INTRODUCTION

On 8 September 2006, the United Nations (UN) General Assembly (GA) unanimously adopted a Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy (Strategy) as the culmination of a multi-year effort by former Secretary-General Kofi Annan to encourage all UN member states to accept and adopt a blueprint for a coordinated, consistent, and comprehensive response to terrorism at the national, regional, and global levels. The UN Strategy calls for a holistic, inclusive approach to counter-terrorism, which includes not just security-related preventative measures, but also gives priority attention to ensuring respect for human rights and the rule of law, as well as addressing underlying conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism. According to the Strategy, these conditions include: “poverty, prolonged unresolved conflicts, dehumanization of victims of terrorism, lack of rule of law and violations of human rights, ethnic, national and religious discrimination, political exclusion, socio-economic marginalization and lack of good governance.”

By elaborating a broad range of counter-terrorism measures, underpinned by the commitment to uphold the rule of law and human rights, the UN Strategy reinforces what many terrorism experts have long felt, namely that an effective counter-terrorism strategy must combine preventive measures with efforts to address both real and perceived grievances and underlying social, economic, and political conditions.

One of the achievements of the UN Strategy is that it highlights the importance of addressing issues that promote extremism and the recruitment of terrorists. For example, all UN member states agreed for the first time in the context of an overarching counter-terrorism strategy “[t]o pursue and reinforce development and social inclusion agendas at every level as goals in themselves, recognizing that success in this area, especially on youth unemployment, could reduce marginalization and the subsequent sense of victimization that propels extremism and the recruitment of terrorism.”

Among the wide range of issues addressed in the UN Strategy, some such as terrorist financing, border security, and capacity-building, have already received extensive treatment by the UN and other multilateral bodies, as well as government and non-government experts. Thus, the international community’s understanding on how to address these elements of the UN Strategy effectively is relatively advanced, with numerous existing programs at the global, regional, sub-regional, and local level aimed at addressing these elements of the UN Strategy. Efforts to address other elements, however, such as those related to “measures to address the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism,” are not as advanced. Effective strategies have yet to be developed at the international, or for that matter local, level for tackling many of them. This is partly because a number of these issues – such as local conflicts, religious extremism, lack of political freedoms – touch upon highly sensitive topics on which it is difficult to achieve
consensus regarding appropriate multilateral responses, particularly at the global level. As a result, according to one expert, “international counterterrorism cooperation has been least successful where it matters most.”

Thus, these issues could benefit from further study, with a view to developing a deeper understanding of the institutions, programs, and policies that could contribute to addressing them in an efficient, coordinated manner. In addition to focusing on those thematic parts of the UN Strategy that could benefit most from more in-depth study, efforts should be made to tackle these issues at the regional and sub-regional levels. Given the varied nature of the terrorist threat, a one-size fits all approach to Strategy implementation is not likely to be effective or appropriate. Rather, regions and sub-regions will need to determine how best to implement the generally broad elements of the UN Strategy, while taking into account the particular historic, cultural, and political context.

With these considerations in mind, the Rome Brainstorming will address some of the factors that may contribute to or affect violent radicalization processes in the Mediterranean region, particularly among youth, where the phenomenon of youth radicalization has caused a degree of concern and has raised important questions with regard to how policies can be channeled more effectively to reduce this trend. One of the goals of the Brainstorming will be to try to get a better understanding of what can turn a ‘normal person’ into a terrorist. As the coordinator of the UN Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force, UN Assistant Secretary-General Robert Orr, has recently stated,

this process normally takes a lot of time. We see this process in an accelerated form in those regions of the world where ideology and collective feelings of powerlessness and humiliation are very strong. That can be caused by specific current conditions, historical patterns, by political or religious developments. Whatever the reason, we have to pay attention to both the conditions conducive to terrorism and the process leading from those conditions to a terrorist attack. There is a long chain of events preceding a terrorist attack. If we can break this chain of events at one point – like the financing, the ideology or with law enforcement – we can stop the terrorists.

