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CO-CHAIRMEN'S REPORT BRAINSTORMING "IMPLEMENTING THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY'S COUNTER-TERRORISM STRATEGY: ADDRESSING YOUTH RADICALISATION IN THE MEDITERRANEAN REGION. LESSONS LEARNED, BEST PRACTICES AND RECOMMENDATIONS"

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Rome, 11-12 July 2007

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BRAINSTORMING "IMPLEMENTING THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY'S
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LESSONS LEARNED, BEST PRACTICES AND RECOMMENDATIONS"

The Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) and the Center for Global Counter Terrorism Co-operation (Center) convened a brainstorming on 11-12 July in Rome on "Implementing the UN General Assembly's Counter-Terrorism Strategy: Addressing Youth Radicalisation in the Mediterranean Region. Lessons Learned, Best Practices and Recommendations." The event was organised in co-operation with the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Centro Studi sul Federalismo (Turin), with the support of the Compagnia di San Paolo. The participants included experts from the UN and other multilateral bodies, officials from the Italian and German governments, and academic and other non-government experts from the United States, Europe and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. The meeting also included a roundtable of representatives of the "Consulta Giovanile per il Pluralismo Religioso e Culturale" (Youth Consultative Council), a youth advisory board recently established by the Italian Ministries of Youth and Sport and Interior to enhance the role of youth in promoting dialogue and tolerance among different cultures and religions. The Rt. Hon. Giovanna Melandri, the Italian Minister for Youth Policies and Sport addressed the brainstorming.

Discussion focused on identifying proposals to address effectively the factors that may contribute to or affect violent radicalisation processes in the Mediterranean region, particularly among youth. The phenomenon of youth radicalisation in the region has caused some degree of concern and alarm and has raised important questions with regard to how policies can be made more effective to reduce this trend. With the aim of building consensus and fostering implementation of a coordinated response by national governments to this phenomenon, the brainstorming participants were invited to exchange regional, national, and local experiences and identify and share best practices on five key thematic issues: 1) the impact of media and the Internet on the spreading of youth radicalisation; 2) radicalisation and education; 3) unemployment and radicalisation; 4) prisons as a radicalisation-conducive environment; and 5) women, the family and the social environment.

The results of the brainstorming are intended to contribute to implementation of the September 2006 UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, by focusing on certain aspects of the UN Strategy that could benefit from more in-depth study by government officials, counter-terrorism practitioners, academics and other experts.

This co-chairmen's summary highlights some of the issues and observations put forward during the event, which was convened under the Chatham House Rule. It is not an official record and does not reflect the official views of any of the participants. A set of action-oriented policy recommendations directed at states, intergovernmental bodies and other actors has been prepared and will be distributed in the fall of 2007 to coincide

with the UN General Assembly's informal review of the implementation of the UN Strategy, which is scheduled for November 2007. It is the hope of the co-chairmen that the results of the brainstorming can be presented by interested UN Member States for discussion during this informal review.

Session I: The Impact of Media and the Internet on the Spreading of Youth Radicalisation

Terrorists depend on the media to spread fear to target audiences. Historically, it was noted, innovations in mass media have been preceded – if not provoked – by waves of terrorism, which capitalized on new opportunities to reach potential audiences. Recently, satellite TV, the Internet and mobile communication technology have helped spread the message of Al-Qaida and groups inspired by Al-Qaida. The use of the mass media by these and other terrorist groups has dramatically enhanced their capacity to shape the political discourse and made it possible for terrorists and terrorist ideologies to have a vast audience. Satellite channels such as Al-Jazeera have contributed to the development of a pan-Arabic sense of identity, especially among diaspora communities in Europe. Some participants asserted that, while access to a wider variety of media sources is a generally positive phenomenon, some sources such as some satellite channels may play an indirect role in facilitating the process of radicalization and more should be done to encourage inclusion of moderate Muslim points of view.

Mass media also play a pivotal role in legitimising the narrative used by extremists, emphasising the suffering and discrimination of the community with which vulnerable individuals identify, reinforcing their feelings of victimisation, and pushing a small minority towards violence.

