Center for Strategic and International Studies

CSIS Commission on Countering Violent Extremism

Keynote Remarks:
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Co-Chair, CSIS Commission on Countering Violent Extremism

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Introductory Remarks:
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Closing Remarks:
Farah Pandith,
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JOHN J. HAMRE: Well, good morning, everybody. I hope that you appreciate that we ordered up London weather this morning. (Laughter.) And we were joking with the prime minister that we thought we wanted to make him at home, and he feels at home.

First of all, before we do public events, we always have a little safety announcement. Probably more appropriate today than ever. Shannon Green, who's going to be here, she's the responsible safety officer. So if anything does happen, please follow her instructions. Our exits are right back behind us. These doors, the exit, that'll take us – that's the closest one to go down to the street. If the problem's in the front, we're going to go to the back, and we will rendezvous over at the National Geographic. If the problem's in the back, we're going to go to the front, and we'll go over to St. Matthew's. We have arrangements with both of them. So follow our instructions. Nothing's going to happen, but I just want to be prepared.

You know, it – I was thinking about today, and I'm very grateful that Prime Minister Blair is going to – he and Leon Panetta are going to lead this effort. And I'm very grateful for the commissioners who are willing to devote some time to this. I was thinking back, you know, to the start of the Cold War. Nobody knew when that war was going to end, but we put in place a strategy – a comprehensive strategy. You know, the military side – NATO was an important part, but NATO's real role was to serve as a political framework for Europe. The military had a minor role. That was to ensure there was no intimidation, you know, that prevented the political strategy from succeeding. And we didn't know when it was going to end, but it was hugely successful.

We've now been 15 years after 9/11, and we don't have a strategy. We're still just drifting. And our goal here with this effort – and I'm so grateful that someone of Prime Minister Blair's stature and intellect would be willing to lead an effort here for us to try to think our way through what is the strategy, and hopefully with this bipartisan commission will be able to hand a very meaningful product to the next president.

This is the launch today. We're very grateful for having all of you here to be a participant to it, and we are looking forward very much to hearing Prime Minister Blair. Obviously, he doesn't need an introduction, especially in Washington. He's well known and highly regarded in Washington, and we're very proud to have him here.

Would you please, with your warm applause, welcome Prime Minister Tony Blair. (Applause.)

TONY BLAIR: Thank you. (Applause.) Thank you. (Applause.) Thank you. Thank you very much indeed. And thank you, John, and thank you indeed for arranging the weather, and was very thoughtful of you – (laughter) – but not entirely necessary. We get enough of it back home.

So this initiative of the CSIS is timely. The threat of violent extremism is growing, casting its shadow over ever-larger parts of the globe. There is a justified anxiety that we do not, as of now, despite all the experience and some progress, have a fully effective strategy to counter

it. Populist solutions, which are not solutions at all, are gaining ground on both sides of the Atlantic. But the reality is this: There is no safety in isolation. This is a struggle with no borders, no zones of immunity, and no volition as to whether to participate. And there is no solution founded on denial of the essential nature of the problem. At its heart is a struggle about and within Islam, a violent struggle played out with profound implications for our security, our cohesion, and the future of a religion followed by over 1.6 billion people – a religion of peace and honor which is under attack from an enemy within.

We need allies. There are dimensions of this challenge that only allies, particularly within Islam, can lead. But without our leadership – our meaning the West – this fight cannot be won. So there is an urgent need to develop a strategy that is comprehensive, has weight, is capable of building the right alliances, and can be a practical guide to those charged with the responsibility in office of defeating this threat.

Both Leon Panetta, with whom it is an honor to be serving, and I have experience in government of dealing with this challenge. Providentially, we cover both periods of policymaking since 9/11 – in my case, 2001 to 2007; and in his, from 2009 to 2013. The commission assembled by CSIS has immensely distinguished people on it with a broad range of expertise, and CSIS has a top-class group of researchers and thinkers, as you know.

So our aim is to produce something strong, clear and realistic: it is to offer an agenda for the successful surmounting of this challenge so that nations, faiths, and cultures can live in harmony and peace with each other, and so that our citizens can live free from the fear of the terrorism that over these past years has taken the lives of so many innocents. We know the issue is complex, and that it will take time to reach our goal. But the sooner we chart the right path forward, the sooner we will do so. And I think we all know that what we're doing at present is inadequate.

