

Statement before the House Armed Services Committee***“AL QA’IDA IN 2010:
HOW SHOULD THE U.S. RESPOND?”***

A Statement by

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Chairman Skelton, Ranking Member McKeon, and distinguished members of the House Committee on Armed Services. I am pleased to be with you today to testify on the state of al Qaida in 2010 and how the United States should respond. This is an important moment for such a hearing, given the recent series of terrorist plots uncovered including the Christmas Day failed airline attack; the growing role of al Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula; and the continued allure of al Qaida’s ideology, including in the United States. This hearing is made all the more poignant with the release of an audio tape this past Sunday purportedly from Usama bin Laden taking credit for the Christmas Day attempt.

Al Qaida is no longer the same organization we faced on September 11, 2001. In many ways, it has been decimated and constricted in its capabilities, with the core elements of the organization on the ropes. Al Qaida’s senior leadership is being methodically destroyed, its primary safe haven is being undermined, its ideology is being rejected within Muslim communities around the world, and its strategy has yet to produce the results promised. Al Qaida continues to sow the seeds of its own destruction because of its violently exclusionary ideology and horrific terror tactics (especially against fellow Muslims), which are essential to the nature of the organization but inherently alienating.

On the other hand, al Qaida has attempted to spur an ideological awakening among Muslims around the world to fight the West. The allure of this ideology and narrative continues to draw adherents and manifests itself in real threats to the international community – whether through known regional terrorist or militant organizations or in the actions of lone wolves radicalized via the Internet.

Thus, there appears a current paradox in which al Qaida as an organization remains in steady decline, but the global terrorist threat inspired by this ideology remains a central national security concern for the United States. The United States must then not only hasten the defeat of al Qaida but look beyond al Qaida to displace and contain the next phase of the global terrorist threat.

It is essential to try to understand the adaptations of al Qaida, grapple with the new evolutions of the Sunni extremist terrorist threat, and focus on steps the United States can take to destroy al Qaida and address looming threats on the horizon. My testimony attempts to address these issues.

The Morphing Nature of al Qaida

Al Qaida has evolved since its creation, adapting to pressures placed on the organization and taking advantage of strategic and tactical opportunities to ensure its survival and the viral expansion of its ideology. Al Qaida can be defined in different ways depending on

one's analysis of what al Qaida represents and how broad its ideological reach extends globally and via the Internet. It is important to be precise about this definition, in part to understand the threats we face but also to avoid inadvertently aggrandizing an organization that may be in decline.

Over the last four years, we have seen a hybrid face for this enemy emerge. Al-Qaida core leadership has continued to set the strategic direction for the movement and has directed attack planning, as with the August 2006 Atlantic airliners plot. At the same time, al-Qaida has aggressively and systematically moved to establish and use regional affiliates, like al-Qaida in Iraq, al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb, and al Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula, as forward bases for al-Qaida activity and strategic reach. Until the Christmas Day attack, these groups confined their activities largely to their local environments or regions. In addition, al-Qaida has identified and nurtured pockets of radicalized cells or individuals in Western Europe with the capability to carry out deadly attacks under al-Qaida direction and in its name. This has been amplified by the radicalization of individuals by like-minded groups and ideologues around the world and via the Internet.

The best way to understand al Qaida as an organization and an idea in 2010 is to break it into three parts: AQ Core; AQ Regional Affiliates and Like-Minded Groups; and AQ-Inspired Radicalization and Threats.

Al Qaida (AQ) Core

Al Qaida, Usama bin Laden, and the core leadership of mainly Saudis and Egyptians have defined and led the global Sunni terrorist movement since the 1990s. This leadership has laid out the long-term strategic goals for the global movement, in public statements, fatwas, and documents and has drawn from Muslim fighters who have fought asymmetric wars – starting in Afghanistan against the Soviets and now globally against the United States. This AQ core membership is limited, including key al Qaida leaders in the Afghanistan/Pakistan border region and those who remain in Iranian custody.