The participants discussed the rise in the use of the Internet and the challenges in preventing its misuse for terrorist purposes. The Internet, it was highlighted, allows terrorist groups to maintain a global constituency aimed at transforming common people into active participants in the struggle. Extremists use the Internet not just to radicalise, but also to recruit, organise, train, raise and move money, plan and even execute attacks: recent prosecutions and convictions in Europe have almost all involved an element of Internet use of this kind. While there are some 1.1 billion users of the Internet, it was pointed out that this only represents a penetration of 17%. Thus there is room for significant growth and it is likely that the impact of the Internet will increase exponentially over the coming years.

Terrorists have shown a tendency to use the Internet to target different audiences with specific messages, that is, “narrowcasting”. Some terrorist organizations, it was noted, have created multiple websites in order to address the diverse audiences. Alarming trends have emerged from the monitoring of websites dedicated to children: examples include computer games to attract and train them, animated movies spreading extremist messages, videos available on the Internet of executions to be imitated. Terrorists also monitor chat rooms to find young people to recruit. Those who agree to become suicide bombers are rewarded through videos and pictures showing their sacrifice, giving them

visibility as martyrs and heroes, and promising them a better second life. Parents are also targeted, in order to convince them to encourage their children to become martyrs.

Al-Qaida and other terrorist groups extensively use the Internet to spread their influence all over the world. They have created sophisticated production units to produce videos of terrorist leaders and established distribution units to ensure that these videos and other products (training manuals, on-line magazines, religious opinions supportive to terrorism, interviews, films of terrorist acts or eulogies for dead fighters) reach a wide audience.

The UN Strategy contains two references to the Internet, noting the need to coordinate international and regional efforts to counter terrorism on the Internet and to use the Internet proactively to counter the spread of terrorism. It was reported that the Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force (CTITF) has established a working group to work with relevant UN entities and with states to address these issues. The working group has identified two immediate tasks: to assess the extent and the nature of terrorist use of the Internet, and to devise regional and national initiatives to deal with it. While recognizing the legal difficulties and human rights issues pertaining to regulation of the Internet, participants agreed that the working group and states should continue to seek to identify ways in which to prevent its misuse for terrorist purposes. Possible additional steps could include: increased monitoring of the exchanges in Internet chatrooms and fora, increased use of the Internet as a public diplomacy tool, and enhanced efforts to monitor extremist websites to learn more about the debates within extremist communities, the mindsets of terrorists, recruiters, and targets.

Participants cited the need to formulate rules to address the growing threat posed by terrorists' misuse of the Internet. Some called for the UN to bring together Internet Service Providers (ISPs), human rights and legal experts to consider this issue. ISPs, in particular, should be encouraged to participate in the process to ensure that their interests are protected from the outset. It is important, some noted, that ISPs do not suffer the fate of the financial services industry right after 9/11. There, governments developed regulations to combat terrorist financing, often without industry input, and which placed a heavy burden on the industry.

It was pointed out by some participants that the responses to this new challenge presented by terrorist misuse of the Internet have been half-hearted and unconvincing, with the temptation being either to over-react or to give up. According to some, the key is to undermine the arguments put forward to justify terrorism by emphasising its criminality, the consequences for people within the same communities that produce the terrorists, and the heartlessness and arrogance of terrorism, in contrast to the compassion and humility preached by the religion the terrorists purport to defend. Actions to counter terrorism on the Internet should take advantage of existing and well-established moderating influences in schools, families and open communities, giving them space and visibility. In the UK, for example, some people have come out of terrorist organisations and turned against them. These individuals, it was stressed, need to be empowered and given a voice through television or the Internet to speak out against their former group members. It was cautioned against having the government be

seen as supporting any initiatives in this area, as this would diminish their credibility within their former communities.

People, particularly youth, that access terrorist material on the Internet are often driven by the desire to connect, be engaged, identify others who share similar interests, seek excitement and feel empowered. The Al-Qaida-related or inspired websites deliberately offer a sense of belonging, purpose, or importance, an opportunity for involvement, a belief in the power of the individual to effect change, and the vision of a future. The result is often to breed introversion and isolate the individual concerned from the potentially moderating influences of friends and family. Self-radicalisation can follow, and a slide towards violent action, with the subliminal message of the websites being that there is an overwhelming argument in favour of taking action, and no good reason not to do so.