No one factor will automatically lead to violence, and the factors which do cause a person to cross the line to being prepared to commit a terrorist act are complex, multifaceted, and in many cases distinctly personal. Further, only a very small portion of those who connect with radical groups or organizations actually become involved in terrorist activities. This should be kept in mind during any discussion on violent radicalization. Nevertheless, it remains essential to try to understand the reasons which drive people into the arms of terrorist groups, recognizing that, as stated by Gijs de Vries, the former European Union Counter-Terrorism Coordinator, “if we do not prevent the next generation of terrorists from emerging we will not solve the problem in the long run.”
The Brainstorming will seek to identify lessons learned and best practices from efforts at the regional, national, and local level to prevent youth in a region where young people make up more than half of the population from becoming radicalized and then resorting to violence.

Although the Euro-Mediterranean region has experienced different types of terrorism over the years, the main threat currently comes from Al-Qaeda and extremists inspired by Al-Qaeda and therefore this will be the focus of the Brainstorming. The motivational factors behind violent radicalization and the strategies for addressing them, however, are generally the same for all forms of violent radicalization be it nationalistic, anarchic, separatist, religious or secular. Although there is a wide range of specific issues and international dynamics that have been identified as potential influences on the process of youth radicalization, the Brainstorming will focus primarily on five thematic areas: education, unemployment, prisons, the media (including the Internet), and the role and treatment of women. This discussion paper will provide some general background on each of these themes, while recognizing that a deeper understanding of these complex issues can only be brought about by engaging in an sustained dialogue among political, social, cultural, and other experts from the region. Following the event, the co-sponsoring institutions will prepare a “co-chairmen’s paper” that will include policy relevant recommendations for international and regional organizations, and national and local governments, which could be presented to the UN General Assembly in the fall of 2008 when UN Strategy implementation efforts are first assessed.

I. Education

One of the key environments for youth radicalization in many European countries appears to be universities, which have served as the scene for the political awakenings of generations and have historically been breeding grounds for radical ideologies in terrorist movements in Europe, whether it be the Red Brigade in Italy or the Baader Meinhof in Germany. For second and third generation immigrants this has been combined with the pressures of struggling to define their identity within (or in opposition to) European society. According to a 2005 European Commission report, university is where some young people, away from their familiar environment and support structures of friends and family, first come into contact with radical groups. For example, three of the four suicide bombers involved in the July 2005 London bombings were university students who had dropped out to train as terrorists.

Whereas universities, in certain circumstances, have been the backdrop for the radicalization of alienated and disenfranchised youth from migrant communities in Europe, it is generally the lack of available quality, universal, primary and secondary schooling in many countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region that appears to be a greater cause of concern. The education challenges in many countries in the MENA region include a lack of access to functioning schools, large numbers of out-of-school youths, high rates of absenteeism, dropping out and illiteracy and low percentage of students who go on to secondary school from primary school. Compounding this problem are the curricula, which are often dated and irrelevant to
socio-economic needs. In some cases, state-funded public schools are not capable of equipping young generations with the skills they need for the modernized job market, thus offering them minimal opportunities in the future. Unemployed and unemployable youth provide a vast pool of potential recruits for terrorist organizations.\textsuperscript{11} In response to the weakness of many national education systems, alternative schools have emerged, a small number of which have helped to spread radical and sometimes violent interpretations of Islam.\textsuperscript{12}

The Report of the High-Level Panel on the Alliance of Civilizations (AOC Report), which seeks to promote collective action across civilizations to combat extremism, stresses the importance of increasing access to quality education in order to address the underdevelopment and the marginalization of youth and recommends the expansion of traditional education opportunities to include more students at the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels.\textsuperscript{13} Providing access to quality education for all children and out of school youth of vulnerable populations is one deterrent to radical or fundamentalist ideology which may lead to support for or participation in acts of terrorism. Such access provides children and youth with independent and critical thinking skills, leadership and life skills, and exposure to democratic values.

