

STATEMENT OF
JARRET BRACHMAN
BEFORE THE HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON TERRORISM,
UNCONVENTIONAL THREATS AND CAPABILITIES
ON THE TOPIC OF
UNDERSTANDING CYBERSPACE AS A MEDIUM FOR RADICALIZATION AND
COUNTER-RADICALIZATION

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On 14 February 2007, I had the privilege of testifying before this subcommittee on the topic of emerging trends within the global al-Qaida movement. In my 2007 testimony, I sought to outline the broad spectrum of al-Qaida activism, touching on the various categories including, al-Qaida ideologues, propagandists, strategists, pundits, enthusiasts, and others. I emphasized the fact that individuals from all over the world were filling those roles with various degrees of sophistication and connectivity to the al-Qaida organization. In other words, I argued that al-Qaida as a global movement was growing smarter, more functionally differentiated and increasingly formalized in its approach – it had cemented its ideological core and was concentrating on building itself out, not just operationally, but intellectually, culturally and socially.

One of the central points of my 2007 testimony was that the global al-Qaida movement was pioneering more avenues of participation, particularly by way of the internet, so that more people in more places could get more involved in more ways with supporting al-Qaida. Reflecting the thinking of forward-looking jihadist strategists like Abu Musab al-Suri, al-Qaida was looking more and more like a global social movement, not just a multilayered organization. I argued that the global al-Qaida movement was on the upswing and that the natural outcome of this increase in ideological participation and activity would invariably translate into increased operational activity.

I also made a point of emphasizing the fact that one of the most popular books being downloaded off the internet was one entitled, *39 Ways to Serve and Participate in Jihad*, which was penned by a now neutralized Saudi al-Qaida member. The book argues that, even if a supporter of al-Qaida cannot or will not travel to the front-lines, places like Iraq and Afghanistan, there are at least thirty-nine other categories of activities that they can be doing from the comfort of their own home. Those thirty-nine categories of behavior expanded the ways that individuals could promote al-Qaida's ideology and capabilities.

Since February 2007, al-Qaida's global movement has indeed made deeper inroads into the English-speaking world. The United States has seen more, not less, jihadist conversation, and perhaps more concerning, jihadist-inspired terrorist plots. What is most problematic is that many of the recent plots uncovered in 2009 contained direct operational ties with the al-Qaida organization and its affiliates.

Beyond the global al-Qaida movement's operational-level advancement, the collective sophistication, knowledge and activism of its English-language supporters has also increased. Ideological adherents to and supporters of al-Qaida have now reached a point where they are

virtually indistinguishable from their Arabic-speaking counterparts in their knowledge of key authors, texts, arguments and leadership. They are consuming al-Qaida media products at a rate and nuance that is on par with the Arabic forums. And an ever-growing amount of al-Qaida literature and media products are being translated into English and disseminated broadly by way of the internet.

Importantly, al-Qaida should be seen as having undergone a metamorphosis in recent years. I would contend that al-Qaida has transformed from a terrorist organization that selectively leverages the media to advance its objectives into a media organization that selectively leverages terrorism to advance its objectives. This strategic recalibration has helped the al-Qaida's aging Senior Leadership reclaim a role in a now globally dispersed movement dominated by younger, more active personalities. It has also helped propel the global al-Qaida ideological movement because the organization now serves the role of a terrorist force-multiplier as much or more as it does a terrorist group.

In short, the al-Qaida organization as well as the global al-Qaida movement has extended its ideological tentacles globally, particularly in the United States. The English-speaking jihadist world has now reached 'cruising speed' in terms of its ability to independently adhere to al-Qaida's ideology: it no longer requires the proverbial hand-holding of the Arabic-language supporters.

Despite this noticeable encroachment of al-Qaida's ideology into the English-speaking world, little has changed in terms of this nation's commitment to combating the sources of that global movement: the ideas underlying this movement.

For nearly four years, a small cadre of voices, including myself, have been advocating the need for the United States to invest in a series of initiatives that advances the ongoing study of al-Qaida. Such an initiative would focus on leveraging diverse expertise to understand al-Qaida as they understand themselves, focusing on the ideological and strategic communication dimensions of the organization. But perhaps more importantly, it would focus on understanding the historical, social and cultural contexts from which al-Qaida emerges. What the United States needs today is a fresh perspective on the intersection of scholarship and government. We need to once again invest in the intellectual capital of our graduate students and young researchers who are doing work on projects that may not be directly applicable to military and strategic needs but that provide long-term social-cultural insights necessary.

