



NEWS

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American Muslim leaders provide analysis to strengthen US efforts against militant Islamist terror

AILC proposes key revisions to Obama administration's latest National Strategy on Counterterrorism

Washington, DC (July 19, 2011) – The [American Islamic Leadership Coalition](#) (AILC) issued a policy communiqué today noting both improvements and glaring omissions in the Obama administration's recently released [National Strategy on Counterterrorism \(NSCT\)](#) and recommending revisions to increase the effectiveness of the strategy. The AILC is a group of more than 25 organizations and leaders representative of the overwhelming "silent majority" of Muslims in America—who span a wide gamut of religious beliefs and adhere to diverse social and cultural practices. As Muslims dedicated to helping the U.S. government to protect our nation, AILC leaders are offering their vision of a genuine solutions-based approach against the threat of Islamist terror.

The NSCT is the guiding document for the U.S. government's efforts to combat terrorism around the world. The Obama administration received significant criticism because its previous version of the NSCT failed to identify the ideological underpinning of terrorism and because the document deliberately avoided using terminology such as "Islamism," which refers to a political ideology that underlies and animates not only al-Qa'ida -style terrorism, but also other movements that seek to establish a theocratic state.

Some key elements in the current strategy are promising. These include the recognition that there is an ideological underpinning to terrorism; advocating the dissemination of positive views of the US and our values; confirmation that it is and shall remain U.S. strategy to maintain a robust military counter-terrorism protocol in regions of the world where Islamist militants execute terrorist campaigns; and acknowledgement that the administration must work with Muslim groups to implement the strategy.

The latest NSCT has made significant steps forward, in particular in its recognition that there is an ideology that drives terror. If we ever truly hope to defeat Islamist terrorism we have to recognize that the battle is first and foremost ideological. But we must also recognize the deep diversity of the Muslim community, and we must identify our counter-terrorism partners by the ideological positions of their organizations. In addition, we must develop a comprehensive, proactive strategy that demonstrates to Muslims around the world that their faith is more secure in an environment that promotes and protects the freedom of each individual. The AILC hopes the administration will utilize its critique to strengthen the NSCT to be an effective document for securing the United States.

AILC recommends that the administration update the NSCT to:

- Clearly and publicly define the ideology of al-Qa'ida and the terror organizations that we seek to defeat;
- Distinguish between the religion of Islam and Islamist ideology ("a distorted interpretation of Islam"), whose adherents seek to conflate their own theocratic, statist agenda with Islam itself;

- Acknowledge the diversity of American Muslims, and recognize that genuinely pluralistic, tolerant and spiritual Muslim leaders possess the theological legitimacy, authority and credibility required to counter Islamist ideology and movements *from within Islam*, and should be encouraged and supported in their efforts to do so;
- Engage non-Islamist Muslim groups to help develop and implement effective counter-radicalization programs that affirm the principles of liberty and individual rights;
- Facilitate the production of compelling content (“narratives”) and their distribution, through proactive use of the internet, which is one of al-Qa’ida’s primary means of ideological indoctrination and recruitment;
- Support the development of robust, on-the-ground efforts to expose the brutal reality of Islamist oppression, violence and terror, and contrast it with American values.

“The current NSCT is better than its previous iteration, in that it correctly identifies ideology—specifically, ‘*a distorted interpretation of Islam*’—as a key enabling factor of al-Qa’ida-style terrorism,” said Dr. M. Zuhdi Jasser, AILC member. “However, in order to actually counter this ideology, our government must take the additional step of identifying it for what it is: a militant form of political Islam, or ‘Islamism.’ Although the NSCT uses the term ideology 20 times within a 17 page document, its failure to identify the exact nature of this ideology suggests a continued unwillingness to confront the root cause of terrorism.”

“While we applaud the administration’s recognition that it must work with Muslim organizations to implement change, we are concerned that they do not realize the diversity of thought within Muslim communities and thus may not engage with a truly representative group of organizations,” said AILC member Manda Ervin.

According to C. Holland Taylor, another AILC member, “We must recognize the diversity of Muslim populations in the U.S. and abroad, and carefully select our counter-radicalization partners on the basis of their principled rejection of Islamist ideology, rather than on the basis of tactical differences they may have with al-Qa’ida, when the ultimate objective they hope to achieve—the establishment of a theocratic state, and/or caliphate—is virtually identical.”

Individual AILC Muslim leaders and organizations that are signatories to this policy communiqué are listed below. [To view the full version of the AILC’s critique and policy recommendations, please visit http://americanislamicleadership.org/ailc_response_nsct](http://americanislamicleadership.org/ailc_response_nsct)

About the American Islamic Leadership Coalition (AILC)

The American Islamic Leadership Coalition (AILC) is a diverse coalition of liberty-minded, North American Muslim leaders and organizations. AILC’s mission advocates for defending the US Constitution, upholding religious pluralism, protecting American security and cherishing genuine diversity in the faith and practice of Islam. AILC provides a stark alternative to the Islamist organizations that claim to speak for what are diverse American Muslim communities. For more information on AILC, please visit our website at <http://www.americanislamicleadership.org/>.

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