Al Qaida sees itself as the vanguard and defender of the global Muslim community against a perceived historical, material, and cultural onslaught from the West (“the Jews and the Crusaders”). It seeks to reestablish an Islamic caliphate operating under an extreme brand of sharia (Islamic law) spanning from southern Spain (“al Andalus”) to Indonesia. To do this, Usama bin Laden and al Qaida decided that they needed to wage war in the first instance against the United States, the “far enemy,” in order to expel U.S. presence from historically Muslim lands and weaken its support for “apostate” regimes that currently rule in such countries. This focus on attacking the “far enemy” in the first instance versus trying to overthrow “near enemy” regimes, as in Egypt and Saudi Arabia, resolved an ongoing strategic debate within extremist circles prior to Usama bin Laden’s 1996 declaration of war against the United States. For al Qaida, the experience of the mujahedeen expelling the Soviet Union from Afghanistan, combined with examples of American retreat after bloody engagements (as after the Black Hawk Down engagement in Somalia), are lessons that made such a strategy realistic and achievable in their minds.

Al Qaida is patient in its strategic vision, viewing their movement in terms of centuries not four-year cycles, and is willing to use any means to achieve its goals. Al Qaida has concentrated on tactical and strategic innovations and attempted to develop biological and chemical weapons while expressing an interest and intent to acquire and use nuclear weapons. It is a terrorist movement that rejects elements of modernity while being fully devoted to using its implements, like the Internet.

Through its propaganda and the longevity of its core leadership, Usama bin Laden and al Qaida have created a symbolic brand that identifies al Qaida as the leader of this global movement, which has driven funding and support from within Muslim communities. The narrative from al Qaida is simple: The West is at war with Islam; Muslims have a religious obligation to engage in “jihad” to “defend” fellow Muslims; the United States is the “head of the snake” and must be fought along with its apostate allies; and al Qaida is the ultimate vanguard of this movement for the “Umma” (all Muslims).

Their extremist and exclusive ideology preys on discontent and alienation at the local and global level, while providing a simple narrative that pretends to grant meaning and heroic outlet for the young. To disaffected, aggrieved, or troubled individuals, this narrative explains in a simple framework the ills around them and the geopolitical discord they see on their television sets and on the Internet.

The AQ Core then has served as the strategic hub and driver for the global Sunni terrorist movement, with a focus on attacking the United States and U.S. interests. This focus has allowed al Qaida over time to press adherents and affiliates to keep their eyes on the ultimate prize and not get bogged down in local disputes or conflicts. Though its goals are global, al Qaida uses and co-opts local and cultural grievances and national movements and aspirations to fuel recruitment and establish its legitimacy.

AQ Regional Affiliates and Like-Minded Groups

Al Qaida has historically relied on allied and like-minded regional groups, like Jemaah Islamiyah in Southeast Asia, and core mujahedeen and AQ veterans in theaters of battle around the world, like East Africa and Yemen, to facilitate its global agenda.

The constellation of terrorist groups that have direct ties, associations, or parallel ideological agendas with al Qaida is consistently shifting. Over the past four years, al Qaida has tried to forge deeper ties and strategic control over Sunni terrorist groups – so as to leverage their respective regional infrastructures, recruits, fundraising, and increase al Qaida’s overall ability to threaten Western and local interests. This has been facilitated by the safe haven and training grounds present in Western Pakistan, in particular the Federally Administered Tribal Areas

The most lethal of these official affiliates have emerged in North Africa (al Qaida in the Islamic Magreb, AQIM), Saudi Arabia and Yemen (al Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula, AQAP), and Iraq (al Qaida in Iraq, AQI). Al Qaida has historically maintained a presence in East Africa (reaching into Sudan), with senior al Qaida leaders moving in and out of Somalia,

depending on attack planning and operational needs. Asbat al Ansar in Lebanon has ties to al Qaida and could represent a foothold for AQ in the Levant, aside from being a threat to stability for Lebanon.

