

Executive Summary

The United States lost nearly 3,000 lives in the devastating terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. On that day, a problem that had been slowly festering and barely noticed in the West broke onto the world stage in a forceful and heart-wrenching way.

Those events and many that would follow have prompted trillions of dollars to be poured into military, law enforcement, and intelligence operations. Yet the problem of violent extremism has grown more severe and urgent. Despite the many efforts to extinguish the flames of violence, new and powerful extremist movements have taken root. Terrorist groups around the world have used technology, the media, religious schools and mosques, and word of mouth to sell their twisted ideologies, justify their violence, and convince too many recruits that glory can be found in the mass murder of innocent civilians.

The spread of extremist ideologies and increasingly frequent terrorist attacks are stoking anxiety and fear across the globe. According to a survey conducted by the Commission on Countering Violent Extremism (CVE), people are willing to try just about anything to stop the bloodshed: from military action to stronger border controls and mandatory identification cards to relinquishing privacy and accepting constraints on speech. The increasing potency and reach of terrorist groups—and a sense that governments' response to the threat has been inadequate—is creating deep political divisions and fueling support for populist solutions.

There are no easy solutions to this problem. Neither troops nor police nor economic sanctions alone can address this threat. We cannot close our borders and hope that

the problem goes away. And we cannot abandon our commitment to human rights and freedom of expression in an attempt to quell violent extremism.

Diminishing the appeal of extremist ideologies will require a long-term, generational struggle. The United States and its allies must combat extremists' hostile and apocalyptic world view with the same level of commitment that we apply to dealing with its violent manifestations. We urgently need a new comprehensive strategy for countering violent extremism—one that is resolute, rests in soft and hard power, and galvanizes key allies and partners from government, civil society, and the private sector.

It is time for the U.S. government and its allies to go all in to prevent the radicalization and recruitment of a whole new generation. This is a problem that affects everyone. All segments of society must pull together to defeat this global scourge. Yet, they should not have to do so alone. The U.S. government, its allies, especially from Muslim-majority countries, and the private sector have an essential role to play—providing leadership, political support, funding, and expertise.

The Commission's goal was to clearly articulate what the next U.S. administration, in close collaboration with governmental and non-governmental partners, must do to diminish the appeal of extremist ideologies and narratives. The plan has eight major components:

1) Strengthening resistance to extremist ideologies: The international community must forge a new global partnership around education reform to stop the teaching of extremist ideologies in schools. At the same time, we must redouble efforts to enhance respect for religious

diversity, stem the spread of intolerance, and reinforce community resilience to extremist narratives.

- 2) Investing in community-led prevention:** Governments should enable civil society efforts to detect and disrupt radicalization and recruitment, and rehabilitate and reintegrate those who have succumbed to extremist ideologies and narratives. Community and civic leaders are at the forefront of challenging violent extremism but they require much greater funding, support, and encouragement.
- 3) Saturating the global marketplace of ideas:** Technology companies, the entertainment industry, community leaders, religious voices, and others must be enlisted more systematically to compete with and overtake extremists' narratives in virtual and real spaces. It is the responsibility of all citizens to rebut extremists' ideas, wherever they are gaining traction.
- 4) Aligning policies and values:** The United States should put human rights at the center of CVE, ensuring that its engagement with domestic and foreign actors advances the rule of law, dignity, and accountability. In particular, the U.S. government should review its security assistance to foreign partners to certify that it is being used in just and sustainable ways.
- 5) Deploying military and law enforcement tools:** The international community needs to build a new force capability and coalition to quickly dislodge terrorist groups that control territory, avert and respond to immediate threats, weaken violent extremists' projection of strength, and protect our security and the security of our allies and partners.
- 6) Exerting White House leadership:** The next administration should establish a new institutional structure, headed by a White House assistant to the president, to oversee all CVE efforts and provide clear direction and accountability for results. The Commission finds that strong and steady executive leadership is essential to elevating and harmonizing domestic and international CVE efforts.
- 7) Expanding CVE models:** The United States and its allies and partners urgently need to enlarge the CVE ecosystem, creating flexible platforms for funding, implementing, and replicating proven efforts to address the ideologies, narratives, and manifestations of violent extremism.
- 8) Surging funding:** The U.S. government should demonstrate its commitment to tackling violent extremism by pledging \$1 billion annually to CVE efforts, domestically and internationally. These resources are meant to catalyze a surge in investment from other governments, the private sector, and philanthropic community.

We can change the course of this threat. Doing so will require aligning all of these pieces into a comprehensive strategy and investing in CVE programs, partnerships, and policies at scale and over the next decade or more.