INTRODUCTION

Fifteen years after September 11, 2001, violent extremism has spread, gained favor among a new generation, and now casts an ever-larger shadow over the globe.[1] From all corners of Africa to Europe, from the Caucasus to South and East Asia, from North to South America, the threat of violent extremism continues to evolve in real and virtual spaces, enticing thousands of recruits and inciting the sympathies of many more.

In one day in February 2016 alone, the Center for Religion and Geopolitics recorded terrorist incidents in Syria, suicide attacks in Cameroon, roadside bombs in Somalia, the destruction of a girls' school by the Taliban in Pakistan, the ghastly decapitation of a Hindu priest in Bangladesh, the arrest of suspected terrorists in Indonesia, Islamic State (ISIS) beheadings of alleged spies in Egypt, operations against al Shabaab in Kenya, concerns about al Qaeda-linked violence in Mali and Burkina Faso, arrests in Russia connected with terrorism, and moves to overcome extremism and establish peace in the Philippines.

The repercussions of violent extremism are acute and wide-ranging. Humanitarian crises, persecution of human rights defenders, destruction of sacred historical and cultural sites, threats to religious diversity, eradication of educational and development gains, and fear and insecurity in communities are all exacerbated by the spread of extremist ideologies. Today's catastrophic global refugee and migrant crisis—resulting in an unprecedented 65 million people displaced—has largely been driven by state violence alongside the rise of ISIS in Syria and Iraq. Violent extremists are even altering the political landscape and erasing national borders, and in so doing, destroying evidence of people, history, and cultures that threaten their world view.[2]

The Nature of the Threat

A major political fault line for CVE has been what to call the threat we are facing. Some argue vociferously for using language like "radical Islamic extremism" to describe the phenomenon and its connection to Islam. Others argue equally passionately that a lexicon that uses Islamic terms is deeply problematic because it can cause confusion; alienate critical partners and allies; reduce complex religious concepts to narrow, typically negative associations with violence; and lend support to terrorists' claims to legitimacy.

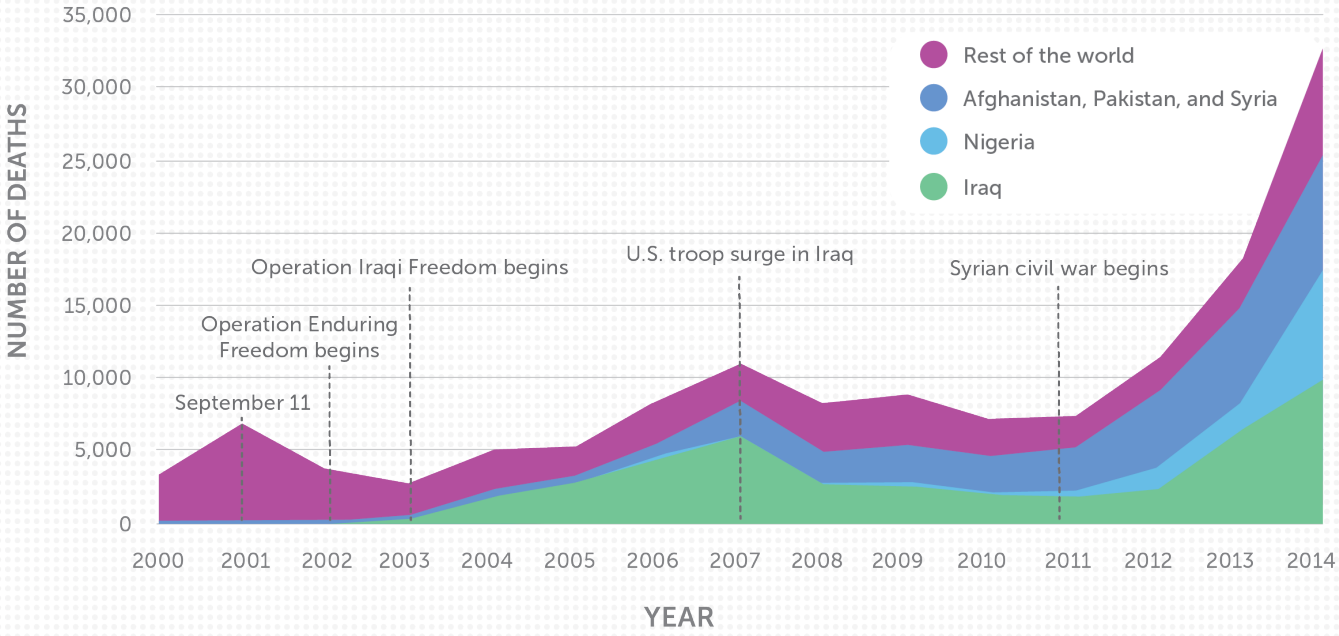
In determining what language to use throughout this report, the Commission was guided by three principles: 1) the need to be explicit about the nature of the enemy and ideologies we are confronting at home and abroad; 2) the need to appeal to partners who are instrumental in advancing our common goals; and 3) the need to ensure that we do not reinforce narratives put forth by our adversaries.