With senior al Qaida leaders in Yemen unifying operational activities in the Arabian Peninsula and now strategically directing plots at the United States, al Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula represents the regional group with the most dangerous and deepest affiliation with AQ Core.

Not all such ties are lasting. In the past, al Qaida has worked with Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) in Southeast Asia (engaging in such work as an anthrax program), but counterterrorism activities in Southeast Asia and growing public rejection of terrorist tactics have largely rooted out those activities and senior operatives directly tied to al Qaida in Southeast Asia. Groups like the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) have also been closely allied with al Qaida, providing backing and operatives, but the recent LIFG rejection of al Qaida's program has proven a major setback for al Qaida.

Other regional or local groups have operational ties with al Qaida that dovetail with their parallel agendas and underlying ideology.

- The Pakistan and Afghan Taleban have longstanding tribal, familial and operational ties to al Qaida, which are being used now against the common enemy of U.S., foreign, and Afghan and Pakistani forces in the region.
- The al Shabaab movement in Somalia has received training from longstanding al Qaida members in East Africa and has pledged support to al Qaida's agenda, especially its operations in Yemen.
- The Islamic Jihad Union (IJU) and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) have served as Central Asian partners for al Qaida, with direct threats to Central Asian nations and in Europe, as seen in the disrupted IJU plot in Germany.
- The East Turkmenistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) has historic ties to al Qaida and terrorist training in Pakistan and has threatened Chinese interests.
- At times, Ansar al Sunna/Ansar al Islam in Iraq has flirted with assisting or working with AQI, but they have largely distanced themselves from AQI.
- There are other groups like the Army of Islam in Gaza and the remnants of terrorist groups in Chechnya that have aspirations to join with AQ more officially, but no such Palestine or Chechen-based groups have been established to carry AQ's banner in those theaters.

Finally, there are groups like Lashkar e Tayyiba (LT), other Kashmiri based terrorist groups, Harakat ul Jihad I Islami (HUJI), and Harakat ul Jihad I Islami/Bangladesh (HUJI-B), which have a well-established terrorist infrastructure, a deep well of recruits, and are well trained. These groups, though focused on local or regional grievances, could serve as global platforms for a broader terrorist movement.

There are several concerns about all of these regional groups and their activities, which provide an infrastructure, geographic reach, and recruits for a global movement. These groups can also tap into diaspora communities in Western societies, like North Africans living in Southern Europe and Canada, who may be susceptible to radicalization and recruitment.

The primary concern over the past few years has been that these groups could become outposts from which al Qaida would launch direct attacks against the West. The most troubling dimension of the Christmas Day failed attack emanating from Yemen was that this was the first manifestation of one of al Qaida's regional arms attempting to hit the United States directly. This changes the threat landscape, as seen in reactions from the U.S. Administration to the threat of al Qaida in Yemen. This possibility has been a major preoccupation for U.S. counterterrorism officials in the investigation of the American Somalis from Minneapolis and Seattle who have traveled to East Africa and made contact with militant groups.

Aside from the direct threat to the United States, the possibility that some subset of these regional organizations or groups could form a new global syndicate – absent AQ Core involvement – is an evolution that has yet to occur and that we need to prevent. Iraqi and American success against AQI prevented Iraq from becoming a central emirate from which al Qaida could organize and reach into North Africa and the Levant, which had started to occur under Abu Musab al Zarqawi's leadership.

Finally, one of the more sophisticated of these groups, like Lashkar et Tayyiba could alter its regional focus and become a global leader and successor to al Qaida, taking up the mantle for the defense of Muslims. We saw glimpses of this possibility with the selection of Western and Jewish-related targets in the Mumbai attacks and in the revelation of LT plotting against the Danish newspaper that published the Muhammad cartoons – far afield from the cause of Kashmir.