I will recommend to this subcommittee an initiative that leverages a virtual network of non-governmental scholars, academics and researchers who are already doing cutting-edge work related, not just to the global al-Qaida movement, but to area studies, to history to anthropology and sociology. It is by empowering America's intellectual resources and making their insights accessible both to the cutting-edge practitioners and the broader public – including our enemies – that the United States is likely to find the most success.

English-Language Jihadist Use of Cyberspace

2009 was a disastrous year for America in the number of jihadist terrorist plots that were uncovered. It follows, however, on the heels of several years wherein jihadist activity in the United States and the broader English-speaking world was increasing in pervasiveness and seriousness. The common thread across most of these plots is that there had been some kind of cyber activity. In this section, I will briefly review some of the highest profile cases and the nature of the internet usage being reported.

In May 2007, a group of Albanian Americans were arrested for plotting to attack Fort Dix. Although unsophisticated, the group seems to have been dedicated to the cause of global jihadism. According to noted al-Qaida specialist, Evan Kohlmann,

Aside from having an unsettling interest in acquiring assault rifles, these young men had separately downloaded hundreds of megabytes of hardcore terror propaganda videos from the web, including the wills of Sept. 11 hijackers and the July 7 London suicide bombers, and instructional materials on how to build improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and carry out sniper attacks -- and they knew all about radical Yemeni-American cleric Anwar al-Awlaki and his online lecture series "Constants on the Path of Jihad." ¹

What becomes clear is that this kind of use of the internet for both operational and ideological purposes was not anomalous. Former Georgia Tech student, Syed Haris Ahmed, 24, was brought to trial in 2009 for his jihadist activities in 2005 and 2006. Ahmad had allegedly contemplated an attack on Dobbins Air Reserve Base, traveled to Pakistan in an attempt to join mujahidin forces in fighting, took "casing videos" of Washington D.C. landmarks, all as an undergraduate. It was while in college, at the nearby Al-Farooq Masjid mosque, that he met Ehsanul Islam Sadequee, who was charged alongside Ahmed.

Together, the two seemed to radicalize and militarize one another. Ahmed would reportedly tell federal agents that he also tried to recruit others to go with him to Pakistan and join a military training camp. Most of this attempted recruiting was done by way of email. Allegedly, Ahmed used code words in his email correspondence including, "membership" (a passport), "the land of the two rivers" (Iraq), "curry land" (Pakistan), "picnic" (a meeting).²

Ahmed and Sadequee had reportedly made contact, via the internet, with two other concerning parties. One was members of the "Toronto 18," a cell charged with plotting to overthrow the Canadian Parliament and bomb a power plant and the Canadian stock exchange. Ahmed and Sadequee also drove to Washington D.C. where they reportedly took 60 surveillance videos,

¹ Evan Kohlmann. "A Web of Lone Wolves -Fort Hood shows us that Internet jihad is not a myth." *Foreign Policy*. November 13, 2009.

http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2009/11/13/a_web_of_lone_wolves

² Bill Rankin . "Trial nears for ex-Tech student - Syed Haris Ahmed is accused of conspiracy to provide support for acts of terrorism." *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. May 31, 2009.

which they subsequently transferred to. Younis Tsouli, a well-known al-Qaida propagandist and web-node operating out of the United Kingdom going by the moniker, “Irhabi007.”

The accused shooter from a June 1, 2009 attack against a military recruiting center in Little Rock, Arkansas, Abdulhakim Muhammad, had reportedly used the internet, including Google Maps, to search and map several Jewish organizations, a child care center, a Baptist church, a post office and military recruiting centers in the southeastern U.S. and New York and Philadelphia.³ Although little more is known publically about his internet activity, these kinds of locations, if indeed targets, fit with those that would ideologically targeted by an adherent of al-Qaida’s ideology.

Abdur Syed provides another useful case of how American jihadist have been using the internet for operational coordination. Since early 2008, retired Pakistani major, Abdur Rehman Hashim Syed, a resident of Chicago, Illinois, began what would become extensive internet-based correspondence with at least two other individuals, one of whom is the American, David Headley. The men were discussing something they referred to as, “Mickey Mouse Project,” which according to a recently unsealed criminal complaint, involved planning for one or more attacks directed at the Danish newspaper, *Jyllands-Posten*, the paper that published cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad in 2005.

