EMPOWERING LOCAL PARTNERS TO PREVENT VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN THE UNITED STATES

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THE WHITE HOUSE

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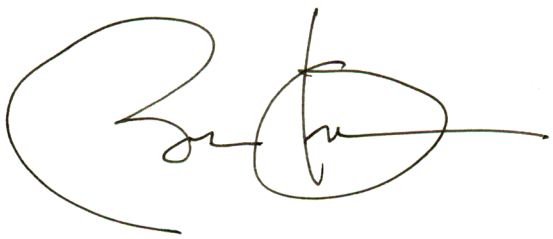
Sadly, the threat of violent extremism in America is nothing new. Throughout our history, misguided groups – including international and domestic terrorist organizations, neo-Nazis and anti-Semitic hate groups – have engaged in horrific violence to kill our citizens and threaten our way of life. Most recently, al-Qa'ida and its affiliates have attempted to recruit and radicalize people to terrorism here in the United States, as we have seen in several plots and attacks, including the deadly attack two years ago on our service members at Fort Hood.

As a government, we are working to prevent all types of extremism that leads to violence, regardless of who inspires it. At the same time, countering al-Qa'ida's violent ideology is one part of our comprehensive strategy to defeat al-Qa'ida. Over the past 2 1/2 years, more key al-Qa'ida leaders – including Usama bin Laden – have been eliminated in rapid succession than at any time since the September 11 attacks. We have strengthened homeland security and improved information sharing. Thanks to coordinated intelligence and law enforcement, numerous terrorist plots have been thwarted, saving many American lives.

Protecting American communities from al-Qa'ida's hateful ideology is not the work of government alone. Communities – especially Muslim American communities whose children, families and neighbors are being targeted for recruitment by al-Qa'ida – are often best positioned to take the lead because they know their communities best. Indeed, Muslim American communities have categorically condemned terrorism, worked with law enforcement to help prevent terrorist attacks, and forged creative programs to protect their sons and daughters from al-Qa'ida's murderous ideology.

The strategy that follows outlines how the Federal Government will support and help empower American communities and their local partners in their grassroots efforts to prevent violent extremism. This strategy commits the Federal Government to improving support to communities, including sharing more information about the threat of radicalization; strengthening cooperation with local law enforcement, who work with these communities every day; and helping communities to better understand and protect themselves against violent extremist propaganda, especially online.

Most of all, this strategy reaffirms the fundamental American principles that guide our efforts. As we approach the 10th anniversary of the September 11 attacks, we remember that al-Qa'ida tried to spark a conflict between faiths and divide us as Americans. But they failed. As this strategy makes clear, we will not waver in defense of our country or our communities. We will defeat al-Qa'ida and its affiliates. We will uphold the civil rights and civil liberties of every American. And we will go forward together, as Americans, knowing that our rich diversity of backgrounds and faiths makes us stronger and is a key to our national security.



Empowering Local Partners to Prevent Violent Extremism in the United States

"Several recent incidences of violent extremists in the United States who are committed to fighting here and abroad have underscored the threat to the United States and our interests posed by individuals radicalized at home. Our best defenses against this threat are well informed and equipped families, local communities, and institutions. The Federal Government will invest in intelligence to understand this threat and expand community engagement and development programs to empower local communities. And the Federal Government, drawing on the expertise and resources from all relevant agencies, will clearly communicate our policies and intentions, listening to local concerns, tailoring policies to address regional concerns, and making clear that our diversity is part of our strength—not a source of division or insecurity."

—National Security Strategy, May 2010

A. THE CHALLENGE

The seal of the United States of America is inscribed with the Latin dictum *E Pluribus Unum*—out of many, one. It is our great strength that the American social fabric continues to weave together waves of immigrants to the United States and people from all backgrounds and walks of life as part of an indivisible community. We are a pluralistic Nation and a society that does not just accept diversity; we embrace it, and we are stronger as a result. We surmount the many challenges that we face by remaining committed to the American ideals of freedom, equality, and democracy, which transcend differences of religion, ethnicity, and place of birth. Since America's founding, our country and our ideals have been assailed by forces of hate and division, yet we remain strong, unified, and resilient.