The mere existence of these groups is dangerous and needs to be viewed as a potential next phase in the war on terror – whether they are operating in concert with al Qaida or independently of AQ Core direction and control.

AQ-Inspired Radicalization and Threats

The long term threat from al Qaida comes in the allure of its ideology to individuals who may decide to join an established terrorist organization or may elect to conduct acts of terror on their own or with a small cell of actors. The radicalization of such individuals can be facilitated by extremist spiritual gatekeepers as well as the Internet and can take many forms – occurring quickly and remotely or over months with the intervention of several radicalizing actors. We have seen glimpses of this variety in the homegrown plots disrupted over the last eight years -- including those who had direct contact with senior AQ Core leadership while others connected with spiritual guides or foreign operatives via the Internet.

Over the last year, there has been a wave of terrorist acts and plots disrupted that demonstrate the spectrum of this threat within the United States:

- The brutal attack at Fort Hood on November 5, 2009, perpetrated by U.S. Army Major Nidal Malik Hasan.
- The attacks and murders at a military recruitment center in Little Rock, Arkansas on June 1, 2009.
- Two alleged plots with apparent direct international connections to known and designated terrorist organizations disrupted this fall.
 - Najibullah Zazi allegedly planned terrorist attacks in New York. Zazi appears to have had direct connections to al Qaida, including receiving training from al Qaida in Pakistan.
 - David Coleman Headley and Tahawar Rana allegedly planned attacks against the Danish newspaper that had published the cartoons of Mohammed. Both individuals are alleged to have direct connections and communications with Lashkar-e-Tayyiba (LT) and Harakat-ul-Jihad Islami (HUJI).
- The arrest of Bryant Neal Viñas, an American citizen who allegedly met with al Qaida members in Pakistan.
- Several plots involving radicalized individuals attempting to target sites in the United States:
 - The alleged plot in New York by four American citizens to attack two synagogues in the Bronx and a military transport plane;
 - The alleged attempt by Mosam Maher Husein Smadi, a Jordanian national, to blow up a skyscraper in Dallas;
 - The alleged attempt by Michael Finton to detonate a truck bomb at a federal building in Springfield, Illinois.
 - The arrest of seven men in North Carolina, including the supposed ringleader Daniel Patrick Boyd, who were allegedly planning terrorist attacks.
- The arrests of Somali Americans from Seattle and Minneapolis over the past year who were allegedly radicalized and trained in East Africa and then returned to the United States. These arrests form part of a broader inquiry into the ongoing recruitment, radicalization, and training of Somali Americans, including the October 2008 suicide bombing attack in Somalia by an American, Shirwa Ahmed. The Washington Post has reported that there has been at least seven Somali American recruits killed in East Africa.
- The recent arrest of five Americans from Northern Virginia who traveled to Pakistan to join the fight against the United States and who remain in Pakistani custody.

Though we have seen eight years of plot disruptions and attempted attacks, there are some concerning elements to these recent cases within the United States reflecting a growing allure to al Qaida's ideology and agenda. Unlike in past cases, some of the individuals involved appear to be second or third generation Americans who were born into Islam, as opposed to being converts to the faith; they appear to have acted in clusters, as with the American Somalis and Northern Virginia five; and they attempted to join or succeeded in

connecting with a known terrorist organization abroad for training, experience, and direction. These factors are troubling, especially given the effectiveness of AQ and like-minded extremists like Anwar al Awlaqi to use the Internet to recruit new adherents, including from the West.

In Muslim majority countries and among Muslim minority populations, frustrations held by Muslim youth because of lack of economic or social opportunity, political voice, or integration could serve to deepen the pool of potential radicalized individuals. This problem is exacerbated by the demographic youth bulge projected in the Middle East for years to come. In addition, there are international groups like Hizb ut Tahrir and Jamiat al Tabligh that preach an exclusionary brand of political Islam which could serve as a platform for radicalization of violent extremists. Such groups have growing global reach, as seen with Hizb ut Tahrir establishing itself in Central Asia.