Media practitioners also face great challenges in reporting on terrorism; especially since new TV stations like Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya have broken the monopoly of Western stations such as the BBC and CNN. It was noted that some Western media have a tendency to portray Muslims as terrorists, Muslim countries as non-democratic and Muslim women as abused, instigating a feeling of fear and suspicion among Muslim communities towards these outlets. It was further noted that neither Western nor Arab media pay sufficient attention to positive examples coming from mainstream Islamic leaders and communities, giving too much air-time to reporting on the extremists. Moreover, it was argued that states, as well as intergovernmental bodies such as the UN, should avoid using language that associates terrorism with Islam or is otherwise pejorative and which may serve to alienate Muslims. It was suggested that more attention be given to promoting dialogue among and between journalists and government officials in the West and in the Islamic world. Consideration should be given to new and more creative channels for dialogue. For example, Western governments may be more effective in conveying their messages through fluent Arabic speakers on Middle Eastern media outlets, such as Al Jazeera, rather than through Western-funded outlets. It was also proposed that hot lines should be set up between press agencies in the West and Islamic world to foster dialogue among journalists and develop a common approach to covering terrorist attacks.

Session II: Radicalism and Education

It was acknowledged that quality education is an essential element of any long-term strategy to prevent individuals from becoming terrorists. Quality education, it was stressed, raises awareness and understanding of fundamental human rights and generates respect for others and conveys skills for creating and maintaining cultures of peace. This, however, requires a regular renewal of curricula, improvement and revision of educational materials as well as periodic teacher training.

Regarding the curricula in both state and traditional schools in the MENA region, it was noted that they too often concentrate on local and religious discourse without incorporating universal values and realities. An international dimension has to be incorporated into the curricula so that young people study foreign civilizations and

cultures. Schools should promote critical thinking and expand course offerings that seek to broaden students' understanding of other cultures, religions, and societies. School curricula should be developed to help ensure that students are prepared for employment opportunities and, more generally, for post-graduate life. Moreover, young people from Muslim countries should be encouraged to study in the "West" (and vice versa), as the experience of students abroad could serve as a bridge between different cultures and societies. In addition to citing a need for increased study abroad programs, participants called for more international dialogue among young people.

Textbooks, it was stressed, should be used as effective tools to spread not only scientific notions, but also values, attitudes, skills and behaviours. Radical agendas should be banned from these books, which should instead promote non-discrimination, tolerance and human rights.

More generally, education should be reinforced, particularly in MENA countries, to tackle three crucial goals: promoting critical thinking; widening the horizons of general culture; training the future citizens. Critical thinking is of primary importance to allow students to understand what they learn, to discuss and to develop a scientific approach to knowledge, and to acquire a rational spirit. It is also important to broaden the horizons of youths' knowledge through a solid general education. It was pointed out that students in some developing countries are oriented early on towards scientific studies and lack a sound education in humanities, especially history, philosophy and civic education. It has been observed that in Islamic countries the number of extremist students is much higher in scientific and engineering faculties than in the humanities and law. Education in humanities and social sciences is important for students to understand both their own culture and foreign cultures, to develop sentiments of tolerance and to promote peaceful coexistence. Moreover, participants noted the importance of ensuring that the greatest number of children possible has access to a quality education and modernising traditional religious educational programs.

Focusing on traditional Muslim educational institutions – i.e., madrasas – it was noted that they are the heritage of the old system that predates the largely state-driven modern one. These traditional institutions have survived, it was stressed, as a result of the continued underdevelopment of the public school systems in most Muslim countries. Because the state often lacks the capacity to provide adequate schooling to all citizens, these often privately-funded traditional schools help address a need and thus reduce the level of illiteracy that would otherwise exist, particular in rural communities. While it was recognized that these traditional schools are being used to recruit extremists, this is a result of the political agenda that is being imported from the outside. These institutions themselves, it was stressed, are not "radical." While it was recognised that such institutions should be preserved, it was underlined that they have to be monitored closely to ensure that they are not penetrated by radical agendas.

It was also noted that traditional religious education may no longer be adequate for preparing students for employment opportunities. The curricula often do not prepare students to be integrated into society. Partly as a consequence, a proportion of these young people refuse society and seek refuge in radicalism, with some resorting to violence.

More broadly, it was noted that further research is needed to better understand, among other things, the reasons which drive young people towards association with terrorist groups, which kinds of young people seem especially vulnerable, and what personal needs and hopes are addressed by such groups.

The view was also expressed that Muslim communities, particularly in Europe, often lack credible spokespeople to advance a moderate message. In order for moderate voices to emerge, they need to be careful about the language they use to describe the violent extremists so as not to be seen as going against their co-religionists. Further, some suggested that individuals departing extremist organizations should be given opportunities to rejoin mainstream society and empowered to speak out against their former organizations and their leaders. Governments, however, should be cautious about launching government-funded or sponsored programs in this area as this might jeopardize the credibility of the former extremists within their old communities.