Throughout history, violent extremists—individuals who support or commit ideologically-motivated violence to further political goals—have promoted messages of divisiveness and justified the killing of innocents. The United States Constitution recognizes freedom of expression, even for individuals who espouse unpopular or even hateful views. But when individuals or groups choose to further their grievances or ideologies through violence, by engaging in violence themselves or by recruiting and encouraging others to do so, it becomes the collective responsibility of the U.S. Government and the American people to take a stand. In recent history, our country has faced plots by neo-Nazis and other anti-Semitic hate groups, racial supremacists, and international and domestic terrorist groups; and since the September 11 attacks, we have faced an expanded range of plots and attacks in the United States inspired or directed by al-Qa'ida and its affiliates and adherents as well as other violent extremists. Supporters of these groups and their associated ideologies come from different socioeconomic backgrounds, ethnic and religious communities, and areas of the country, making it difficult to predict where violent extremist narratives will resonate. And as history has shown, the prevalence of particular violent extremist ideologies changes over time, and new threats will undoubtedly arise in the future.

We rely on our local, state, and Federal law enforcement to deter individuals from using violence and to protect communities from harm. But we also must ensure that the right tools are applied at the right time to the right situation. Countering radicalization to violence is frequently best achieved by engaging and empowering individuals and groups at the local level to build resilience against violent extremism. Law enforcement plays an essential role in keeping us safe, but so too does engagement and partnership with communities.

While we can and must prioritize our efforts, our approach should be enduring and flexible enough to address a variety of current and possible future threats. Individuals from a broad array of communities and walks of life in the United States have been radicalized to support or commit acts of ideologically-inspired violence. Any solution that focuses on a single, current form of violent extremism, without regard to other threats, will fail to secure our country and communities. Our threat environment is constantly evolving, which is why we must consistently revisit our priorities and ensure our domestic approach can address multiple types of violent extremism.

Today, as detailed in the *National Security Strategy* and the *National Strategy for Counterterrorism*, al-Qa'ida and its affiliates and adherents represent the preeminent terrorist threat to our country. We know that these groups are actively seeking to recruit or inspire Americans to carry out attacks against the United States, particularly as they are facing greater pressure in their safe-havens abroad. The past several years have seen increased numbers of American citizens or residents inspired by al-Qa'ida's ideology and involved in terrorism. Some have traveled overseas to train or fight, while others have been involved in supporting, financing, or plotting attacks in the homeland. The number of individuals remains limited, but the fact that al-Qa'ida and its affiliates and adherents are openly and specifically inciting Americans to support or commit acts of violence—through videos, magazines, and online forums—poses an ongoing and real threat.

This type of violent extremism is a complicated challenge for the United States, not only because of the threat of attacks, but also because of its potential to divide us. Groups and individuals supporting al-Qa'ida's vision are attempting to lure Americans to terrorism in order to create support networks and facilitate attack planning, but this also has potential to create a backlash against Muslim Americans. Such a backlash would feed al-Qa'ida's propaganda that our country is anti-Muslim and at war against Islam, handing our enemies a strategic victory by turning our communities against one another; eroding our shared sense of identity as Americans; feeding terrorist recruitment abroad; and threatening our fundamental values of religious freedom and pluralism. Violent extremists prey on the disenchantment and alienation that discrimination creates, and they have a vested interest in anti-Muslim sentiment. It is for this reason that our security—preventing radicalization that leads to violence—is inextricably linked to our values: the protection of civil rights and civil liberties and the promotion of an inclusive society.

B. A COMMUNITY-BASED APPROACH

The United States relies on a broad range of tools and capabilities that are essential to prevent violent extremism in the United States, emphasizing, in particular, the strength of communities as central to our approach. The best defenses against violent extremist ideologies are well-informed and equipped families, local communities, and local institutions. Their awareness of the threat and willingness to

work with one another and government is part of our long history of community-based initiatives and partnerships dealing with a range of public safety challenges. Communities are best placed to recognize and confront the threat because violent extremists are targeting their children, families, and neighbors. Rather than blame particular communities, it is essential that we find ways to help them protect themselves. To do so, we must continue to ensure that all Americans understand that they are an essential part of our civic life and partners in our efforts to combat violent extremist ideologies and organizations that seek to weaken our society.

We are fortunate that our experience with community-based problem solving, local partnerships, and community-oriented policing provides a basis for addressing violent extremism as part of a broader mandate of community safety. We therefore are building our efforts to counter radicalization that leads to violence in the United States from existing structures, while creating capacity to fill gaps as we implement programs and initiatives. Rather than creating a new architecture of institutions and funding, we are utilizing successful models, increasing their scope and scale where appropriate.

