

It's a great honor and pleasure to speak to you this morning.

Congratulations, Terri Hasdorff, director of the USAID Center for Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, for putting this conference together.

And thank you Jedd, for your good work and wonderful comments.

I want to begin by thanking everyone in this room for the important work you are doing. You are truly changing the world.

America is the most generous nation on earth, though we rarely get credit. Most of that generosity comes directly through the private sector, though a great deal comes from the taxpayers via the government. No administration has done more in foreign assistance than this one. The President's AIDS initiative involves the most money ever mobilized against a disease in history.

But today, I want to tackle a different subject, one that some may feel is unusual for this type of conference.

I want to talk to you today about how civil society – organizations like yours – can play a critical role in countering the most serious threat the world faces today, the threat of violent extremism. The world has confronted violent movements motivated by ideology and, yes, twisted interpretations of great religions, in the past. What makes the 21<sup>st</sup> century threat different is that technology has given violent extremism global reach.

Let me begin by telling you about my job as Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy. What is public diplomacy? It is engaging the direct or indirect engagement of foreign publics with the aim of achieving the national interest. And these days the primary interests are reducing threats and promoting freedom – goals that are linked. Free people tend not to be violent extremists.

The traditional tools of public diplomacy are enormously important: cultural and educational exchanges, like the Fulbright scholarships and international visitors programs, and outreach where we tell America's story on the Internet and through speakers we send abroad. This is where we spend most of our money, and we could not do our work without the help of NGOs and businesses.

This approach has been vital to the United States for more than 60 years. But today I want to tell you about another approach we are taking – another kind of engagement.

We call it the war of ideas – as opposed to the war of bullets and bombs. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates has said that, in the global battle we are fighting, we “cannot kill or capture our way to victory.” Military means are important, of course, but non-military means are at least as necessary as military.

The term “war of ideas” is probably not the best. It implies a kind of us-against-them framework that is simply inaccurate. Let’s use the term global strategic engagement. In global strategic engagement, it’s not us against them. It’s the vast majority of the people of the world encouraging those who are at-risk of becoming violent extremists – or those who already are – to embrace productive, life-affirming alternatives.

The group that’s at risk tends to be young people.

While extremists around the world justify their violence with a variety of ideologies, what the groups have in common is that they hijack impressionable youth to carry out their crimes.

These young people can be exceptionally vulnerable.

A few weeks ago, I was in Colombia, where I talked to former fighters for a murderous group called the FARC that has been terrorizing that nation since 1964. FARC leaders, like Al Qaeda leaders, exploit the spiritual emptiness – the hole in the heart – of young people searching for an identity. These leaders fill the opportunity gap with what kids often see as the most alluring game in town, linking what is seen as adventure with a doctrine of hatred, fantasy, greed, and hysteria.

Colombia shows that this phenomenon is not exclusive to Muslim societies. An effective strategy must both undermine the ideology of a violent extremist group and disrupt its flow of recruits by offering productive alternatives for young people. We have been following these simultaneous approaches lately in America’s war of ideas abroad, as are countries as diverse as Saudi Arabia, Singapore, and Britain.

The strategy is beginning to work. Public support for Al Qaeda’s ideology, which justifies the slaughter of fellow Muslims, has been weakening in nearly all Muslim nations. Organizations have sprung up like the Quilliam Foundation, composed of former extremists now working to counter-radicalize and demobilize young people enticed by violent ideology.

But the flow of recruits has not stopped. Our strategy to stanch it is called “diversion” – the channeling of young people away from violence with the attractions of technology, sports, culture, education, and entrepreneurship.

The Colombians, through a policy they call demobilization and reintegration, are successfully luring young fighters out of the FARC where many of them have been for years. (I talked to one young woman who joined as a 12-year-old and spent seven years in the jungle.) Over the past few years, a total of more than 40,000 members of terrorist groups have been demobilized – and serious efforts are being made to educate and train them and bring them back into productive society. USAID, I am pleased to say, is helping in those efforts. The FARC, which is the main terrorist group remaining, has been reduced in size by half, and fighters are leaving at a rate of 10 a day. You may have seen

the recent story of a Colombian congressman, held as a hostage for seven years, who recently escaped the FARC with help from a FARC fighter, who demobilized himself.

The Colombians are showing the world that terrorism can be defeated – not by arms alone but by arms and by smart activity that treats young people in these groups as the victims they are. Often, a former FARC fighter can find a new constructive identity that combines idealism with maturity and restraint, just as a former Mideast terrorist can build an identity on the positive values of Islam.

One young demobilized Colombian fighter, now in college in Bogota, says she still fervently believes in making life better for her nation's poorest, as the FARC professes, but "I don't share the idea of making change by arms." That's the sort of result we're after.

So what does global strategic engagement of this sort mean to you?

We have found that in trying to divert young people from the path to violent extremism, the U.S. Government itself may not be the most effective player. Sometimes, we simply don't have the credibility, but more often it is a case of a lack of expertise.

What we like to do is find groups like yours that are doing great work and nudge you or encourage you in a direction you are going anyway.

If we are going to be successful in global strategic engagement – in the war of ideas – it will only be through the work of the private sector, of civil society.

And faith-based and community organizations are especially suited to this work, for two reasons. First, much of the deficit that the terrorists try to fill – and that we must fill instead – is spiritual. As Jedd said, "Government can't love". People who comprise faith-based groups can. Second, in our engagement with violent extremist groups like Al Qaeda, religion (a twisted interpretation of religion) is the foundation of the extremism. Faith-based organizations have a head start in responding both to the spiritual deficit and to the religion-center ideological imperative. We need you.

A great example of global strategic engagement by a civil society organization is the one you will hear about next from Doug Johnston. We at the State Department are proud to be giving support, in a small way, to the work that Doug's International Center for Religion and Diplomacy is doing in Pakistan.

The world is a dangerous place. But it is also a glorious place. The project that we have embarked on seeks to help those who are suffering and who, partly as a result, threaten us, to help those people find more productive and fulfilling lives. That is what will make us safer. We cannot kill or capture our way to victory. But we can educate and help our way to victory. And by "we" I do not mean Uncle Sam alone. I mean the few of us in government added to the legions of you in civil society. Together, we will make a better, safer, freer world.

- Thank you.