My foundation's research arm, the Center for Religion and Geopolitics, tracks extremism across the world day by day. It lists the various terror-related incidents, and also it produces in-depth analysis of the different groups responsible and the underlying issues connected with areas of conflict. Take any day – take yesterday. We reported on terrorism in Syria, missing radioactive material in Iraq found by officials, suicide attacks in Cameroon, roadside bombs in Somalia, Taliban claims to have blown up a girls' school in Waziristan, the beheading of a Hindu priest in Bangladesh, arrested suspected terrorists in Indonesia, travel warnings by the Australian government about Malaysia, Kurdish reports on the use of chemical weapons by ISIS, executions by jihadists in the Sinai, Kenyan action against al-Shabaab, the French prime minister in Mali amid concerns of AQ-linked violence there and in Burkina Faso, arrests in Russia connected with extremism, and moves to try to overcome extremism and establish peace in the Philippines. One day.

Yesterday, we published our first monthly monitor of extremism. It shows that in January 2016 alone over 20 different countries suffered terrorist incidents. Over 50 different countries were forced to take counterterrorism measures of one kind of another. Thousands of people died. Hundreds of thousands were displaced.

So this problem is growing and it is global. We focus on the Middle East, but in reality Africa is suffering hugely, the Far East has a much bigger problem than is generally understood, and Central Asia should be on everyone's watch list. Europe's security services are on constant alert, as are those here in the USA.

Naturally, we tend to highlight the actual acts of terrorism, but this is not the only consequence of extremism. The transition taking place all over North Africa and the Middle East since the so-called Arab Spring is complicated, distorted, thrown off-course by extremism and violence. These countries have young populations striving for political and economic change. But this takes time, and best happens through a process of steady evolution – or, where revolution has occurred, with some ability to manage events. Countries with weak institutions need stability and political space to mature. Extremism and the terror it brings shred the stability and shrink the space. We saw this with the removal of the Taliban in Afghanistan and Saddam Hussein in Iraq. But since 2011 and the Arab uprisings, we see it across North Africa and the Middle East, in Libya, Syria, Yemen; even in Egypt and Tunisia.

When, some years ago, I participated along with President Clinton in the military action in Kosovo, in 1998-9, we were able to stop the killing and, in effect, remove the dictatorship of Milosevic. And the road since then has been rocky, the tasks of reconciliation and reconstruction have been immense, but the absence of extremism afforded us the time and space. And for all the challenges which continue to exist, Serbia and Albania's leaders now cooperate with each other, and both nations – which are functioning democracies – have candidate status within the EU. The Balkans remains tense, but it no longer threatens the peace of Europe.

Unfortunately, these conditions don't apply in the Middle East. In the countries of the northern part of sub-Saharan Africa also, extremism and terrorism are probably the single biggest inhibitor of development. Poverty and poor governance are usually cited as the reasons for lack of progress. This is true, but extremism makes all these problems worse and harder to resolve.

Resolution of the conflict in Syria is undermined and complicated by the presence of ISIS and other radical groups which confuse the outside world, whose help is so desperately needed for the Syrian people. And they provide some color of excuse for Assad as he seeks to retain power against the wishes of a majority.

In turn, this has created a crisis in Europe. Hundreds of thousands of people fleeing from Syria and other conflict zones are making their way across Europe. Their plight is tragic, but it's important to understand why Europe finds this so difficult. Of course we should be generous and welcome to those fleeing persecution. The vast majority of those wretched and dispossessed people are refugees risking their lives for freedom. They deserve our compassion and our help. However, the debate in Europe is also a security issue. Screening entrants is tough to do with certainty. In addition, we're bringing people in from very different cultures, with in some cases different norms of behavior and a different understanding about citizenship. This can be overcome, of course, but not easily, and not at speed with these numbers. So the presence and the fear of extremism complicates the resolution of the European refugee crisis, making the host nations afraid to do what otherwise would be difficult, but tolerable. And added to all of this is

the massive cost of the security measures nations are forced to take around the world to prevent acts of terrorism.

So it is not just the acts of terror alone and their impact on the innocent victims, their families, friends and neighborhoods which trouble us. The consequences go far and wide; are geopolitical, as well as parochial; affect the development of nations, and not only the well-being of communities; stunt progress and cause harm; derail positive change, advance negative change; and entrench attitudes of fear and division even within our own societies, rather than welcome and coexistence.