This environment then suggests that more individuals will be radicalized over time and could take on the global terrorist mantle. This radicalization could certainly manifest itself in more violent local or regional conflicts, to include sectarian conflict between Sunni and Shia populations. This could also manifest itself – particularly in the West -- as a more virulent anti-globalization movement, especially in the wake of the recent financial crisis.

The ideas AQ germinated still resonate, regardless of the state of AQ Core or its affiliates. This metastasized dimension of the terrorist problem is perhaps the most bedeviling since it is diffuse and hard to counter. This ideological battlefield is where the long war will be fought.

U.S. Response to Al Qaida

The U.S. response to al Qaida over the past eight years has involved an aggressive offensive campaign intended to disrupt and dismantle al Qaida's global network, deny it safe haven, and prevent further attacks. The toppling of the Taleban and displacement of al Qaida training camps and safe haven in Afghanistan was a critical early victory, but the ultimate success of that mission needs to be solidified in the coming months. President Obama's decision to send additional troops to support General McCrystal's counterinsurgency campaign is the right move to shift momentum in that theater. In Iraq, the American surge, the rise of the Sunni Arab tribes against AQI, and the growing confidence of the Iraqi government over the last three years has served as a critically important counter to al Qaida's potential rise in the heart of the Middle East.

This offensive campaign was complemented by efforts to undercut the legitimacy of the violent extremist ideology through the use of soft power, partnership, and suasion. Furthermore, the U.S. government has attempted to build a layered defense to make it more difficult for al Qaida to attack the United States or our interests abroad.

Though American leadership has remained critical, the international community has responded aggressively to the threat from al Qaida for its own purposes, with countries like Saudi Arabia and Indonesia taking on the terrorists and their ideology in their midst,

especially after multiple attacks from al Qaida related groups in those countries. The U.S. and other countries have helped build counterterrorism capacity, including information sharing capabilities, so as to enable local authorities to handle terrorist groups within their borders. Thus, any effort to destroy al Qaida and constrain or mitigate any follow-on global terrorist movement requires a full-scale international effort, with the most important participation and rejection of this violent extremist movement coming from within Muslim communities.

Our efforts, however, have involved missteps. The two wars being fought in Muslim-majority countries have played into the al Qaida narrative of an invading force from the West, and the Abu Ghraib scandal and perceptions of prisoner abuse in Guantanamo Bay and Baghram Air Base have allowed the enemy to hammer its propaganda themes about the cruelty and hypocrisy of the United States. We must be conscious of the perceptions and effects of our actions and policies – especially among Muslim communities -- though we cannot shy away from defending the legitimacy of our actions or allow the enemy a heckler's veto over the steps we take to secure our country.

Response in 2010

We must pressure al Qaida on all fronts now: disrupting plots; destroying its core leadership; straining its financing; regaining momentum in Afghanistan; supporting Pakistanis, Yemenis, and Iraqis' denial of safe haven; pressuring Iran to hold the al Qaida leadership in its custody; and empowering regional and credible actors to contain al Qaida's nodes. This needs to be complemented by an all-out offensive in the ideological battle, with a concentration on networking and empowering a grassroots countermovement against al Qaida. Finally, we must continue to develop our layered defenses, with our partners abroad, and should anticipate new innovations by the enemy to circumvent current security measures.

Much of this work is underway:

- We are dismantling al Qaida's hard-to-replace core leadership while its planners worry more about spies in their midst than launching the next strategic attack;
- Funding is sparse with a demoralized donor base, likely forcing al Qaida to make tough budget decisions and shortchange long-term projects, like their WMD programs;
- Thanks to the work of key allies, al Qaida and its affiliates have failed to regain strategic footholds in Iraq, Saudi Arabia, East Asia, and the Levant. Other than in Yemen, its regional satellites in North Africa, Central Asia, and East Africa, though dangerous, have not become the strategic outposts that would threaten the West directly; and
- A number of al Qaida's major strategic plots against the United States and Europe

over the past eight years have been disrupted through intense intelligence and law enforcement cooperation.