II. Media and the Internet:

In many ways, the Internet has become the main vehicle through which terrorist organizations communicate with their own members, reach a wide audience of real and potential sympathizers, publish propaganda and engage in a sophisticated auxiliary psychological campaign to amplify violence on the ground. According to Magnus Ranstorp, “[n]owhere is this more starkly illustrated than their determination to invoke moral shock through videotaped brutal beheadings of hostages in Iraq and Afghanistan. Many appear in extremist chat-rooms and websites for anyone to access.”\textsuperscript{14} The Bavarian State Office of Criminal Investigation and the State Office for the Protection of the Constitution have reportedly employed experts on Islam to evaluate the content of radical sites and chat rooms, with disturbing results. For example, according to conversations in chat rooms, it seems that young Muslims in Germany are increasingly open to being recruited for suicide missions.\textsuperscript{15}

The dramatic increase in the number of violent Islamist websites from fewer than 20 in the late 1990s to more than 5,000 today is evidence of the empowerment and ability of terrorists to create and distribute news themselves, providing ideological tracts, discussion forums, weblogs, and videos.\textsuperscript{16} This increase in the number of websites reflects the strategic and operational advantages cyberspace offers. As a result, “the Internet has become the principal means by which terrorists publish propaganda, proselytize, indoctrinate followers, recruit new members, communicate, train, engage in information gathering and reconnaissance, raise funds and other material resources, transfer funds, plan operations, and engage in information attacks on enemy websites or other critical infrastructure.”\textsuperscript{17}
Misuse of the Internet for these purposes is particularly troubling in European countries where frustrated youths from second and third generation migrant communities are actually seeking out terrorist groups through chat rooms and the Internet rather than being directly recruited through the traditional channels; this is even more so now that traditional recruitment channels are increasingly targeted by the authorities. Through web-based interaction, radical youths can identify with, connect to, and share the emotional intensity of the suffering of fellow Muslims both locally and globally. The Dutch security and intelligence service has identified the growing trend of “self-radicalization” or “autonomous radicalization” among Muslim youths taking place increasingly through the virtual world.

Proposals to prevent the misuse of the Internet for terrorist purposes generally call for closer monitoring of the Internet, especially public sites used by known terrorists for recruitment, increasing the presence and accessibility of moderate religious voices to counter extremist messages, and using it to propagate alternative, mainstream messages. The AOC Report, which recognizes that the Internet may be used for harmful purposes such as terrorist recruitment, recommends focusing on the use of the Internet as a mechanism to “bridge cultural divides, linking activists capable of promoting dialogue and understanding.” The UN Strategy calls on states to work with the UN system to use the Internet as a tool for countering the spread of terrorism. Given the web’s transnational nature it is necessary for states to think and respond in a similar way and to harmonize or coordinate the response of individual states; thus, multilateral institutions are well-placed to contribute to the development of a comprehensive response to this new threat.

The Internet is not the only form of media being used as a vehicle for radicalization on a mass level. Other forms, including television and print media, are being manipulated to disseminate radicalizing rhetoric as well. Yet, like the Internet, they can also be effective tools for countering radicalization. The media has the potential not only to serve as a bridge between cultures and societies, but to play an important role in influencing often impressionable youth and mitigating negative religious, cultural or other stereotypes.

In the political arena of international media communication, many have argued that politicians should be careful with their use of language so as not to exacerbate the situation or play into the radicalizing narrative. The AOC Report puts forward a series of suggestions for encouraging greater professionalism in the media. It argues that the media should be more responsible in producing reliable information, recommending that media professionals articulate and implement a code of conduct and that they educate journalists and those producing information for public digestion in that code of conduct. The EU counter-terrorism strategy also points out that policies and politicians should refrain from using language that exacerbate divisions.