Yet, we still have no consensus as to how we define the nature of the threat. We can all agree on the need to fight terrorism, but I mean we do not as yet have a full explanation of how this threat has arisen, why it is so rampant, what are its drivers, and what are its root causes. To what extent is it about religion? Or is it, rather, the product of social and economic factors? Does it help to call it Islamist extremism, or does that alienate the very people we need on side to defeat it? Above all, is the problem a fringe group of fanatics addicted to violence? Or is the root cause a spectrum of opinion within Islam united by an ideology of extremist Islamism, which is a far greater sway and includes at the one end of it the jihadists and at the other those who may not support violence, but nonetheless share much of the same worldview? If the latter, how do we define it? And how do we defeat something that is plainly much bigger and more pervasive than the small number of those attracted to groups like Daesh?

These are highly contestable questions, but they do require answering. I have studied them in office and out of it for over 50 years. I'm roughly twice a month in the Middle East. I've watched the debate evolve through 9/11; the conflicts of Afghanistan and Iraq; the 7/7 attacks in London; the Arab uprisings of 2011, which have convulsed the region; the battles in Libya, Syria, Yemen; the twists and turns of Egyptian revolution; and I have been engaged in one form or another throughout in the Middle East peace process, or lack of it. In addition, through my Africa Governance Initiative, I've witnessed the efforts of presidents in Nigeria, Kenya and elsewhere to stem the tide of terror attacks, and seen counties in Asia with significant Muslim populations whose cohesion and tolerance have been put under pressure from radicalizing elements totally at odds with those countries' true traditions.

Now, I believe that, of course, this is something the commission should test – that the problem is not a fringe of fanatics, but a spectrum within ideology; that this ideology has its roots in the perversion of religion, the religion of Islam; and a worldview derived from it which is innately hostile to the West and to peaceful coexistence between those of different faiths – and that if we do not challenge and defeat this ideology, we will never eradicate the violence which is the product of it.

Islam, as practiced as the overwhelming majority of Muslims, is a peaceful faith which has contributed greatly to human development. This ideology is not true to the proper and historic traditions and beliefs of Islam. Indeed, it's contrary to them. But neither is it a recent phenomenon, a fad, a transient explosion of aggression unconnected to a deeper way of thinking. It has grown, at first almost unnoticed, for over half a century. It has, unfortunately, reached way beyond the activities of a few fanatics measured in the tens of thousands. The ideology, or at

least significant parts of it, are accepted by those measured in the tens of millions. Most of those will be opposed to violence, but they share the close-minded view of religion that is hostile to those who do not share it.

Defining the challenge is, in my view, prerequisite to defeating it because it changes critically the policy responses, both their substance and their scope, and the alliances necessary for victory. In particular, it moves us from a pure security or de-radicalization response, important though that is, to a much wider and more profound engagement around issues, relationships and attitudes. See, I think the problem is not simply terrorist action, but extremist thinking – that there is a connection between the belief that women are the property of men to the kidnapping of Nigerian girls; that support for draconian blasphemy laws gives succor to those who kill the opponents of such laws; that preaching anti-Semitism motivates those who attack Jews; that teaching that Islam is under assault from the West creates an intellectual environment in which violence is incubated; that disrespect for those who are of a different faith leads to a culture incompatible with our modern world, which only functions through diversity and respect for difference.

So commission will analyze and debate these arguments, and it will focus on every aspect of the challenge. It will seek to provide what I might term a practical policy guide and handbook for those currently, or indeed prospectively, in office.

And let me describe three areas of inquiry. First, we will analyze the motivations, the triggers and drivers of Islamist extremism. This will obviously concern how people become radicalized, but it also allows us to go into the deeper ideological nature of the threat and the degree to which the ideology behind the extremism drives the violence. One especial area for inquiry is around the systems of education, formal and informal, in different countries, including our own, and an examination of whether the teaching of a narrow religious curriculum creates a potentially dangerous learning environment. Another is the degree to which the deprivation of political rights encourages the development of extreme thinking. We will analyze the abuse of religion in fomenting extremism, and also how mainstream religious voices can help defeat it theologically as well as politically. We will probe the position of women, both as victims and as those who might join Salafi jihadist groups, and as advocates of counter-radicalization. The point is that our interest is not simply in looking at radicalization in the conventional sense – i.e., those who become involved with groups like Daesh or AQ – but in looking at the underlying factors and their origins, the worldview that sees those who do not share a particular religious position as heretics and infidels.