According to the complaint, David Headley, who also lived in Chicago, had used the internet to post comments like, “I feel disposed towards violence for the offending parties,” on Yahoo! discussion group, entitled “Abdalians.” By 2009, the men were using multiple email accounts to coordinate with one another about plans for an attack against the newspaper and its employees. They also used the internet to coordinate with a representative from the Lashkar-e Taiba terrorist organization about the attack as well as with Ilyas Kashmiri, operational chief for Harakat ul Jihad Islami. The men also used the internet for surveillance and reconnaissance purposes. When he was arrested, FBI agents found a memory stick on him that contained 10 surveillance videos, including footage of the newspaper office and Danish military barracks.⁴

In February 2009, the United Kingdom tried and convicted a Muslim convert described as the “least cunning” terrorist ever to come before a British court for his botched suicide nail bombing.⁵ The 22-year-old, diagnosed with a host of medical conditions, was given a life sentence at the Old Bailey after pleading guilty to attempted murder and preparing an act of terrorism in May 2008. The court was told that he acted alone, although media reported that he had been in contact with at least two other al-Qaida supporters likely based in Pakistan by way of the internet. In the course of their conversations, these individuals had reportedly urged him to

³ “Source: Arkansas Shooting Suspect Searched Targeted Sites on Google.” *Fox News.com*. June 23, 2009. <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,524833,00.html>

⁴ Natasha Korecki. “Two Chicago men charged in terror scheme.” *Chicago Sun Times*. October 28, 2009

⁵ Adam Fresco. “Nicky Reilly, Muslim convert, jailed for 18 years for Exeter bomb attack.” *The Times Online*. January 31, 2009. <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/crime/article5619151.ece>

attack military rather than civilian targets. Debbie Simpson, the assistant chief constable of Devon and Cornwall, said efforts were being made to trace the Al Qaeda sympathizers. “We are in contact ... with the Pakistani authorities. We believe there is an association,” she said.⁶

This cyber-prodding is an important aspect of jihadist internet usage. The same kind of cyber recruiting and prodding on to action occurred in the recent case of five Virginia men who traveled to Pakistan in order to receive training from militant Islamic groups. These men had been first contacted known as Saifullah, an unknown cyber-recruiter who identified one of the men after he had posted pro-jihadist comments on YouTube.

Saifullah reportedly exchanged emails with the cell member for months, urging him and his colleagues on to Pakistan. Once there, Saifullah reportedly sought to guide the cell, unsuccessfully, to training opportunities with al-Qaida and its affiliate groups.

According to Manuel Torres, a Spanish –based terrorism specialist, “A recruiter does not radicalize a person from scratch.”⁷ Rather, he told the *Washington Post*, “They deal with people who are already ready to die.” Recruiters who are satisfied that they have found a would-be terrorist who is serious, and not a spy, can then make the necessary introductions, the *Post* article explained. “What they really serve as are facilitators, intermediaries to the jihadist world,” Torres was quoted as saying. In other words, the internet plays a contributing role in helping to prime individuals ideologically, toward increasing their susceptibility to being ‘pitched.’ The internet now also provides the vehicle by which that ‘pitch’ to action can be made.

A key part of priming the ideological pump within an individual is in continuously barraging someone, or at least providing them with the content by which they can barrage themselves, with ideologically sound propaganda. In February 2009, the Canadians placed Said Namouh, 36, on four terrorism-related charges including conspiracy, participating in a terrorist act, facilitating such an act and committing extortion for a terrorist group.⁸ The Canadian government argued that Namouh was a member of the Global Islamic Media Front, an organization involved in propaganda and jihadist recruitment tool. In the course of the trial, RCMP investigator itemized hundreds of files found on Namouh's computer. He was found guilty and is facing up to a life sentence.

Namouh was accused of conspiring with an Austrian man, Mohammed Mahmoud, described as a leader of the Global Islamic Media Front. Mahmoud, an Austrian man of Egyptian origin, has already been sentenced in Austria to four years in prison. His wife was also sentenced to 22-months for her role in the plot. The GIMF, an organization involved in propaganda and jihad

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Griff Witte and Shaiq Hussain. “Pakistan focuses on terrorist recruiter, hoping to expose network.” *Washington Post*. December 13, 2009.