While communities must often lead this effort, the Federal Government has a significant responsibility. Our research and consultations with local stakeholders, communities, and foreign partners have underscored that the Federal Government's most effective role in strengthening community partnerships and preventing violent extremism is as a facilitator, convener, and source of information. The Federal Government will often be ill-suited to intervene in the niches of society where radicalization to violence takes place, but it can foster partnerships to support communities through its connections to local government, law enforcement, Mayor's offices, the private sector, local service providers, academia, and many others who can help prevent violent extremism. Federal departments and agencies have begun expanding support to local stakeholders and practitioners who are on the ground and positioned to develop grassroots partnerships with the communities they serve.

C. GOAL AND AREAS OF PRIORITY ACTION

Our central goal in this effort is to prevent violent extremists and their supporters from inspiring, radicalizing, financing, or recruiting individuals or groups in the United States to commit acts of violence. The U.S. Government will work tirelessly to counter support for violent extremism and to ensure that, as new violent groups and ideologies emerge, they fail to gain a foothold in our country. Achieving this aim requires that we all work together—government, communities, the private sector, the general public, and others—to develop effective programs and initiatives.

> "As extremists try to inspire acts of violence within our borders, we are responding with the strength of our communities, with the respect for the rule of law, and with the conviction that Muslim Americans are part of our American family."
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> *—President Barack Obama, State of the Union, January 2011*

To support a community-based approach, the Federal Government is working to strengthen partnerships and networks among local stakeholders. There is no single issue or grievance that pushes individuals toward supporting or committing violence, and the path to violent extremism can vary considerably. As a result, it is essential that we empower local partners, who can more readily identify problems as they emerge and customize responses so that they are appropriate and effective for

Leveraging Existing Models

The United States has rich experience in supporting locally-based initiatives that connect communities and government to address community challenges through collaboration and the development of stakeholder networks. While recognizing that different challenges require the involvement of different stakeholders, we view community-based problem solving as an effective model of organizing communities and government to counter violent extremism in the homeland. The following provides three examples of this model in practice.

Example One: Comprehensive Gang Model

The Department of Justice's *Comprehensive Gang Model* is a flexible framework that communities can use to reduce or prevent gang activity, involving strategies of community mobilization, social intervention, opportunities for educational and vocational advancements, and organizational change. Local community organizations and government offices responsible for addressing gangs—police, schools, probation officers, youth agencies, grassroots organizations, government, and others—help identify causes, recommend appropriate responses, and select activities for local implementation, supported by integrated Federal, state, and local resources to incorporate state-of-the-art practices in gang prevention, intervention, and suppression. This multi-dimensional, community-led response to gangs—driven by local stakeholders and supported by the Federal Government—has reduced serious gang-related crimes in affected locations across the country.

Example Two: Building Communities of Trust Initiative

The Departments of Justice and Homeland Security established the *Building Communities of Trust (BCOT) Initiative* to improve trust among police, fusion centers, and the communities they serve in order to address the challenges of crime and terrorism prevention. In support of BCOT, a National Planning Team comprised of representatives from Federal, state, and local governments; community organizations; and privacy and civil liberties groups convened and, in select locations, conducted roundtables to explore how to build and maintain relationships of trust. Lessons learned from these roundtables have resulted in official guidance highlighting the importance of meaningful information sharing, responding to community concerns, and distinguishing between innocent cultural behaviors and conduct that may legitimately reflect criminal activity or terrorism precursors.

Example Three: Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative

Responding to a series of lethal school shootings in the late 1990's, which culminated with the tragedy at Columbine High School, the Departments of Education, Justice, and Health and Human Services launched the *Safe Schools/Healthy Students (SS/HS) Initiative* to create broader, more comprehensive local programs to prevent violence and substance abuse among our Nation's youth, schools, and communities. In order to receive an SS/HS grant, school districts must partner with local mental health experts, juvenile justice officials, and law enforcement. Proposals must include programs that address violence and substance abuse prevention; social, emotional, and behavioral development; school and community-based mental health services; and early childhood development. According to an ongoing evaluation, the Initiative has resulted in fewer students experiencing or witnessing violence, increased school safety, and an overall decrease in violence in communities where the program is active.

particular individuals, groups, and locations. To that end, we have prioritized three broad areas of action where we believe the Federal Government can provide value to supporting partnerships at the local level and countering violent extremism. Our work will evolve over time as we enhance partnerships and further our understanding of what tools and methods are most effective.