Secondly, in respect of the security dimensions of the issue, we want to go further than merely what we do to keep our nations safe – the counterterrorism measures, if you like – important though those are. We also want to look at the lessons we can learn from the military engagement of the jihadist groups. What are the effective ways of confronting them, eliminating their ability to hold territory? And what methods yield the best results with the maximum speed? It is central to the recruitment strategy of the jihadists that they are able to proclaim a so-called caliphate, able to present as being masters of a space that they govern. Wherever they manifest themselves, it is clearly crucial that they are confronted immediately. But how do we develop the capability to do that? What forces and what type of coalitions do we need? When they get a

foothold, what is the best way of dislodging them quickly, before they get traction? How do we achieve early warning of potential problems and deal with them preventively?

And this leads to the thirds issue, which is how to create the necessary partnership and alliances. Confrontation of jihadist groups is rarely undertaken by one country's forces on their own. And even when it is, there is outside support usually necessary. So nations are inevitably pooling their efforts, combining force capability, and working together on the battlefield. Yet, this happens at present on an ad hoc basis with a series of hastily put together coalitions. Now, maybe this is unavoidable, but it is absolutely germane, surely, to examine whether there couldn't be a more systematic way of assembling the right capabilities in rapid reaction to a jihadist threat. Then, combating extremism within societies requires partnerships of a different kind. We need to work out what narratives work, and work best to counter those of the extremists, and who are the best people to formulate them – how we mobilize credible voices, how we develop persuasive content, how we use the Internet effectively, the role of the private sector, and how we disseminate effectively a correct theological interpretation of Islam.

So there's a lot of work to do. (Laughter.)

And to summarize as to the purpose of this, there is much anxiety right now amongst our people. We see regions of the world in chaos and we fear the possibility of terrorist attacks in our own countries. And we have been through wars and various elements of military engagement, a broad range of security measures, diplomatic activity, attempts at stopping radicalization, government programs, civic society responses, and we now have a wealth of often harshly gained experience. Yet, the anxiety increases and the challenge grows.

It is affecting the domestic politics of our own nations, too. There are those on the left who want us to disengage – who believe that our policies are largely the cause of the extremism, and that if we leave well alone it will resolve itself. There are those on the right who believe that Islam itself is the problem, thus in a strange way affirming the position of the extremists that the West and Islam are in immutable conflict with each other. And this polarization of the debate is mirrored both sides of the Atlantic, and the casualty is serious policymaking. Both far left and far right come together in advocating solutions that might make a tweet but they don't make a policy.

So we need a new approach, what I might loosely term a more muscular centrist one, which in a sense is a synthesis of the lessons of the whole period since 9/11 and can unify our people behind it. We require a combination of military and security capability to counter the violence, together with a deep strategy to counter the ideology of extremism which breeds it. This comprehensive approach needs the heft, the coverage, and the intelligent formulation to rally our own opinion to build the essential alliances and give us the confidence that this is a threat we can and will overcome. It is urgent, for sure. We face not the possibility but the probability of serious terrorist attacks in Europe in the time to come. Even the prospect is today altering our politics in Europe. Think what the reality could do.

The only answer is to have a plan that is radical, but sensible, which deals with the problem head on, but in a way that is consistent with the values of our society and not a diminution of them. This commission seeks to make such a plan. Thank you. (Applause.)

SHANNON N. GREEN: Well, thank you, Mr. Blair, for your very thoughtful remarks. You've clearly laid out an agenda for the commission that is both urgent and ambitious, but also, I think, doable with the great group of commissioners that we have and with you and Secretary Panetta at the helm. So thank you so much for that.

Mr. Blair has agreed to take some questions from the audience. So what we're going to do is call on individuals a few at a time. When I call on you, I ask that you please wait for the mic, and when you are given the mic please state your name and your affiliation, if you have one, and ask your question as clearly as concisely as possible so that we can get in as many questions as possible.

OK, let's – the first hand I saw was this gentleman in the second row.

Q: Good morning. My name is Randy Pleatman (sp). I'm with the State Department.

Prime Minister Blair, thank you very much for an excellent presentation. You yourself noted this is largely a struggle within Islam, and that we need Muslim allies. Looking at the – looking at the people on the commission, my first thought was, why don't you have more Muslims on there? If they're the target audience and they're the allies you need, it seems to me like half the commission should be Muslims.

MR. BLAIR: I think we do, actually. We –

MS. GREEN: Yeah, I think we took great pains to make sure that the commission was as diverse as possible, drawing from a variety of backgrounds, professions, sets of experience, gender, religion. So we really did try to, you know, think about the composition and make it as diverse as it could possibly be. And then, in addition to the actual commission members, we will be doing robust consultation with a very broad group of stakeholders and hearing from as many diverse voices as possible.