Destroying AQ Core and Denying Regional Safe Havens

It is essential that the core AQ leadership be killed or captured so as to destroy the strategic and symbolic hub of the global Sunni extremist movement. Core al Qaida is the heart of the global Sunni terrorist movement focused on attacking the West and developing WMD. While the destruction of AQ Core will not end terrorism or the allure of its ideology, it is a necessary step to disable the global terrorist movement.

This also requires that the United States and international community deny physical safe haven to terrorist groups. It is in these undergoverned or ungoverned zones of the world that terrorist groups are able to plot, train, interact, and adapt. In denying safe haven, we must in the first instance rely on the local and regional partners which have a vested interest in ensuring that such zones are not allowed to fester.

This problem begins in Western Pakistan, where core al Qaida and the Pakistan Taleban have maintained their presence and influence. The Pakistani government must maintain its pressure in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas and should not fall prey to the past practice of negotiated settlements with tribal leaders and the Taleban when there is no way to enforce such deals. The United States should continue to press this position, using the power of the purse, development, and military assistance as levers.

The problem of safe haven extends well beyond the Afghanistan/Pakistan theater. In Yemen, we must assist the Yemeni government and regional partners to disrupt al Qaida activity and presence. This is now an imperative given the Christmas Day attacks. Saudi Arabian and UAE leadership, commitment, and resources will be needed to sustain a long-term effort to deny safe haven. In East Africa and Somalia, there must be continued attention from the African Union and East African countries to containing the threat from instability in Somalia and the presence of al Qaida and like-minded terrorist groups in the region. In Iraq, we must ensure that the Iraqi government is able to handle the threat from the remnants of AQI and other extremist groups as we withdraw our troops. In North Africa, we must enable Algeria and Morocco, among other countries in the Magreb, to pressure AQIM as it takes advantage of the vast expanse of the Sahara and support from local tribes.

In Southeast Asia, the United States and Australia must continue to support countries like Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Singapore to ensure that there is no reemergence of JI-like terrorist groups. The reliance on local and regional partners and enablers has proven successful in rooting out terrorist groups in this region. Countries in Southeast Asia, with assistance from Australia and the United States, have adopted full-fledged counterterrorism strategies -- from "soft" counter-radicalization and jihadi rehabilitation programs to the development of "harder" special forces capabilities to address militants and terrorists on the battlefield. This approach and related regional partnerships signal an

important graduation for the international community in reducing the global reach of the terrorist groups in the region that needs to be replicated.

This effort to deny safe haven applies to broad swaths of territory (often straddling borders) as well as mini safe havens in refugee camps and urban environments. We need to be smart about preemptively denying al Qaida safe haven or entry into environments that are ripe for sectarian exploitation and radicalization. This requires the use of all elements of national power and resources – development aid and assistance and private sector investment and resources – and some forward looking policymaking and resource allocation in potential safe havens. For example, Bangladesh has wonderful potential as a Muslim democracy in South Asia but could serve as a country where a violent extremist ideology takes root. This approach applies in regions like Central Asia, with a growing class of radicalized youth stifled by lack of economic opportunities and political voice. It also applies to countries like Nigeria, where al Qaida could take advantage of longstanding conflicts between Christians and Muslims and where extremists like the Nigerian Taleban already have a foothold.

While resources are limited, the United States and our partners abroad will be more effective if we start addressing these emerging threats before they become entrenched. We must be proactive and not reactive in our efforts to deprive al Qaida and like-minded groups the luxury of safe haven.