Therefore, throughout this report, we use the general term "violent extremism" to refer to the subset of violent extremist organizations that claim the religion of Islam as their motivating source and to justify their nefarious goals, and the term "extremist" to describe the ideologies and narratives deployed by these groups. Although there is

[1] Tony Blair, former prime minister of the United Kingdom (remarks at "CSIS Commission on Violent Extremism," CSIS, Washington, DC, February 23, 2016, https://www.csis.org/events/csis-commission-countering-violent-extremism.

[2] Farah Pandith and Juan Zarate, "Winning the War of Ideas," in *Global Forecast 2016*, ed. Craig Cohen and Melissa Dalton (Washington, DC: CSIS, 2015), https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy_files/files/publication/151116_Cohen_GlobalForecast2016_Web.pdf.

DEATHS FROM TERRORISM SINCE 2001



Source: National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START). (2016). Global Terrorism Database. Retrieved from https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd

"Violent extremists are altering the political landscape and erasing national borders, and in so doing, destroying evidence of people, history, and cultures that threaten their world view."

great diversity among such violent extremist groups, the general features of their ideologies include:

- A willingness to use force and violence to return society to "a pure form" of Islam and create their version of an ideal global community;
- Declaring Muslims who do not share this vision as "unbelievers," subject to torture or death;
- Appropriating Islamic texts, teachings, and traditions to justify their rule and support their narratives; and
- Selectively using theology to legitimize violence and compel "true believers" to target their governments, Western powers, and even civilians.

The Commission focused its analysis and recommendations on this form of violent extremism as it presents the most immediate transnational and national security threat to the United States, its allies, and communities across the globe. Groups like ISIS, al Qaeda, Boko Haram, the Taliban, and others are unique in their global ambition: they seek to reshape borders; define the identity and beliefs of Muslims around the world; undermine international values; and normalize abhorrent behavior like human slavery, rape, and wanton violence against civilians. In pursuit of these goals, violent extremists specifically target Muslims to fill their ranks and incite conflict around the world.

The Commission noted that these terrorist organizations do not operate in a vacuum—they derive strength and momentum from other extremist groups, including on the right and the left. Thus, while focusing on violent extremists that claim to represent or draw inspiration from Islam, this report offers broader recommendations for addressing growing intolerance and hatred.

The Origins of Extremist Ideologies

Modern extremists' world view did not just appear out of the blue. It has been deliberately cultivated and spread for many decades. As many Arab and Muslim-majority states throughout the twentieth century transformed into secular military dictatorships, social movements of various stripes competed to define the relationship of Islam to the state. This precipitated the emergence of Islamic religious ideologies designed to provide direction and morale to the faithful in the form of highly charged, powerful oversimplifications.

Early on, the religious establishment played a central role in trying to put forth a blueprint for sociopolitical change. Clerics such as Muhammad Abduh, Rashid

TONY BLAIR, COCHAIR

Rida, Khayr al-Din al-Tunisi, and Jamal al-Din al-Afghani sought to redefine the mission of Islam in the modern world. These thinkers thought primarily in terms of religious and intellectual reform, not organized resistance. Their call to arms was not jihad but *ijtihād*, the unmediated interpretation of Islamic scripture for the purpose of freeing modern Muslims from medieval presuppositions they saw as holding Muslims back. However, their failures, both real and perceived, saw them soon outflanked by the rise of Islamic movements, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, the Jamaati Islami, and the Liberation Party (*Hizb al-Tahrīr*). While not completely abandoning reform, these movements assigned greater priority to acquiring political power. They saw Muslim states' abuse of power as the source of the problem and sought to bring about change outside of the system, by force if necessary.