This woman right here in the third row with the glasses.

Q: Thank you, Prime Minister Blair, for an excellent presentation. My name (is) Basma Fakri from the Iraq Foundation.

With all these challenges, what's your forecast, if all moderate Muslims come together with the West, when you think we're going to get rid of Daesh? And that's the question been asked for me when I went to visit Iraq, because people there, they are fed up and they are against Daesh. And, you know, if we put ourself in their shoes, everybody against them – the bombing, the violence. So they are waiting for an answer. Thank you.

MS. GREEN: Let's take a question right here on the second row.

Q: Thank you, Mr. Blair. I'm Akbar Khawaja, former World Bank official.

There was a recent discussion in British Parliament regarding remarks of one of the presidential candidates on banning Muslims. Would you add any comments? Thank you. (Scattered laughter.)

MR. BLAIR: (Laughs.)

MS. GREEN: One more question. The woman all the way back in the back, Andrea.

Q: Thank you so much, Prime Minister Blair. Andrea Koppel with the global humanitarian organization Mercy Corps.

Last week, General John Allen at the Brookings Institution affirmed what many in the NGO community have been saying for years regarding the importance of addressing the grievances that often drive people into the arms of these extremist groups, and that unless and until we get at the front end of prevention, no amount of military force is going to be able to really, I guess, end extremism. So what do you see the commission doing to lead on prevention of violent extremism? Thank you.

MS. GREEN: OK, let's take those.

MR. BLAIR: Yeah. So in respect to Iraq and Syria and all of the places that are most, you know, on our – command our attention right now, you see the tragedy is the majority of people in any of these countries want to live in peace. This, by the way, is part of the good news because I often – especially when I'm talking to audiences back home, here, elsewhere, people will say to me: Maybe it's all war. Tell us some good news. You know, you give a – I mean, right now when I go and I talk to people I talk about the Middle East and I talk Europe. And then at the conclusion of my speech, they say: Tell us some good news. (Laughter.)

So the good news is this, is that there is a broad majority for peaceful coexistence within Islam and within the world community as a whole. So the answer to the question of when you get rid of groups like Daesh, is it is a combination of the military and countering the ideology, countering the ideas upon which these people feed. I guess my – the central idea that I have come to over a long period of time dealing with this, with all the difficulties I've been through on it, is that you have to have both strategies. In other words, a military strategy alone will not deal with this problem. There has also to be an attack on the ideology, the ideas that are behind these groups.

So our desire in the commission is to look at what are the most effective ways of using force capability – because you've got to defeat these people on the ground, right? You can't – there's no point in – you can't wait for the – you know, for the ideology to be defeated. That's a generational struggle. You've got to take immediate action on the ground. And one of the things we will look at is what is the most effective way of doing that. But then you've also got to

shrink the ideological space, as well as the geographical space. And that is what I think is really important. And it also leads to the last question. I haven't forgotten the other question.

But the last question, which is about addressing the grievances. I mean, we know in Iraq and elsewhere there are genuine political and social grievances. They also have to be addressed. And one of the things that I've learned about the Middle East, by the way, now spending, as I said, I'm twice a month there, is that, you know, here's a great insight. The people there are not much different from the people everywhere in this sense: You know, you can't exclude a majority of the population from government. And this is particularly so when you've got young populations that are politically and economically frustrated. And this is where the Arab Spring came from.

And it's also where – sometimes I hear people say – in the West, in fact, it's a very, very common thing I hear back home. They say, look, it's better just to keep all the dictators in place because then it's easier for us to deal with the situation and so on. And I say to them, you know, I don't agree with that. But let's supposing it's true. It doesn't matter what we think. The people out there aren't going to tolerate it. That's why the Arab uprising happened. And so, in the end you've got to address these political and social grievances as well. And that's one of the things we need to look at.

So one other thing I'd say on that, however, is that in my experience what these groups do is they prey on these grievances. And that makes those grievances harder to resolve, not easier. You can see this very clearly in Iraq particularly. The truth is it makes it – you divide the communities. It's the same, by the way, in what I see in the Israeli-Palestinian issue. The presence of terrorism makes everything harder to resolve. And so I think we have to look as well at the relationship between those political and social grievances and the security issue.