Countering the Ideology and Fomenting a Countermovement

Importantly, all quarters in Muslim communities are now openly challenging al Qaida. Some in the so-called jihadi community deconstruct the violent ideology and ask critically what al Qaida's agenda has achieved. Former extremists in the London-based Quilliam Foundation and Muslim scholars in Singapore's Religious Rehabilitation Group are counteracting the ideology and activities of violent extremists. Al Qaeda's radically exclusionary ideology and violent tactics, victimizing even Muslim civilians, have led to its rejection – seen most vividly and importantly in Iraq.

In Iraq, which bin Laden once called the "golden and unique opportunity" to wage a central battle against the United States, al Qaida is in retreat. Its dream of an "Islamic State of Iraq" to serve as a platform for regional expansion was repulsed by its supposed core constituency - Sunni Arabs in the heart of the Middle East. Al Qaida's senior leadership no longer mentions Iraq, where local resistance with American backing has it in retreat.

This rejection is not isolated to Iraq or to extremist circles. More and more Muslim and Arab populations -- to include clerics and scholars -- are questioning the value of al Qaida's program and al Qaida's fomenting of chaos and its justification for the killing of Muslim innocents. In an article published in the Washington Post, the Grand Mufti of Al-Azhar Mosque in Egypt noted that "attacking civilians, women, children, and the elderly by blowing oneself up is absolutely forbidden in Islam. No excuse can be made for the crimes committed in New York, Spain, and London, and anyone who tries to make excuses for these acts is ignorant of Islamic law, and their excuses are the result of extremism and

ignorance." In October 2007, the Saudi Grand Mufti, Shaykh Abdul Aziz, delivered a speech warning Saudis not to undertake unauthorized jihadist activities and blamed "foreign elements" for exploiting the religious enthusiasm of young men for illegitimate purposes. The Grand Mufti also strongly warned wealthy Saudis to avoid funding causes that "harm Muslims." These are just some examples of concrete opposition to al-Qaida emerging around the world.

It is significant that there is notable and consistent opposition in Arab country polling to the targeting of civilians and use of terrorism. This trend is reflected in popular culture. For example, popular musicians in Pakistan and Indonesia are performing anti-terrorism songs that have become anthems for Muslims who want to distance themselves from extremism and violence.

We know that all of this matters to al Qaida and that its senior leadership is sensitive to the perceived legitimacy of both their actions and their ideology. They care about their image because it has real world effects on recruitment, donations, and support in Muslim and religious communities for the al Qaida message.

Though the United States is not a central protagonist in this ideological and theological battle within Islam, it has a role to play. This is especially the case after President Obama's Cairo speech directed to Muslims that attempted to break the narrative of the West being at war with Islam.

Aside from promoting democracy and defending our policies and values, the United States should be actively countering this narrative and the violent extremist ideology by supporting and empowering those credible voices emerging to counter al Qaida – in the physical and virtual worlds. There are examples of such groups around the world, and the United States should focus on enabling and networking such individuals and groups. The U.S. government has already begun this work as seen in the formation of the Alliance of Youth Movements (AYM) in December 2008, intended to use new technologies to connect and empower youth groups around the world seeking to counter violence in their communities.

Initiatives like this should be launched to create a seeming tidal wave of opposition to al Qaida and its ideology. The goal should be to help foment a grassroots countermovement that will not only speak out against al Qaida, terrorism, and violent extremist ideologies but will actively oppose it. At the end of the day, though, this opposition, as we have seen on the streets of Amman and in the voices of victims of al Qaida, must be organic and come from within Muslim communities. Muslim Americans then have a special responsibility to stand up against this ideology of hate that has begun to creep into the American consciousness.

In addition, our policy initiatives – in support of local partners -- need to address squarely some of the festering geopolitical conflicts and underlying conditions upon which al Qaida and violent extremists feed like leeches, such as the Israel/Palestinian dispute and the Indian/Pakistani Kashmiri conflict.