⁸ Sidhartha Banerjee. “Homegrown Canadian terrorist with jihadist ideals found guilty.” *The Canadian Press*. October 1, 2009.

recruitment, is popular with English-language jihadist supporters. The organization has been particularly active in translating Arabic-language al-Qaida propaganda into English and disseminating it on the pro al-Qaida forums.

The internet seems to have played an important role in the initial self-radicalization of Long Island resident Bryant Neil Vinas, who would go on to allegedly coordinate directly with al-Qaida to attack the Long Island Rail Road. According to reports,

Mr. Vinas worshiped at a mosque on Long Island, where he worked briefly as a truck driver and in a car wash, according to officials, one of whom said he had been largely “self-radicalized.” This official said that Mr. Vinas had met some people at the mosque, the Islamic Association of Long Island, but largely turned toward jihad on the Internet.⁹

Major Nidal Hasan, the only suspect in the November Fort Hood shootings, reportedly used the internet for two purposes. First, according to media reporting, he used email as a way of coordinating with a known pro- al-Qaida cleric, Imam Anwar al-Awlaki. Although the content of these eighteen emails between December 2008 and June 2009 has not been released, open source news reporting provides some sense for the nature of the interaction. ABC News reports that Hasan sought religious advice and wrote, "I can't wait to join you," presumably meaning in the afterlife.¹⁰

Nidal Hasan also reportedly used the internet to post his own thoughts about suicide operations. In this post, he rejected the distinctions typically made between the heroism of self-sacrifice by a soldier and that of a suicide bomber.¹¹ There have also been reports that one of Nidal Hasan's closest friends had been an active viewer of al-Qaida and jihadist content on the streaming video site, Youtube.¹²

Hasan's targeting of U.S. military personnel looked markedly similar to a case in the United Kingdom from the previous year. Parviz Khan, a thirty-seven year-old British extremist had planned to kidnap and behead a British soldier was jailed on a life sentence in 2008. Khan was the leader of a Birmingham-based terror cell which, for three years, had been shipping equipment to terrorists in Afghanistan. In 2006 he hatched a plan to kidnap a Muslim soldier serving in

⁹ William K. Rashbaum and Souad Mekhennet. “L.I. Man Helped Qaeda, then Informed.” *The New York Times*. July 22, 2009.

¹⁰ Brian Ross and Rhonda Schwartz. “Major Hasan's E-Mail: 'I Can't Wait to Join You' in Afterlife.” *The Blotter From Brian Ross*. November 19, 2009. <http://abcnews.go.com/Blotter/major-hasans-mail-wait-join-afterlife/story?id=9130339>

¹¹ <http://www.scribd.com/NidalHasan>

¹² Mark Schone, Joseph Rhee, Mary-Rose Abraham and Anna Schecter. “Major Hasan Dined with 'Jihad Hobbyist.’” *The Blotter From Brian Ross*. November 17, 2009 <http://abcnews.go.com/Blotter/hasans-friend-proclaimed-extremist/story?id=9100187>

British forces, video his beheading and broadcast it over the internet. He was caught discussing the plot via an MI5 bug placed in his home. Covert recordings captured Khan bragging about cutting the soldier's head off "like a pig", before burning the body and sending the video to terror leaders based in Pakistan.¹³

The case of Najibullah Zazi, the twenty-four year-old American of Afghan descent, is another example of how jihadist use the internet. Zazi came to the attention of authorities when an email address that was being monitored as part of the abortive Operation Pathway, a bungled British counterterrorism investigation, was suddenly reactivated. Despite that the eleven suspects that had been apprehended on terrorism-related charges earlier in 2009 by British authorities were released, British security staff continued to monitor an email address, which helped them to acquire information pointing their American counterparts to Zazi.

The Afghan is alleged to have been part of a group who used stolen credit cards to buy components for bombs including nail varnish remover. The chemicals bought were similar to those used to make the 2005 London Tube and bus explosives which killed 52 people. Zazi, from Denver, Colorado, is understood to have been given instructions by a senior member of al-Qaida in Pakistan over the internet. US authorities allegedly found bomb-making instructions on his laptop and his fingerprints on batteries and measuring scales they seized. A phone containing footage of New York's Grand Central Station, thought to have been made by him during a visit a week before his arrest, was also found along with explosive residue. Zazi was also said by informants to have attended a terrorist training camp in Pakistan.¹⁴

Recommendations

In his 10 September 2007 video release, Shaikh Abu Yahya al-Libi offered the United States several unsolicited tips for better prosecuting its 'war of ideas' against al-Qaida. Although his comments brought al-Qaida propaganda to new heights of arrogance, the fact is that Abu Yahya's recommendations are nothing short of brilliant. Policymakers who are serious about degrading the resonance of the jihadist movement, therefore, would be remiss in ignoring his strategic recommendations simply because of their source.