Commissioners hold different perspectives about the relationship between today's violent extremist organizations and these early Islamic movements. Some commissioners draw a direct link between the Muslim Brotherhood and its ilk, arguing that contemporary terrorist groups like ISIS, al Qaeda, Boko Haram, and others are the logical outgrowth of their political agenda and intolerant world view. For these commissioners, it is impossible to separate the ideology espoused by these groups and violence. The violence has its roots in extremists' core belief that everything should be subordinated to their ideology and that those who do not share it are misguided and should be forced to accept it. For example, the kidnapping of girls by Boko Haram has its roots in a far more widely shared view that women should be subordinate to men. The idea that cartoon makers should be killed has its roots in the belief that those who print such cartoons are committing an act worthy of punishment. A recent study points to these linkages. Of a hundred prominent terrorists profiled, over half associated with non-violent extremist groups before joining violent movements.[3] In this light, ignoring the intimate connection between the ideology and violence is a major strategic error.

Others contend that while violence invariably played a role in early Islamic movements' programs, it would be circumscribed by the fact that they had to appeal to society at large to gain acceptance. In this view, violent extremism descends from an entirely distinct artery of Muslim activism. It begins with the wholesale condemnation not merely of Muslim-majority governments but of Muslim society in general. The centrality of excommunication or *takfīr* to this ideology can be seen in the name of one of its earliest representatives: *al-Takfīr wa al-Hijrah* (Excommunicating and Dissociating from Modern Muslim Society). According to Professor Sherman Jackson, renowned scholar of Islamic thought and culture and commissioner, this is the first step in justifying the most violent and inhumane treatment of adversaries—as apostate traitors to the faith. It also sustains these groups' view that they are the only true representatives of Islam, which they sell to potential recruits who are often starving for absolution, belonging, or identity. On this logic, to oppose these groups is presented as opposing Islam itself. And not to oppose the West is to oppose these groups. In contrast to the religious establishment and earlier Islamic movements who viewed *sharī'ah*, at least in theory, as serving society, contemporary violent extremists tend to conceive of *sharī'ah* as punitive retaliation against society.

[3] Mubaraz Ahmed, Milo Comerford, and Emman El-Badawy, "Milestones to Militancy" (Tony Blair Faith Foundation, Centre on Religion and Geopolitics, April 2016), http://tonyblairfaithfoundation.org/sites/default/files/Milestones-to-Militancy.pdf.

According to these commissioners, violent extremists' pursuit of political power is palpably different from that of the earlier movements, for they have little to no sense of accountability to society at all. It is from this artery (both ideologically and in terms of actual personnel) that later groups such as al Qaeda and ISIS would descend.

Despite these differences, all of the commissioners agree that violent extremism as we experience it today took shape in the crucible of geopolitical and ideological contestation through the second half of the twentieth century. Saudi support of extremism began in the 1960s as an effort to counter the Arab nationalism championed by Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser. The strategy's apparent success in helping contain Nasserism encouraged segments within the Saudi elite, who, in propagating extremist ideas, believed they could control the beast.[4]

Yet, even the Saudis would not be entirely spared the lethal effects of violent extremism. In November 1979, militant groups, led by radical Saudi preacher Juhayman al-Otaybi, seized the Grand Mosque in Mecca and declared the arrival of the Madhi, or redeemer. A spectacular, drawn-out hostage crisis ensued. The "Siege of Mecca" was a harbinger of terrible things to come.[5] The militants' demands—the overthrow of the royal family, ending oil exports to the West, and the imposition of an extreme interpretation of the *sharī'ah*—foreshadowed Bin Laden's demands 15 years later. However, in the aftermath of the siege, instead of changing course, Saudi Arabia doubled down, perhaps feeling compelled to demonstrate its religious legitimacy.[6]

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Earlier that year, a youth-led revolution in Iran brought a clerical regime to power with its own transnational ideology, threatening to undermine Saudi Arabia's perceived hegemony over the faith.[7] Tehran's strategy of exporting revolution through its own roster of militant groups, notably Hezbollah, would escalate the dangerous proxy war between competing violent extremist groups.