Yeah, that other question. (Laughter.) Look, by the way, you who elect as your president is up to you. I just want to make that clear. I was going to say, you guys – (laughter) – you can decide that. But let me – let me just say, I think that mentioning no names – (laughter) – that it is vitally important if we're going to win this battle that we have allies. And those allies within Islam are crucial. So we probably should concentrate on building those alliances, not alienating an entire religion.

MS. GREEN: Great. Next round of questions? Right here in the middle.

Q: Good morning. My question is about the ideology of violent extremism and how we need to separate that with Islamism, because as you know there are very strong political movements across the Arab world that are called Islamist. And they are not violent. And they want to participate in the political process. And whenever there were elections, they always get 30 percent or 40 percent, and sometimes 50 percent. And I think it would be a huge mistake to lump all Islamists together, as if all Islamists are violent or are the enemy or are the danger, and that we have to confront them. This would not only justify dictatorships in the region, but would drive a lot of these young people towards more extreme and more violent forums of Islamism. Thank you.

MS. GREEN: Please introduce yourself, because you're doing great work.

Q: Radwan Masmoudi. I'm the president of the Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy.

MS. GREEN: OK, let's take a question. The woman right here on the aisle with the colorful sweater or shirt, scarf?

Q: Hello. I'm Nadia Alami from Palladium. Thank you very much for your presentation today.

I have just very – two quick questions. One of them: Is there a timeline for your commission? When do we expect to see some results? And number two, you talked a lot about partnerships, again, and it's not a criticism it's a recommendation. When I'm looking at the members of the commission, why aren't there any people from the region? You know, you only have American and British people. How about the people you're studying? Thank you.

MS. GREEN: OK. And then right here on the front row.

Q: Mr. Prime Minister, there's a lot of controversy right now relative to the ability for terrorist groups to be able to use encrypted communications. We've not seen any organization as effective in propaganda as ISIS has become. Be interested in your comments relative to the recent controversy associated with the requirements for corporations to provide capabilities for governments to be able to access this critical communications network that is hiding all of their activities today.

MR. BLAIR: All right. You know, my press people sometimes say to me, you're giving a speech in America, doing an event in America, try to avoid controversy. (Laughter.) And this is an area I think is absolutely fraught with interesting and difficult questions. And the first question is a really important question, from the gentleman from the Center of Islamic Democracy.

So here is what I think, that there is a spectrum of Islamist extremism which includes people who are Islamists, who do not themselves engage in violence, but who provide a lot of the support for the world view of the extremists. But then, there are obviously also those people who might describe themselves in some way as Islamists who want proper democracy. And here's what I think about it. I think it is possible for Islamism and democracy to coexist, provided that there is an understanding of the principle of pluralism, because that is the basic democratic principle.

And that's where I draw the line between, you know, for example, some of the leadership in Tunisia that have played a really important part in helping to give that country a chance, and other elements – for example, elements of the Muslim Brotherhood, who I would say are in danger of crossing into that, or who do cross into the other side of that. And where, as it were, democracy is not as important as the enforcement of a particular view of religion.

And I also think that one of the things though it's worth having a discussion about more broadly is the role of religion in democracy, because, you know, on the one hand you have people who want, as it were, to exclude the religious voice from the political space, which I think is wrong. On the other hand, you've got people who say, well, my view of religion should actually determine the laws of the country, which I also think is wrong. So I'm, as ever, in a more centigram position, which is – you know.

And I found this, by the way, when I was prime minister, because I'm a member of the Catholic Church. And the Catholic Church was often in my politics very insistent on certain views and was more or less saying: Well, if you – this is what you should be doing. And I was – always said to them, I'm a member of the church, but politics is politics and religion is religion. You have your voice, but you don't determine the outcome. And you don't determine the outcome for me either as a legislator.

So this is – this is a debate I think we need to carry on having. But so that I'm very clear, what I'm talking about when I'm talking about this spectrum of people who have what I would call a fundamentally undemocratic view of the place of religion. But some of those people wouldn't – some of those people actually oppose violence, but that worldview is, in my view, the soil in which the violence breeds.

I also think it's – you know, this is – one of the things that's so important with this commission, but important for the public debate, is that we have a really honest debate about these things, because they're difficult questions, by the way. They're not easy at all. But I don't think we benefit from trying to shut out all the intricacies of this debate. So I think this is a really important question.

And by the way, so that – just to – you know, to make it very clear, for us, yes, the people on the commission are from the U.K. the U.S. But we will be doing an outreach to the different regions of the world. And of course, we have Muslim opinion represented on this. And it's very important that we do that. The timeline we hope is?