Combined with the tactical and strategic "soft" and "hard" pressure placed on this movement by the international community, the moral pressure against al Qaida is gaining momentum across the globe and will ultimately help dismantle al Qaida and its allure. Al Qaida's downfall and the end of the broader movement that it represents will follow inherently from their dark vision and terrorist tactics.

Layering and Deepening our Homeland Defense and Imagining the Unimaginable

With respect to our defenses, we need to build on the work of the last eight years to ensure we have a layered defense against strategically significant terrorist attacks. In the first instance, this requires a continual renewal of our commitment to intelligence gathering and prevention as the primary principles guiding our homeland defense. This requires clarity of policies and initiatives to deepen the information-sharing environment, including with state and local authorities and foreign partners. This also means finding new ways of tapping information available throughout the world that may not be in classic government or intelligence channels. The Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) has innovated one such model, called the Trusted Information Network, which collects the knowledge of local experts on issues of concern and uses that network as a baseline for information gathering and analysis.

In the wake of the Christmas failed attack, we should redouble our efforts to improve identity management, to include integration of biometric-based technologies, and accelerate the implementation of Secure Flight. In addition, initiatives like the Container Security Initiative and Megaports, which extend our borders and the screening of cargo beyond our shores, should be expanded.

In addition, we must push government agencies to imagine the unimaginable by continuing to invest resources and energy to prevent terrorist groups from developing, acquiring, or using weapons of mass destruction. The United States has concentrated its strategy, programs, and international engagements on preventing terrorists from acquiring or using bio, chemical, and nuclear weapons. This also then extends to investment of resources in creating resiliency in our critical infrastructure, to include our cyberinfrastructure. Our cyber vulnerabilities must be seen as a new landscape to be defended against state and non-state actors alike. By applying new technologies to a layered defense -- whether it involves screening and detection or integrated biometric analysis -- we can build barriers to entry and execution for any terrorist group seeking to perpetrate a strategically significant attack.

Establishing Long-Term Legal Framework and Tools

We are still in need of a long-term legal framework that allows us to address the realities of this global terrorist threat while ensuring adherence to our fundamental legal principles and the perceived legitimacy of our practices. There remains no consensus about how to hold suspected terrorists and insurgents in a seemingly endless global conflict, in which the theaters of conflict range from recognized war zones and ungoverned havens to city

centers and suburban neighborhoods.

Neither the laws of war nor criminal legal principles fit the challenges presented by an amorphous transnational enemy wearing no uniform and intending to inspire a religiously motivated movement to commit catastrophic atrocities. This is a hybrid conflict still in need of legal and policy innovation.

In May, President Obama formally announced a preventive detention system, admitting that there are some individuals too dangerous to release. This is an important decision that reflects the reality of the threats the president rightly perceives and the inadequacies of the current legal systems to deal with such threats. This is now also the recommendation from the Department of Justice-led review of the Guantanamo detainees.

The President and Congress should examine alternative systems or procedures to detain suspected terrorists preventively and obtain intelligence while ensuring individual rights. Several promising models have been put forward in this debate already – such as a new national security court – and elements from other systems around the world could prove useful, including rehabilitation programs as "half-way houses" for less dangerous violent extremists.

Whatever form this takes, the United States needs to establish transparent rules for justifying continued detention while protecting basic individual rights, and it will need to gain some degree of international legitimacy. This can only be achieved if the President and Congress commit capital and credibility to establishing such a system that can be defended in U.S. courts and in the court of public opinion.

Our efforts to defeat al Qaida require a long-term legal framework to address this 21st century terrorist threat.

Conclusion

Al Qaida and the movement it represents is an enemy that is morphing in structure and adapting to changing geopolitical landscapes, but one that retains the same radical vision and ideology and devotion to the use of terrorism. Despite our disruptions and aggressive counterterrorism actions against al Qaida leadership, this movement has found ways of extending its reach beyond the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region.

In the first instance, we must hasten al Qaida's demise while containing the post-al Qaida terrorist threat and the violent ideology that it spawned.