The December 24, 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan changed the course of history. If Afghanistan proved to be the graveyard of empires, it was also a proving ground for a new generation of violent extremists. Eager to contain communism, the United States and Saudi Arabia poured arms, money, and tactical assistance to Afghan and foreign fighters that flocked to Afghanistan from all over the world. These militants ground down the Soviets, perhaps hastening the end of the Cold War, but their success also raised the profile of an international extremist movement hostile to Saudi Arabia and Western powers.

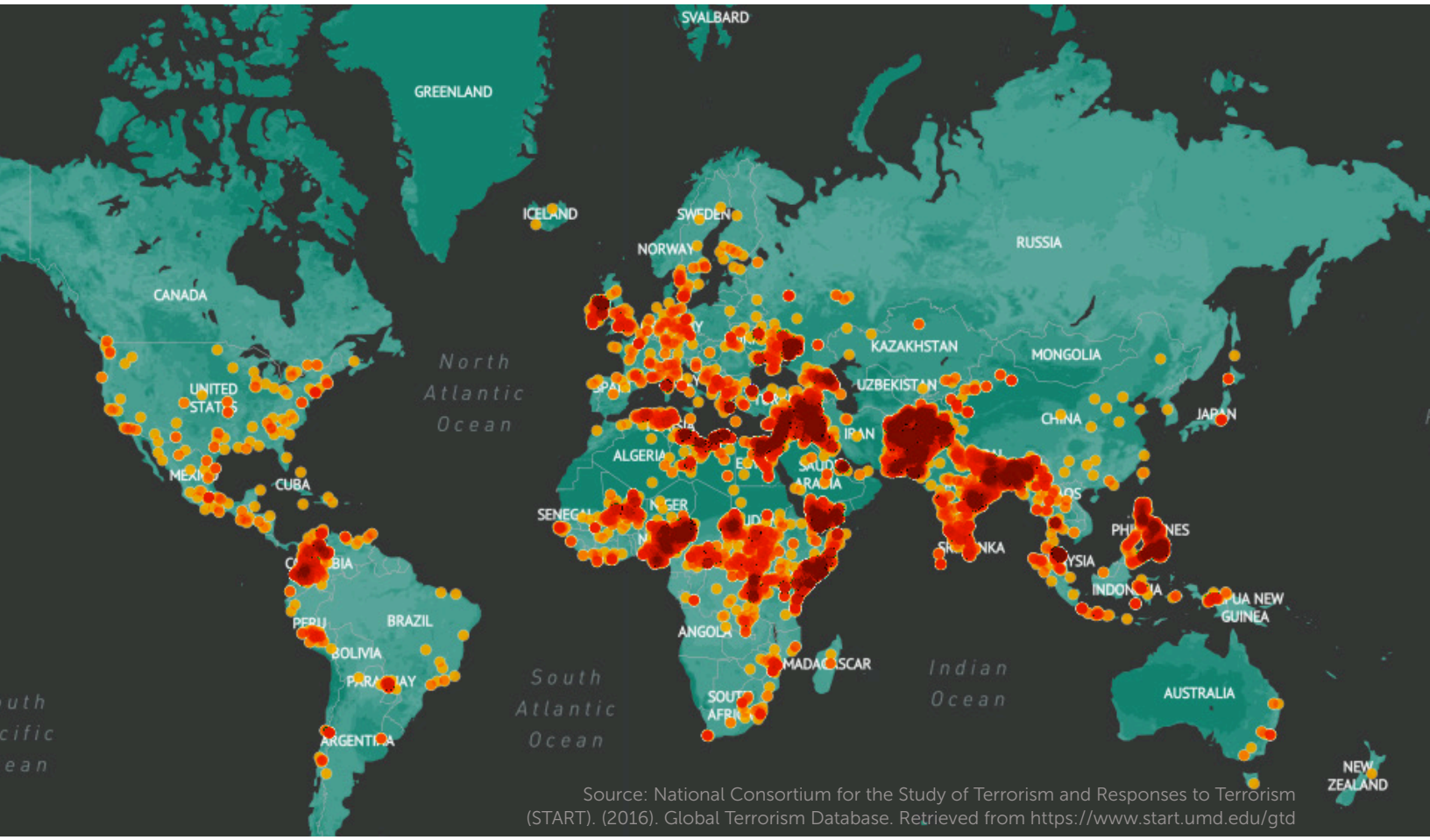
[4] Zalmay Khalilzad, "'We Misled You': How the Saudis Are Coming Clean on Funding Terrorism," *Politico*, September 14, 2016, http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2016/09/saudi-arabia-terrorism-funding-214241.