MS. GREEN: (Laughs.) July.

MR. BLAIR: July. That's what we hope.

MS. GREEN: We're committed to getting the report done by July.

MR. BLAIR: Because that, I think, will make it, let's say, timely. And I think it's important that we have the debate as well-informed as possible.

On the encryption issues and Apple, I mean, I actually find this really difficult. But what I would look for if I were a policymaker is a way that I could narrow what I was asking the company to do, to limit it. And that's the issue, because what they're saying is you can't. You know, once you've broken this code, then you've effectively opened the floodgates. I don't know if that's right. I hope it isn't, because there should be a way of limiting it. But I think this

will be a very, very difficult debate, particularly as we face the possibility and, as I said in Europe, the probably of more terrorist attacks.

So I think we need an answer to this, but it should be an answer that as far as you possibly can, restricts the ability to crack open those codes to those very specific security measures. And I don't know enough about the technical capabilities to know whether that's possible, but that's what I would be looking for if I were a policymaker, because I don't think the position is Apple is an unreasonable position at all. But on the other hand if I was in law enforcement today I would be wanting to make sure we could track the people who are potentially threatening our country.

MS. GREEN: Well, unfortunately we are out of time for questions. Mr. Blair has a number of media engagements lined up after this. But please join me in warmly thanking him for his very thoughtful remarks today. (Applause.)

(Break.)

FARAH PANDITH: One-fourth of the planet is Muslim. One billion people are under the age of 30. This is the demographic from which they recruit. In speaking with tens of thousands of Muslim youth at the grassroots, from Argentina to Zanzibar, in more than 80 countries, I witnessed first-hand what the extremists rely on to gain traction and loyalty. Muslim millennials are facing a crisis of identity. Whether a Muslim in a Muslim-majority country, or a Muslim that lives as a minority, in a post-9/11 environment, they are seeking answers about navigating their identity. And they're getting those answers from Sheik Google.

With a swish of their finger, these digital natives are connecting ideas about culture, religion, belonging, and purpose. And instead of being overwhelmed with the positive, they are exposed to the patient and determined digital armies of the extremists. Bolstering the online voices are their offline sympathizers, peers who reinforce the us versus them narrative. With Muslim millennials in every part of the globe, and with an ideology that has no borders, we know that this threat will have a generational effect, and will impact us all beyond what we think that we know now.

Because diverse and indigenous forms of Islam are being targeted, within a generation any evidence of what came before will be gone. This means that their corrupt definitions and ideas will result in further saturation within societies, resulting in violence, instability, and despair. With female Muslims both recruiting and being recruited, we are experiencing a dimension of this threat that will impact a new generation of children, and has added a new weapon to their arsenal – a womb.

And because Muslim millennials have the power to leverage the status quo for years to come, the sheer numbers are vital to understand. What they feel now, what they experience now, and how they see themselves are unknown aspects of the impact for us all in the years ahead. Fifteen years after 9/11, we have seen various ways the extremist ideology manifests – al-Qaida, the Taliban, Shabaab, Boko, ISIS. What comes after ISIS in the ideological war remains to be

seen. It will depend on how we look at the spread of the ideology now, and how well we stop their power to recruit Muslim youth all over the world.

This CVE commission is convening at an inflection point. Its design and purpose will give our nation an opportunity to be really bold, forward-leaning, creative, and unhindered in our recommendations. Knowing that hard power dimensions of this fight are essential, and that we must break the momentum of these extremist groups, the work of the commission will be to address the issue of the ideological dimensions of this threat. We must find better ways of reducing the power of extremists to gain sympathy and loyalty from Muslim youth. We must focus on the migration of ideas in their minds, and do the job we are capable of in building innovative actions to protect these youth.

In normalizing the conversation about extremism, and using what I call open power, the ability to leverage all members of a local ecosystem, we can protect youth from extremists. The solutions are available, and affordable. Local, credible voices at the grassroots must be given platforms and organic opportunities to compete at scale with the narratives of the extremists. The extremists are determined, organized, and committed to this ideological war. We must all look with new eyes at the threat that we face, and go forward with new purpose, organization, and determination. We must win, and we can win.

Muslim millennials are our greatest asset in this ideological war, and we must do more to provide strong platforms from which they can protect their peers. Parents must be engaged, especially mothers, former extremists and cultural activists. We have experimented with micro-solutions over the years that show promise if scaled up proportionally and professionally. With 15 years of effort in CVE behind us, the CVE commission will look at a new chapter and a new way to organize our effort in the ideological war. Thank you. (Applause.)