News coverage in the Middle East has also raised many concerns from politicians and viewers both in the region and the West, where some believe that the rhetoric used by Arab news channels when covering events in the Middle East incites hatred towards the West, and the United States in particular. Encouraging greater press freedom in this
volatile region while minimizing its potential to contribute to radicalization is a central challenge.

III. Employment

It has been observed that disproportionately high unemployment and discrimination against Muslims in European countries contributes to a sense of economic and social marginalization that may provide fertile ground for political radicalization. According to a 2006 International Labor Organization report, without adequate access to the labor market, which provides an opportunity for a good start in professional life, young people are less likely to make the right choice to improve their employment perspective and those of their future descendents. This, concludes the report, “perpetuates the cycle of insufficient education, low-productivity, employment and working poverty from one generation to the next.” In many European countries where youth unemployment is already high, and that among second and third generation Muslim immigrants disproportionately so, the sense of economic and social marginalization may make certain fringes of these communities more susceptible to the narrative of violent extremists.

In certain predominantly Muslim countries, youth unemployment is two to three times greater than national unemployment levels worldwide and the problem is particularly acute for young people. While the employment rate for those ages 15 – 24 is 54% worldwide, it is only 40% in MENA countries. This problem is particularly acute in two of the countries that have recently been victims of Al-Qaeda-related terrorist attacks: Algeria and Morocco. Approximately 75% of Algerians are under 30, and the unemployment rate for those under 25 is 50%. Morocco experiences similar problems with a large, unemployed youth population. According to some observers, without improved economic conditions and better democratic institutions, it may be difficult to limit extremism in these countries.

In order to help combat growing youth unemployment, the AOC Report highlights the importance of developing national strategies to enhance youth economic participation such as school-based career guidance and the promotion of youth enterprise. Economic prosperity alone, however, does not necessarily inoculate a society against growing radicalization, as demonstrated by the case of Tunisia, which while relatively more economically prosperous than its North African neighbors, has still proven susceptible to growing radicalization. In fact, many terrorists are well educated and come from middle class and even wealthy families.

In much of Europe, youth migrant communities need to be made to feel more connected to the larger European society and be given more employment opportunities to help them move away from the disturbing trend of creating parallel societies. According to Olivier Roy, an expert on Islam in Europe, this will involve changing the perceptions of Europeans in general and European employers in particular of the immigrant population as part of a long-term integration campaign. Addressing unemployment, however, needs to be part of a holistic approach to integration that includes not only
access to the labor market for all groups, but also complementary measures to deal with social, cultural, religious, linguistic, and national differences.36

IV. Prisons

Prisons are now recognized as significant centers of radicalization, particularly among young people. In Europe, prison populations frequently include a disproportionate number of second and third generation migrants, incarcerated for minor crimes.37 Muslims, for example, account for an estimated 50% of the French prison population, with some jails on the outskirts of Paris hitting 80%, while Muslims account for merely 6-10% of the population. Fourteen percent of Italy’s prison population is Muslim, 98% of whom are foreign nationals, while Muslims account for only 1% of the population.38 Feelings of alienation and rejection from society tend to be strong among the prison population and inmates find themselves with plenty of time on their hands. They are thus susceptible to recruitment since they are often eager to develop a new perspective on life. The lack of trained imams in many European prison systems for prisoners seeking religious instruction or guidance enables extremists to target already vulnerable individuals. Information promoting extremism can often be distributed without the knowledge of prison officials, since it is often written in languages they cannot read.39 Already alienated from and perhaps resentful of mainstream society, these populations are particularly vulnerable to radicalization.40

Recognizing the severity of the problem, addressing radicalization in prisons is now a central element of the EU’s counter-terrorism strategy.41 Among the policies being implemented in this area in EU and other countries include providing enhanced training for moderate religious prison tutors to counter the influence of extremist ideologies and education and job training programs to facilitate post-incarceration employment.42 Innovative programs aimed at reforming jailed Islamist terrorists have even been tried in Southeast Asia and the MENA region with some encouraging results.43 Given the variety of national efforts to confront this problem there is a need to exchange best practices so that programs that have succeeded in one country could be adopted in another.

