

**SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS FROM JULY 25, 2007 CARNEGIE-ASPEN
DIALOGUE ON THE “REAL” ROLE OF ISLAM IN MOTIVATING
TERRORISTS**

- Islam is a powerful narrative that is now being used to explain overarching global forces. It helps some to make sense of their political and social conditions. It speaks to those who, for one reason or another, are alienated from society and are seeking to belong to something and believe in something that is larger and more meaningful than the world they know. (A related point is that economic deprivation can be a cause of alienation, certainly, but it isn't the sole cause, and it may even be relatively unimportant. Many terrorists are relatively affluent and well-educated.)
- Many of those who are now Islamic radicals prone to terrorism would, in another time, be Marxist-Leninists, pan-Arab nationalists, or some other kind of, for want of a better term, “fanatical secularist” with a belief system that purports to explain the world as a whole and one's place in it. In other words, the underlying motivator is not so much “theology” as “ideology.”
- Indeed, many terrorists who cite Islam as justification for their actions have little, if any, religious training, and their religious arguments are puerile (i.e., a first-year law student holding forth on constitutional law as if he were a Supreme Court Justice). The terrorists are not true “jihadis;” they are simply a “death cult.”
- Associating these terrorists with Islam gives them religious credibility they do not deserve, and it serves to taint Islam by associating it with terrorism. It also leads some policymakers to attempt to “reform” Islam, when Islam is not the problem, and when, in any event, Western efforts to reform Islam are seen by even moderate Muslims as a “war *on* Islam.”
- To the extent political grievances are at play (and they play a large role), it is important to keep in mind that grievances like, for example, the Israeli-Palestinian dispute, pre-date today's Islamic radicalism.
- Polls show that, contrary to conventional wisdom, religion is not a motivator for terrorism. The motivators tend to be perception of U.S. (and Western) political policies; whether the U.S. (and the West in general) cares about the Muslim world; and whether there is any hope of improving ties between the U.S. (and the West in general) and the Muslim world. If anything, Muslims who reject the tactic of terrorism tend to cite Islam as justification for *opposing* terrorism.
- Too little attention has been paid in the U. S. and the West to the “Amman Message,” the pronouncement by scores of eminent Muslim theologians against terrorism. The Message is proof that there is a strong counterweight to radicalism, and that counterweight is not only in the Muslim community at large, but it is provided by Muslim clergy in the absence of a single authoritative voice on religious orthodoxy (like the Pope in the Roman Catholic Church).
- We in the U.S. and the West need to practice the democracy we preach. If we truly believe in political pluralism and free speech as both an end in itself

- and as a means ultimately to defeat terrorism, we must speak to and engage with groups like Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood that have used (or attempted to use) the political process to advance their agenda. Our hypocrisy in not engaging with such groups and dealing solely with authoritarian and corrupt governments can and does lead some Muslims who might otherwise be “moderate” or “mainstream” in their thinking to become still more radical and violence-prone.
- Just as associating terrorists with Islam confers a legitimacy on them that is not deserved, the same is true for terms like “enemy combatant.” Terrorists aren’t soldiers any more than they are true Islamists; they are criminals and thugs.
 - What the U.S. does in the world can have positive as well as negative effects with regard to terrorism. Our response to the tsunami in Indonesia and earthquakes and malaria in Pakistan, for example, are noted positively, and such actions can, at least to some degree, counterbalance abuses like Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib.
 - We need to reconstitute USIA (the United States Information Agency), so that we can do now what we did in the Cold War – blanket the parts of the world we are losing to public opinion with positive messages about America. We need to re-open libraries and cultural centers, as well as translate key texts into Arabic, Urdu, Pashto, and Farsi. (You can’t get Martin Luther King in Arabic.) We need to again promote educational and cultural “people-to-people” exchanges, even though the positive effects can take time to materialize and even though there is some risk that terrorists can slip through the vetting process.
 - It would help if the Muslim world in general knew that the U.S. government’s list of terrorist organizations includes some groups not affiliated in any way with Islam.
 - We need to push toward an agreement on a common, global definition of terrorism which would center on the targeting of civilians to achieve a “political” goal (“political,” in the sense of acquiring power).
 - The U.S. government can help by assuring Muslim “moderates” or “mainstream” thinkers that their participation in on-line chat rooms and blogs to counter radical thinking will not be misconstrued as terrorism-related and their names placed on watch lists.
 - Indeed, an “army of bloggers” should be engaged to take on the radicals.
 - We should applaud efforts underway to train young people to be religious pluralists.
 - Al Hurra and other U.S. government-sponsored responses to Al Jazeera and like outlets in the Muslim world are ludicrous and counterproductive.
 - Anti-Americanism is not the same as support for terrorism or Islamic radicalism. Especially in the last seven years, many people around the world who are strongly opposed to terrorism are strongly opposed to the United States (including many people in countries like Britain and France that have been historical allies). Equating the two is inaccurate and counterproductive.

- **To the extent that the U.S. government engages Muslims now, it tends to focus only on the most radical. This gives the radicals more legitimacy than they deserve, and it “disenfranchises” other, more moderate points of view within the community. The full spectrum of Muslim thinking should be appreciated and approached for insights.**
- **Government efforts are suspect, so consideration should be given to passing government funding through independent NGOs and contractors.**
- **To counter the dearth of American imams, we shouldn’t train them (as other countries do), but we should encourage peer-to-peer counseling in mosques so that impressionable people looking for direction can find counters to those who would radicalize them.**