1. Enhancing Federal Engagement with and Support to Local Communities that May be Targeted by Violent Extremists

Communication and meaningful engagement with the American public is an essential part of the Federal Government's work. Our open system of governance requires that we respond to inquiries; educate and share information on our programs, policies, and initiatives; and provide a platform for communities to air grievances and contribute their views on policy and government. We do this consistently in a variety of ways: we convene forums, develop brochures, respond to correspondence, post information on websites, and we make available for comment proposed regulations in the *Federal Register*. We also reach out to communities directly to answer questions and provide information and guidance, offering opportunities for communities to provide valuable suggestions about how government can be more effective and responsive in addressing their concerns. As such, engagement with local communities provides an opportunity for us to reexamine and improve how we perform our functions. For these reasons, we view effective community engagement as an essential part of good governance and an important end in itself.

The vast majority of our engagement work relates to issues outside the national security arena, such as jobs, education, health, and civil rights. We must ensure that in our efforts to support community-based partnerships to counter violent extremism, we remain engaged in the full range of community concerns and interests, and do not narrowly build relationships around national security issues alone. Where appropriate, we are relying on preexisting Federal Government engagement efforts to discuss violent extremism, ensuring that these forums continue to focus on a wide variety of issues. There are instances when the government needs to build new relationships to address security issues, but these must be predicated upon multifaceted engagement. Indeed, we refuse to limit our engagement to what we are against, because we need to support active engagement in civic and democratic life and help forge partnerships that advance what we are for, including opportunity and equal treatment for all.

Engagement is essential for supporting community-based efforts to prevent violent extremism because it allows government and communities to share information, concerns, and potential solutions. Our aims in engaging with communities to discuss violent extremism are to (1) share sound, meaningful, and timely information about the threat of radicalization to violence with a wide range of community groups and organizations, particularly those involved in public safety issues; (2) respond to community concerns about government policies and actions; and (3) better understand how we can effectively support community-based solutions.

In addition to engaging communities on a wide range of issues, the Federal Government is using its convening power to help build a network of individuals, groups, civil society organizations, and private sector actors to support community-based efforts to counter violent extremism. Myriad groups with tools and capabilities to counter radicalization to violence often operate in separate spheres of activity and therefore do not know one another. The Federal Government, with its connections to diverse

networks across the country, has a unique ability to draw together the constellation of previously unconnected efforts and programs to form a more cohesive enterprise against violent extremism.

2. Building Government and Law Enforcement Expertise for Preventing Violent Extremism

Although we have learned a great deal about radicalization that leads to violence, we can never assume that the dynamics will remain the same. We must be vigilant in identifying, predicting, and preempting new developments. This necessitates ongoing research and analysis, as well as exchanges with individuals, communities, and government officials who work on the frontlines to counter the threats we all face. In addition, we will continue to hold meetings with foreign partners to share experiences and best practices, recognizing that while not all lessons are transferable to the American context, this sharing can help us improve our approach and avoid common pitfalls.

Government and law enforcement at the local level have well-established relationships with communities, developed through years of consistent engagement, and therefore can effectively build partnerships and take action on the ground. To help facilitate local partnerships to prevent violent extremism, the Federal Government is building a robust training program with rigorous curriculum standards to ensure that the training that communities; local, state, and tribal governments; prison officials; and law enforcement receive is based on intelligence, research, and accurate information about how people are radicalized to accept violence, and what has worked to prevent violent extremism. Misinformation about the threat and dynamics of radicalization to violence can harm our security by sending local stakeholders in the wrong direction and unnecessarily creating tensions with potential community partners. We also are working to support and expand community-oriented policing efforts by our state, local, and tribal partners, and to assist them in enhancing cultural proficiency and other foundations for effective community engagement.

3. Countering Violent Extremist Propaganda While Promoting Our Ideals

Radicalization that leads to violent extremism includes the diffusion of ideologies and narratives that feed on grievances, assign blame, and legitimize the use of violence against those deemed responsible. We must actively and aggressively counter the range of ideologies violent extremists employ to radicalize and recruit individuals by challenging justifications for violence and by actively promoting the unifying and inclusive vision of our American ideals.

Toward this end, we will continue to closely monitor the important role the internet and social networking sites play in advancing violent extremist narratives. We protect our communities from a variety of online threats, such as sexual predators, by educating them about safety on the internet, and we are using a similar approach to thwart violent extremists. We will work to empower families and communities to counter online violent extremist propaganda, which is increasingly in English and targeted at American audiences.

For example, in the case of our current priority, we must counter al-Qa'ida's propaganda that the United States is somehow at war with Islam. There is no single profile of an al-Qa'ida-inspired terrorist, but extensive investigations and research show that they all believe: (1) the United States is out to destroy Islam; and (2) this justifies violence against Americans. Al-Qa'ida and its supporters spread messages of

hate, twist facts, and distort religious principles to weave together a false narrative that Muslims must attack Americans everywhere because the United States is waging a global war against Islam. While al-Qa'ida claims to be the vanguard of Islam, the overwhelming majority of its victims are Muslim.