V. Women

Historically there have been numerous accounts of women being engaged in or making significant contributions to organizations such as the Irish Republican Army, the Italian Red Brigades, and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.44 In recent years, however, women are increasingly becoming more active participants in terrorist attacks and have become both targets for recruitment and more vulnerable to radicalization. The fact that young women represent the majority of the uneducated and unemployed youth only heightens this vulnerability.

When exploring the important question of what appears to be the increasing radicalization of women in many Muslim societies – in some cases to the point of participating in acts of terrorist violence – it is important to understand the role of women
in their particular society, the challenges they face and the opportunities that exist to overcome those challenges.

One must also remain aware of different contextual issues that exist in local settings, as Georgetown University’s Margot Badran has noted, by distinguishing between Muslim majority and minority societies and between societies that have or do not have active feminist movements. Other contextual issues that relate to conditions such as socio-economic conditions, political grievances, susceptibility to extremism through appeals based on religious doctrine, alienation from the patriarchal society due, for instance to divorce or being widowed, ties to radicalized men and their position within their own family and community should also be considered. Recruitment aimed at women, for example, often calls upon them to support terrorist activity by other family members, such as their husbands and sons, by manipulating their role and “duty” as a member of her family. While none of these conditions necessarily leads directly to radicalization, they can increase the likelihood. Research into what can be done to lessen the chances that women are radicalized has led to some concrete ideas that focus on empowerment through education, particularly literacy and enhancing understanding of the law to enhance the livelihood of women at all ages. Efforts to support local female community leaders can also contribute by enhancing the position of women and decreasing their vulnerability to extremist ideologies.

The effects that the empowerment of women can have on decreasing a society’s sympathy and support for terrorism requires further research and should be considered in the context of a broader set of internal reforms within Islamic and Arab countries. Many countries in the MENA region are in transition, affected by internal tensions between secularists and Islamists and between reformist Islamists and conservative Islamists and many are currently supporting initiatives aimed at empowering women. In 2004, for example, Morocco adopted sweeping, progressive reforms to its family code granting women greater rights in marriage, with regard to children and in inheriting property. In Egypt, where earlier efforts focused on increasing women’s enrollment in universities, current efforts focus on emancipating less privileged women and providing them with the skills and trainings they need to move into the viable job market. In Jordan the United Nations Development Fund for Women has five simultaneous projects for the empowerment of women. Most are geared towards adult women getting the skills they need to participate in the economy and protect themselves from gender-based discrimination. Although many of these countries have official centers for women, few reach out enough to women in need with assistance and are sufficiently proactive in trying to change cultural perceptions of women’s inferiority.

In Europe, polling data shows that the number of Muslim women that say they have experienced discrimination rose from 35 percent in 1999 to 80 percent in 2006. Real and perceived discrimination directed at women – or anyone for that matter – exacerbates grievances that can lead to radicalization. A statement summarizing Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)-sponsored discussions with the Canadian Council of Muslim Women, for example, notes that “with deterioration in socio-economic conditions and overt acts of discrimination, it is not surprising that
Muslim women and their children are becoming more and more disenfranchised and disengaged. In many OSCE states Muslims are facing greater alienation and exclusion from mainstream society.”\textsuperscript{51} The statement further notes that “deteriorating socio-economic conditions and overt hostility towards Muslims are at the heart of societal dysfunction which may sometimes lead to radicalization and anti-social behavior….the issues that we are facing are not about cultural integration but rather about civic and socio-economic engagement and participation of all of our population.”\textsuperscript{52}
NOTES

16 Gabriel Weimann, Terror on the Internet, (Washington, DC; USIP; 2005).


