tend to be wary of being seen as politically engaging in or financially supporting any kind of programs that deal with religion, even in an indirect way.

6) First Amendment issues

A similar constitutional and political damper on American authorities' enthusiasm for counter-radicalization initiatives is the country's sacrosanct tradition of respect for freedom of speech. America has traditionally provided a degree of protection for all kinds of extreme discourse that is unparalleled in virtually all of Europe. This tradition is not only enshrined in the constitution but also is deeply entrenched in the American political psyche and is supported by people of all political persuasions. Consequently, American authorities tend to be reluctant to engage in counter-radicalization activities that could be perceived as limiting free speech.

7) Little political/public pressure

In most cases, European counter-radicalization programs were established after a catalyzing event. In the United Kingdom, even though the first incarnation of Contest did include a preventive component, Prevent (the prong of the Contest program dedicated solely to radicalization prevention) gained importance only after the London bombing attacks of July

³¹ Speech by NCTC Director Michael Leiter at CSIS, December 1, 2010. Available at: http://csis.org/files/attachments/101202_leiter_transcript.pdf (accessed January 12, 2011).

2005. Similarly, the November 2004 assassination of Theo van Gogh provided the impetus for the introduction of such measures in the Netherlands. In other European countries, the trigger for implementing counter-radicalization programs has frequently been a failed attack or heightened reporting on the presence of homegrown jihadist militants.

None of these dynamics seem to have taken place in the United States, however. Over the last few years, several attacks with quintessential homegrown characteristics have been carried out (such as the June 2009 shooting in a Arkansas military recruiting office by a Tennessee-born convert linked to al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, the November 2009 Fort Hood shooting, and the April 2013 Boston Marathon bombing) or attempted in the United States. Hundreds of American militants have been arrested on American soil or reported fighting with various jihadist groups overseas. Yet none of these events has triggered a widespread perception among the American public and policymaking community that homegrown jihadism is a major problem requiring action beyond a traditional law enforcement approach.

8) Reluctance to tackle ideology

While all of these factors are unquestionably important, one could argue that none are as important in understanding the US government's shyness toward developing extensive counter-radicalization programs as its reluctance to enter the field of ideology. The Obama administration and, in its last years, the Bush administration have largely avoided dealing with the ideological underpinnings of radicalization, particularly on the domestic front. While there is no question that various elements within the US government fully acknowledge the role jihadi ideology plays in the process, there is no government-wide consensus on the matter. Since a comprehensive counter-radicalization program must entail tackling the ideological element of radicalization as a main component of the program (though not the only component), this indecision leads to the inability to draft the types of extensive programs that have been implemented in Europe.

Several voices within the US counterterrorism community have criticized this approach. "Missing are the policies and programs," states a report published by the Washington Institute, "to contest the extremist narrative of radicalizers, empower and network mainstream voices countering extremism, promote diversity of ideas and means of expression, and challenge extremist voices and ideas in the public domain."³³ The report continues, "Unless [the US] government recognizes and articulates clearly the threat posed by the ideology of radical Islamist extremism, its broader whole-of-government efforts will lack strategic focus and will fail to address the varied root causes of domestic and foreign radicalization." Despite these warnings, the prevailing attitude within the US government seems to be to steer away from the ideological debate, at least on the domestic front.

Conclusion

³³ J. Scott Carpenter, Matthew Levitt, Steven Simon, and Juan Zarate, *Fighting the Ideological Battle: The Missing Link in the U.S. Strategy to Counter Violent Extremism*, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2010, 1; see also Frank J. Cilluffo, J. Scott Carpenter and Matthew Levitt, *What's the Big Idea? Confronting the Ideology of Islamist Extremism*, Homeland Security Policy Institute and The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, February 4, 2011.

Recently there have been indications of a tenuous shift in the US approach towards domestic counter-radicalization. Various counter-radicalization initiatives led by independent organizations at the local level have increasingly gained the attention and support of authorities. In Montgomery County, Maryland, for example, authorities have partnered with local Muslim communities and faith groups to work on a comprehensive counter-radicalization plan.³⁴ Similar initiatives are being developed in places such as Minneapolis, Minnesota and Portland, Oregon.

It is likely that American authorities will deepen their involvement in domestic counter-radicalization, chiefly in the metropolitan areas where the issue of radicalization is considered particularly problematic. At the same time, the development of a comprehensive counter-radicalization strategy including some of the more aggressive, European-style programs seems an unlikely event in the near future.

³⁴ Hedieh Mirahmadi, "An Innovative Approach to Countering Violent Extremism," *Policywatch 2152*, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, October 9, 2013. Available at <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/an-innovative-approach-to-countering-violent-extremism1> (accessed August 3, 2014).