JUAN ZARATE: Well, I get the task of following Tony Blair and Farah Pandith. (Laughter.) Welcome. And I want to thank CSIS, Dr. Hamre, Shannon, the board, as well as my fellow commissioners for taking on this difficult and complicated issue. The issue of the ideology and the threat it poses is often seen as too sensitive and, in many ways, too complicated to tackle. And it really is a credit to the CSIS leadership, Tony Blair, Leon Panetta, and all the commissioners for taking this on a very credible and important way.

But as Farah mentioned – and I've had the honor of working with Farah for a number of years, who's one of the most dynamic leaders in this space globally – this commission comes at a critical time. For us, obviously, in the United States, at a moment of political transition, but obviously with the threat of the ideology manifesting in very real and dynamic ways. It's animating and rejuvenating a global movement. It's adapting to the environment, preying on sectarian tensions, lack of governance, and fragile identities. These are groups that are targeting Muslim communities with new technologies, with heroic and romantic narratives. They're reshaping now just the physical map, as Farah mentioned, but the very notion of identity in the 21st century.

This is something we can't wish away. And it's something that won't burn out from its own brutality. We have to deal with it. But it's a hard problem, as the prime minister laid out.

Many have been working on these issues for many years. I'm one of them. I bear many of the bureaucratic scars of the battles from within government and outside of government. Governments have been trying to organize around these issues. Civil society has been trying to confront and counter and mobilize. Individual voices have been trying to raise their voices to confront the radicals in their midst.

But now is a moment of opportunity and potential innovation. And I can't add much to the eloquence of Prime Minister Blair and to what Farah said, but let me give you five ideas that I will certainly present to my fellow commissioners and the co-chairs, that I think are opportunities for innovation in this space. First, can we scale and fund the efforts to counter this movement to the degree that we need to? There are already ex-jihadis, women, Sisters Against Violent Extremism, victims, activists, entrepreneurs, artist who are trying to counter this movement. There are networks of networks out there. But how do we scale and how do we create funding mechanisms for this? Where is the venture capital for CVE?

Second, how do we convert the ownership of this issue not just to the hard power dimensions of what governments do, but to the essence of what civil society, the private sector, the technology community, communities and families actually do? How do we amplify, empower, and enable civil society and the private sector?

Third, how do we think more aggressively and creatively about intervention and prevention strategies, not just in the province of law enforcement or intelligence or the military but in the form of off-ramps led by communities and families? Use of technology creatively to intervene at stages of radicalization, and alternate visions for what identity in the 21st century means within Muslim communities. How do we counter the allure of this ideology?

Next, how do you confront the actual manifestations of the ideology, not just the narrative and the digital natives that are espousing the ideology, but the actual manifestation, many of which the prime minister laid out. The attack on vaccination teams around the world that we see happening in places like Afghanistan and Pakistan. The attack on courageous voices in places like Bangladesh. The attack on cultural heritage in the Middle East and other parts of the world. The very desecration of cultural diversity historical memory. How do we mobilize against the actual manifestations of the ideology as it emerges and attacks cultural identity and diversity?

And finally, how do we rethink CVE itself? I was the deputy national security advisor for countering terrorism in the Bush administration. So some of you may not like me. (Laughter.) But the reality was, we struggled with this issue, but we largely struggled with it through the lens of counterterrorism. And that's often been the lens through which we have viewed this issue. But I think the final challenge for us, and room for innovation, is how do we think about innovation and how we think about the threat from this ideology? Because this threat is not just in the violent and physical manifestation of terrorist movements, but in the renting and the challenge to local communities, the fabric of families around the world, as well as global norms that we hold dear – human rights, the rights of women, the rights of children, cultural heritage and diversity.

And so those are five arenas that I think are arenas for grand both paradigmatic innovation, but also programmatic innovation. Let me just say a final point, America's diversity is its strength. Its inclusion is part of the solution. And as the prime minister said, we need all hands on deck and all allies to be working in concert on these issues. And I count myself lucky to be on this commission, to have worked with Muslim-American leaders like Farah Pandith and others over the years to address this issue, and I'm looking forward to what this commission will produce.

With that, it's time for us to get to work. We're going to report back to you over time and produce a final report in July. Thank you for coming. CSIS thanks you. Thank you very much. (Applause.)

(END)