[5] Yaroslav Trofimov, *The Siege of Mecca: The Forgotten Uprising in Islam's Holiest Shrine and the Birth of Al Qaeda* (New York: Doubleday, 2007).

[6] Peter Mandaville, *Global Political Islam* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

[7] Gilles Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam*, trans. Anthony F. Roberts (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002).

GLOBAL TERROR ATTACKS SINCE 2012



Source: National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START). (2016). Global Terrorism Database. Retrieved from https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd

With the Soviets' withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989, a global terrorist network emerged. Under the leadership of Osama bin Laden, al Qaeda became the refuge for battle-hardened and highly motivated militants from Afghanistan. Al Qaeda would become emblematic of a new breed of terrorism: transnational, well-financed, savvy to the theatrical nature of terrorist tactics, and focused less on Arab autocrats than on the "far enemy." The 1992 bombing in Aden, the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center, the 1998 embassy bombings in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam, the attack on the USS Cole in 2000 all presaged the tragedy of September 11.[8]

September 11, 2001, and beyond

For much of the twentieth century, the spread of extremist ideologies went largely unchallenged by the West. The devastating terrorist attacks of September 11 brought the danger home to the United States, prompting a response that has relied heavily on military and intelligence actions as well as policing and defensive measures.

These measures, aimed at thwarting opportunities for terrorists to plan and execute complex attacks on the homeland, included: hardening and expanding physical barriers around sensitive locations and critical infrastructure; improving security procedures and equipment, identity checks, and luggage screening at airports; enhancing detection and screening processes for cargo coming into the United States via seaports, land border ports, and mail facilities; strengthening investigation and prosecution capabilities for terrorism-related cases; tightening controls on people entering the United States; and training personnel to effectively implement these measures.

More than 263 government entities were either created or reorganized in response to the September 11 attacks.[9] Chief among them were the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), which integrated all or part

[8] Lawrence Wright, *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006).

[9] Dana Priest and William M. Arkin, "A Hidden World, Growing Beyond Control," *Washington Post*, July 19, 2010, http://projects.washingtonpost.com/top-secret-america/articles/a-hidden-world-growing-beyond-control/print/.

of 22 different federal departments and agencies to create a more unified approach to safeguarding the United States against terrorism, and the Transportation Security Administration (TSA), which centralized and standardized airport security. Intelligence cooperation was bolstered by the *Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004*, which established the position of director of national intelligence and the National Counterterrorism Center to integrate terrorism-related intelligence.

Internationally, the United States invested vast sums on countering terrorism and building the capacity of partner security and intelligence services. According to estimates, Congress has appropriated $1.6 trillion to the Department of Defense (DOD) for war-related operational costs since September 11. When combined with an estimated $123.2 billion for relevant State Department and Foreign Operations, the DOD, Department of State, and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) have received over $1.7 trillion for activities and operations since the attacks.[10] This is comparable to more than 10 years of federal funding for education. Likewise, intelligence budgets have significantly expanded. In 2007, Congress appropriated $43.5 billion to the National Intelligence Program (NIP).[11] Ten years later, the budget requested for the NIP rose to $53.5 billion.[12]

The massive human and financial resources devoted to security since September 11 have made us safer in some respects. It is more difficult for terrorists to get into the United States and, if they do, harder for them to pull off a complex attack.[13] However, as the U.S. government—and its allies and partners—improved counterterrorism capabilities, terrorists quickly moved to exploit gaps in the response. As David Kilcullen explains, these counterterrorism, law enforcement, and intelligence efforts imposed "strong evolutionary pressure on terrorist organizations," since a technique that worked once was highly unlikely to work again, at least not in the same form.[14] Terrorist groups adapted by choosing softer targets, conducting less complicated attacks, and relying on decentralized cells and individual actors (so-called "lone wolves"), making it harder for law enforcement to detect and disrupt plots. These groups have also become much more proficient at using social media and modern digital technologies to target recruits, build their brand and market share, and expand their reach globally. The terrorist threat today is therefore more atomized, pervasive, and challenging to counter than it was at the turn of the century.