Abu Yahya's strategic plan for improving America's counter-ideology efforts centers on turning the global al-Qaida movement's own weaknesses against it. He first suggests that governments interested in weakening the ideological appeal of al-Qaida's message should focus on amplifying the cases of those ex-jihadists (or "backtrackers" as he calls them) who have willingly renounced the use of armed action and recanted their previously held ideological

¹³ Vikram Dodd. "Life sentence for the extremist who plotted to murder soldier." *The Guardian*. February 19, 2008. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2008/feb/19/uksecurity.ukcrime>

¹⁴ "British spies help prevent al Qaeda-inspired attack on New York subway." *Telegraph*. November 9, 2009. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/northamerica/usa/6529436/British-spies-help-prevent-al-Qaeda-inspired-attack-on-New-York-subway.html>

commitments. In short, governments need to show the world that the murder of innocent people is a core part of al-Qaida's ideology.

The most effective way to pursue this strategy, he contends, is to exploit mistakes made by any jihadist group, whether they are al-Qaida or not, by casting that action as being emblematic of the movement itself. Abu Yahya calls this strategy of blurring the differences between al-Qaeda and other Jihadist groups when it serves propaganda purposes, "widening the circle." Pursing this strategy offers the United States significantly more exploitable opportunities for discrediting the actions of the al-Qaida global movement.

Abu Yahya's third strategic point deals with the rise of mainstream Muslim clerics to issue *fatwas* (religious rulings) that incriminate the al-Qaida movement, their ideology and their actions. Abu Yahya shudders at other Muslims' use of "repulsive legal terms, such as bandits, *Khawarij* (literally, "those who seceded," refers to the earliest Islamic sect) and even *Karamathians* or *al-Qaramitah*, ("extreme fanatics") in referring to the jihadists. Abu Yahya is not the first to make these points, however.

The fourth component to Abu Yahya's proposed grand strategy is strengthening and backing Islamic movements far removed from the jihadist trend, particularly those with a democratic approach. Beyond supporting them, he counsels governments to push these mainstream groups into ideological conflict with jihadist groups in order to keep the jihadist scholars and propagandists busy responding to their criticisms. This approach is designed to strip the global al-Qaida movement of its monopoly on the dialogue and instead unleash a "torrential flood of ideas and methodologies which find backing, empowerment, and publicity from numerous parties" against them.

Abu Yahya's recommends aggressively neutralizing or discrediting the guiding thinkers of the global al-Qaida movement. His point is that not all jihadists are replaceable: there are some individuals who provide a disproportionate amount of insight, scholarship or charisma. In order to effectively degrade the jihadist movement's long-term capacity, Abu Yahya suggests that these jihadist luminaries need to be silenced, either through death, imprisonment or perceived irrelevance, thereby leaving the Movement "without an authority in which they can put their full confidence and which directs and guides them, allays their misconceptions, and regulates their march with knowledge, understanding, and wisdom." The consequence of this power vacuum, he argues, is that "those who have not fully matured on this path or who are hostile to them in the first place, to spread whatever ideas and opinions they want and to cause disarray and darkness in the right vision which every Mujahid must have."

Finally, Abu Yahya advises the United States to spin the minor disagreements among leaders or jihadist organizations as being major doctrinal and methodological disputes. He suggests that any disagreement, be it over personal, strategic or theological reasons, can be exacerbated by using them as the basis for designating new subsets, or schools-of-thought. These fractures can also serve as useful inroads on which targeted information operations can be focused: such an environment becomes a "safe-haven for rumormongers, deserters, and demoralizers, and the door

is left wide open for defamation, casting doubts, and making accusations and slanders,” he explains.

The United States should not have had to wait for our adversary to hand us a robust grand strategy like this. Abu Yahya made these ideas publically available. All it required was that I took him seriously, read his work and tried to do to al-Qaida what al-Qaida is doing to us: turning our writings and insights about ourselves back against us.