We will challenge this propaganda through our words and deeds, defined by the very ideals of who we are as Americans. As the President has stated repeatedly, the United States is not, and never will be, at war with Islam. Islam is part of America, a country that cherishes the active participation of all its citizens, regardless of background and belief. We live what al-Qa'ida violently rejects—religious freedom and pluralism. We have emphasized a paradigm of engagement with Muslim communities around the world, based on mutual respect and interest manifest in our new partnerships and programming to promote entrepreneurship, health, science and technology, educational exchanges, and opportunities for women.

But we must remember that just as our words and deeds can either fuel or counter violent ideologies abroad, so too can they here at home. Actions and statements that cast suspicion toward entire communities, promote hatred and division, and send messages to certain Americans that they are somehow less American because of their faith or how they look, reinforce violent extremist propaganda and feed the sense of disenchantment and disenfranchisement that may spur violent extremist radicalization. The Federal Government will work to communicate clearly about al-Qa'ida's destructive and bankrupt ideology, while dispelling myths and misperceptions that blame communities for the actions of a small number of violent extremists.

D. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

How we define and discuss the challenge of radicalization to violence matters. Violent extremism, while of paramount importance given the potential for harm, is only one among a number of threats our Nation is facing. Communities face an array of challenges to their safety, including gang violence, school shootings, drugs, hate crimes, and many others. Just as we respond to community safety issues through partnerships and networks of government officials, Mayor's offices, law enforcement, community organizations, and private sector actors, so must we address radicalization to violence and terrorist recruitment through similar relationships and by leveraging some of the same tools and solutions. In doing so, we are guided by the following principles:

We must continually enhance our understanding of the threat posed by violent extremism and the ways in which individuals or groups seek to radicalize Americans, adapting our approach as needed. As al-Qa'ida and its affiliates and adherents increasingly aim to inspire people within the United States to commit acts of terrorism, we must closely monitor and understand their tactics, both online and offline, remaining nimble in our response, increasing our understanding of the factors that lead individuals to turn to violence, and calibrating our efforts.

We must do everything in our power to protect the American people from violent extremism while protecting the civil rights and civil liberties of every American. Protecting our fundamental rights and liberties is an important end in itself, and also helps counter violent extremism by ensuring nonviolent means for addressing policy concerns; safeguarding equal and fair treatment; and making it more difficult for violent extremists to divide our communities.

As the President said at the National Archives in May 2009, "We uphold our fundamental principles and values not just because we choose to, but because we swear to. Not because they feel good, but because they help keep us safe. They keep us true to who we are . . . So as Americans, we reject the false choice between our security and our ideals. We can and we must and we will protect both."

We must build partnerships and provide support to communities based on mutual trust, respect, and understanding. We must have honest dialogue between communities and government that is transparent and promotes community-based problem solving.

We must use a wide range of good governance programs—including those that promote immigrant integration and civic engagement, protect civil rights, and provide social services—that may help prevent radicalization that leads to violence. This necessitates a whole-of-government approach, based on the expertise of our traditional national security departments and agencies, as well as other parts of the government, including those with experience in addressing community safety issues.

We must support local capabilities and programs to address problems of national concern. While the demographics of communities and the priorities of local government, communities, and law enforcement vary, our efforts to prevent radicalization to violence and terrorist recruitment must harness the knowledge, expertise, and relationships of local actors, both in and out of government.

Government officials and the American public should not stigmatize or blame communities because of the actions of a handful of individuals. We must instead support communities as partners, recognizing that a particular ethnic, religious, or national background does not necessarily equate to special knowledge or expertise in addressing violent extremism. Where communities have been active in condemning terrorism and confronting violent extremism, we must recognize their efforts; help them build upon their work; and connect them with other communities and stakeholders in order to share best practices.

Strong religious beliefs should never be confused with violent extremism. Freedom of religion is a fundamental American right and one of our most strongly held values. Since our founding, people of diverse and strongly held religious faiths have thrived in America.

Though we will not tolerate illegal activities, opposition to government policy is neither illegal nor unpatriotic and does not make someone a violent extremist. It is a basic tenet of our democracy that citizens of good conscience can respectfully disagree with one another and resolve their differences through peaceful means. Our Nation is built upon the principles of debate, dialogue, and cooperation.