As a result, the methods the U.S. government has used in the past to prevent large-scale terrorist attacks will likely not be as effective in the future at preventing smaller decentralized attacks.

[10] Susan B. Epstein and Lynn M. Williams, "Overseas Contingency Operations Funding: Background and Status," Congressional Research Service, July 13, 2016, https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/R44519.pdf.

[11] Office of the Director of National Intelligence, "DNI Releases Budget Figure for FY 2017 Appropriations Requested for the National Intelligence Program," press release, February 9, 2016, https://www.dni.gov/index.php/newsroom/press-releases/215-press-releases-2016/1315-dni-releases-budget-figure-for-fy2017-appropriations-requested-for-the-national-intelligence-program.

[12] Office of the Director of National Intelligence, "DNI Releases Budget Figure for National Intelligence Program," press release, October 30, 2007, https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/Newsroom/Press%20Releases/2007%20Press%20Releases/20071030_release.pdf.

[13] Steven Brill, "Is America Any Safer?," *Atlantic*, September 2016, http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/09/are-we-any-safer/492761/.

[14] David Kilcullen, *Blood Year: Islamic State and the Failures of the War on Terror* (London: C. Hurst, 2015).

What is "CVE"?

The field of countering violent extremism emerged from a recognition that military and law enforcement operations are essential to taking terrorists off of the battlefield and disrupting plots, but are insufficient for extinguishing the underlying ideologies and grievances that motivate scores of recruits to join violent extremist groups. The White House reflected this understanding in the 2006 National Security Strategy. The Strategy defined its short-run goals as "using military force and other instruments of national power" to cut off terrorists' activities and sources of support, while underscoring that in the long run, success would mean "winning the battle of ideas, for it is ideas that can turn the disenchanted into murderers willing to kill innocent victims."[15]

The competition of ideas would eventually come to be known as CVE.[16] CVE refers to the noncoercive, longer-range tools deployed in an effort to counter extremists' ideologies and narratives, reducing their appeal and ultimately neutralizing the threat of violence.[17] Initially focused on the ideological dimension, over time, the parameters of CVE have expanded to address the structural social, economic, and political grievances that can be conducive to terrorist radicalization and recruitment. CVE includes efforts to shrink public support for violent extremist movements; build the resilience of local communities; offer peaceful alternatives to potential recruits; dissuade radicalized individuals from committing criminal acts; and rehabilitate and reintegrate individuals who have either served their prison sentences or are otherwise no longer deemed a security threat. Though the precise definition and boundaries are widely debated, in essence, CVE encompasses a spectrum of interventions aimed at preventing the recruitment and radicalization of individuals into violent extremist organizations.

The Need for a New Comprehensive Strategy

Despite the security enhancements made in the last 15 years, the United States and its allies do not yet have an effective strategy, with broad bipartisan support, for undermining the appeal of extremist ideologies and narratives and stemming recruitment and mobilization to terrorism. Populist figures on both sides of the Atlantic have taken advantage of this gap—and the fear created by terrorist attacks—to sell their own isolationist remedies. Yet, closing

[15] George W. Bush, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: The White House, March 2006), 9, http://usa.usembassy.de/etexts/nss2006.pdf.

[16] The U.S. government defines CVE as "efforts focused on preventing all forms of ideologically based extremist violence, to include prevention of successful recruitment into terrorist groups. It is distinct from disruptive actions which focus on stopping acts of terrorism by those who have already subscribed to violence." See U.S. Department of Homeland Security, "A Comprehensive U.S. Government Approach to Countering Violent Extremism," n.d., https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/US%20Government%20Approach%20to%20CVE-Fact%20Sheet.pdf.

[17] The term "preventing violent extremism," or PVE, has gained traction, particularly within the United Nations and European countries. For some, PVE suggests a more proactive, longer-term effort to address the underlying conditions and root causes associated with support for violent extremism, whereas CVE is more reactive. The Commission does not see this distinction. For the purposes of this report, CVE is inclusive of preventative efforts at the societal, community, and individual levels.