As a nation, we learned the importance of these lessons, of knowing our enemy and leveraging those insights, during the twentieth century. We realized that, although military and intelligence efforts are vital components for keeping adversaries at bay, the root of challenges posed by global ideological movements are inherently ideational in nature. In other words, ideas are at the heart of our adversary’s militancy.

Without its underlying ideology and a social-cultural context in which it can flourish, the global al-Qaida could not persist. Unless the United States makes an effort to understand and combat the ideas and the contexts underlying the adversary’s militancy, developing a coherent and robust strategy to combat that adversary will be limited to the proverbial “whack-a-mole” successes.

Professor David Engerman, a historian and one of the foremost experts on the intellectual history of Sovietology in the United States, makes a number of compelling points in his recent *Foreign Affairs* article, including noting that,

Despite the existence of a successful historical model, the U.S. government does not seem to have absorbed the useful lessons from the creation of Soviet studies programs in its efforts to study this new threat. Sovietology was -- especially in its first decade -- a vibrant intellectual enterprise that contributed to scholarly disciplines, public debate, and top-secret government discussions. A look at this field's success is essential to shaping how the U.S. government defines and studies the threat of Islamic fundamentalism.

For Engerman, the United States should be investing significant resources into catalyzing the study of area studies. History, culture and language are the keys to long-term national strategic endurance. Understanding the world, not on a reactionary, threat-by-threat basis, but from a deep global perspective is the preferred approach, and a lesson that was not seemingly learned from the Cold War. “Widening the pipeline,” as he calls it, is the key to long-term success. By this he means that the United States government needs to invest resources into opportunities that expand the number and diversity of scholars and researchers thinking, researching and writing about a host of topics.¹⁵ This not only provides knowledge that we will need to know, and often do not realize that we need until we do, but it also builds a wide and deep body of professional expertise over the long-haul. The U.S. needs to invest in up-and-coming scholars doing work on social,

¹⁵ Telephone interview with Professor Engerman. December 15, 2009. For more on this topic see, David C. Engerman. *Know Your Enemy: The Rise and Fall of America’s Soviet Experts*. Oxford University Press, 2009.

cultural and historical topics, particularly when it does not seem directly applicable to the operational necessities at-hand.

Indeed, the United States understood after waging its half-century-long conflict with the Soviet Union, that hostile ideas, if left unchallenged, can mobilize populations to action in ways that subverts our national interest. Although not an exact parallel, America's experience combating the spread of global Communism is a useful analog, at least in terms of the importance of ideas. The United States government poured resources into building the academic discipline of Sovietology at universities around the country. Grant programs were established. Cultural, historical and language studies programs were bolstered. Area studies became something that was viewed as part and parcel of national security. The United States recognized that we needed to try to comprehensively understand our adversary, as well as the contexts in which it was, and potentially could be, operating.

Curiously, it has been the Norwegians, not the Americans, who have best understood and embraced the value of deep intellectual engagement with the enemy's ideas today. The Norwegians have established the world's leading program on the study of extremist Islamic movements. Norway's Transnational Radical Islamism Project (TERRA) at its Norwegian Defence Research Establishment provides in-depth academic analyses of contemporary jihadist movements and their ideology, motivations, patterns and types of operations, and the processes of radicalization and recruitment. Shockingly, eight years after 9/11, the United States has no dedicated center, research institute or program that compares in terms of its expertise or capabilities to this Norwegian initiative.

I humbly offer to this subcommittee that we borrow a page out of the jihadist playbook in terms of its use of the internet. The United States needs to establish new vehicles in which scholars and experts *outside* of government can get engaged in this fight by doing what they do best: creative, collaborative academic scholarship. A potential first step would be to establish a vehicle wherein thinkers could virtually (by way of the internet) and openly communicate with one another about both al-Qaida's ideology and media but also the historical social and cultural contexts in which it exists. Such a program should be unclassified and maximize public transparency. It is in such a forum where new ideas can germinate, where new voices can emerge and where the inconsistencies of the enemy's message can be identified – exactly like what the global al-Qaida movement has been doing to us.

Such a conversation should not be seen as 'tipping our hand' but rather as an important step forward in our national commitment to winning this fight. More minds are better than fewer. Open debate is what makes this country strong and what leads us to creative solutions. It is the process of holding this conversation that itself will enhance our own efforts and force the adversary on the defensive in theirs.