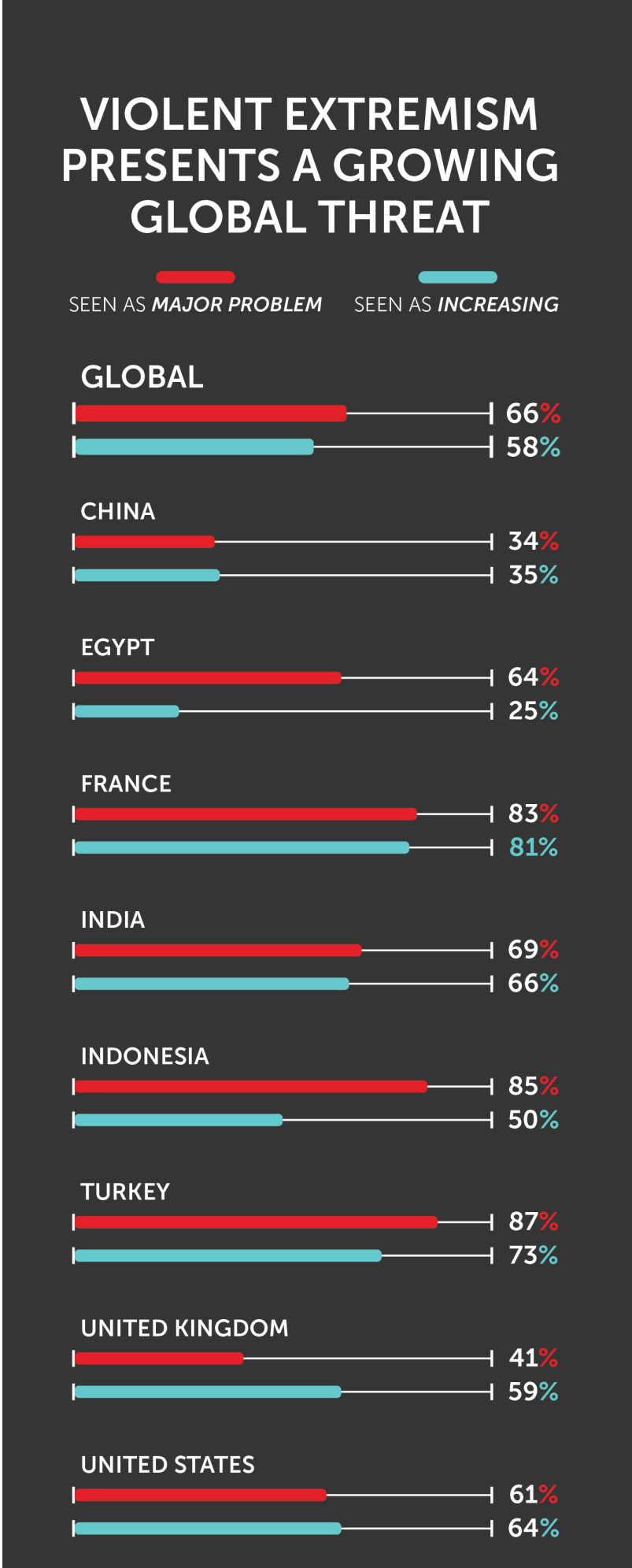
off our borders will not prevent extremist ideologies from taking hold and inspiring people to commit horrific attacks using any means available. So long as individuals throughout the world are attracted to violent extremist groups and the revolutionary ideologies they espouse, we must continue to use our military, intelligence, and law enforcement capabilities to protect our safety. Until we defeat the ideologies themselves, however, we will not achieve lasting security.

We need a new comprehensive strategy to address the ideological battle with vigor, unity of effort, and persistence over the next generation. Such a strategy must focus on ***significantly reducing the number of people worldwide who are drawn to and recruited by violent extremist organizations and ensuring that such groups and their ideologies cannot gain purchase in the United States and around the globe.***

Success will require undermining the appeal and legitimacy of extremist narratives and offering meaningful alternatives to young people so they do not turn to violent extremist movements to find the meaning, belonging, and dignity they seek. This strategy must leverage soft and hard power approaches proportionally and enable the international community to address extremist ideologies and their manifestations directly, consistently, and at scale—outpacing the efforts of violent extremists.[18] By necessity, such an effort must appeal across the political spectrum and attract diverse allies and partners from civil society, the philanthropy community, and the private sector. And it must engender strong leadership from Muslim countries and communities, the vast majority of whom have no sympathy for ISIS, al Qaeda, or any other terrorist organization.

In this report, the Commission offers such a comprehensive strategy, incorporating lessons learned over the past decade and aligning all of the programs, policies, and capabilities that will be needed to transform the conditions and mindset that nourish violent extremist groups. This strategy is based on the following principles:

[18] Soft power refers here to the ability to shape the preferences and choices of others through appeal and attraction rather than by coercion (hard power). The currency of soft power is culture, political values, and foreign policies. See Joseph S. Nye Jr., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2004). Also Richard L. Armitage and Joseph S. Nye Jr., cochairs, *A Smarter, More Secure America: Report of the CSIS Commission on Smart Power* (Washington, DC: CSIS, 2007), https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy_files/files/media/csis/pubs/071106_csissmartpowerreport.pdf.



Source: Views from Around the World: Countering Violent Extremism https://www.csis.org/analysis/survey-findings-global-perceptions-violent-extremism

JUAN C. ZARATE, SENIOR ADVISER AND COMMISSIONER

- **Go all in.** The United States and its allies must build an around-the-clock operation to confront violent extremism, with the right personnel, financial support, and accountability structures. To date, CVE has been ad hoc and undervalued compared to the military, law enforcement, and intelligence aspects of the fight. We must significantly increase the resources and attention dedicated to challenging extremists' narratives and creating new pathways for those vulnerable to radicalization and recruitment.
- **Take a global approach.** The threat of violent extremism can be found throughout the world. ISIS is the most recent and brutal manifestation of the problem—but certainly not the last if we do not change course. Even as it focuses on destroying ISIS in Syria and Iraq, the international community must keep pressure on other terrorist groups, including al Qaeda, Boko Haram, Hezbollah, and al Shabaab, which continue to execute devastating attacks. However, combating existing terrorist organizations is not sufficient. We must address the spread of extremist ideologies to Africa, Europe, South and Southeast Asia, the Caucuses, Russia, and elsewhere to prevent terrorist groups from regenerating in new forms.
- **Forge dynamic partnerships.** The nature of the enemy—decentralized, globalized, committed, and crowdsourced—requires intensive and adaptable partnerships between and among governments, the private sector, and civil society. This demands more than sporadic engagements and pilot programs, which have dominated the last decade and a half. Instead, it requires harnessing the talent, expertise, and ingenuity that exist outside of government.
- **Embrace experimentation.** Although we have learned a great deal about how and why extremist ideologies are appealing, terrorists' tactics are constantly evolving. Therefore, rather than searching for a single solution, we must flood the zone with alternative narratives and

ideas, allowing the strongest to win. Programs will not always be successful, but we must encourage calculated risk-taking and innovation, and make a more concerted effort to learn from practitioners' successes and failures. Such an approach requires careful monitoring to ensure that the process is not captured by proponents of the very ideologies that we are trying to defeat.

- **Avoid reactions that play into violent extremists' hands.** Terrorism thrives on a disproportionate response to perceived and real threats. ISIS, for example, has an explicit aim of creating rifts between governments and their people, as well as between Muslims and non-Muslims in Western countries. Attacks provoke fear and often lead to a rise in anti-Muslim sentiment, which terrorist recruiters then exploit. A former al Qaeda recruiter in the United States explained, "radicals and recruiters love Islamophobia. It drives recruitment."[19] In the face of this dynamic, it is important for governments to avoid rhetoric and responses that estrange Muslim communities. In the United States, such an approach would necessitate redoubling efforts to engage with Muslim communities and address their concerns about stigmatization, surveillance, entrapment, and hate crimes. Abroad, this tenet would require the United States to convince its partners to shun counterterrorism approaches that alienate Muslim communities.

[19] Shannon N. Green, executive director, CVE Commission, interview with Jesse Morton, CSIS, June 23, 2016.