While the participants recognized that there is no one-size fits all approach for governments to relate to ethnic and religious communities, there was widespread agreement that governments should seek ways to empower Muslims and other migrant communities, including by giving them the political space to express their views and facilitating a dialogue with the government. Italy's Islamic Council, established by the Ministry of the Interior, and consisting of 16 moderate Islamic representatives selected by the ministry, was cited as a possible best practice in this area.

Session III: Unemployment and radicalisation

Participants noted that there is no data to support the conclusion that unemployment is a condition conducive to violent radicalisation. There is no single profile of people involved in terrorist activities: in fact, many terrorists are well educated and come from middle class and even wealthy families. Moreover, studies conducted in Maghreb countries have shown that there are no significant differences between unemployed and employed people concerning attitudes towards a series of issues, ranging from support for US foreign policy to support for democratic institutions.

Although unemployment cannot in itself to be considered a factor related to violent radicalisation, the perceived socio-economic marginalization of Muslims in Europe is real and youth unemployment and social marginalisation are empirical facts that have to be taken into account in dealing with Muslim communities in Europe. This sense of economic and social marginalisation can make certain fringes of migrant communities more susceptible to the narrative of violent extremists. In particular, unemployment can lead to alienation, with possible outcomes such as illegal emigration to foreign countries, drug consumption, joining terrorist networks. Taking steps to address unemployment, particularly among youth migrant communities in Europe where the rates are often higher, should therefore be considered an essential part of counter-terrorism strategies. Young people in these migrant communities need to be made to feel more connected to the broader European society and be given more employment

opportunities to help them to move away from the disturbing trend of creating parallel societies.

Some participants argued that addressing unemployment, however, needs to be part of a holistic approach to integration that includes not only access to the labour market for all groups, but also complementary measures to deal with social, cultural, religious, linguistic and national differences, in order to offer them a vision of the future.

Although social marginalization may be a cause for radicalism, it should be viewed in the context of other factors, for instance discriminatory marginalization of a certain class of people, such as immigrants and, in particular, Muslim immigrants. Participants asserted that even second and third generation Muslim immigrants in Europe do not feel part of the society where they live and, on the other hand, Europe has not yet set up a true policy of integration. Terrorists, it was noted, tend to use these unresolved issues to recruit people.

During the brainstorming, the role of international bodies such as UNESCO and the UN Inter-regional Crime Research Institute in addressing the underlying factors leading to radicalisation, in particular among young people, was stressed. UNESCO's "Mondialogo," an initiative launched with support from DaimlerChrysler, which encourages dialogue between young people from diverse cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds, could be considered a best practice in this area. It aims to put into practice UNESCO's Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity and encourages students and future engineers to think about new ways to develop intercultural learning and to achieve sustainable development.

Participants highlighted the significant projects that have been implemented by the Italian Ministry of the Interior, in cooperation with the Italian Ministry of Youth Policies. A Charter of Values of Citizenship and Integration was recently adopted by the Ministry of the Interior, which emphasizes the principles of freedom, respect of human rights, equality and solidarity among people as fundamental values of Italy and the member states of the EU. Responding to the need to actively involve young generations in Italian society, a youth consultative body, composed of young representatives of different cultural and religious communities in Italy, was established in December 2006 with the aim of enhancing the role of youth in promoting dialogue and tolerance. As a first step, the Youth Consultative Council adopted a Declaration on Women and Society in May 2007. The Council can be considered a model to foster dialogue among young people for dealing with youth radicalisation and marginalisation.

Session IV: Prisons as a radicalisation-conducive environment

Prisons are now recognised as significant centres of radicalisation, particularly among young people. For example, it was noted that in Spain, since October 2001, 20% of those imprisoned for being actively engaged in terrorist groups linked with or inspired by Al-Qaida were previously in prison for crimes not related to terrorism. Further, the leader of the financial cell of the network, which perpetrated the March 2004 Madrid

bombings was radicalized in a Moroccan prison when he was sentenced for a drug-related offence.

People tend to experience a particularly severe crisis of identity while in prison. This, often coupled with the feelings of alienation and rejection from society that often are strong among the prison population, the time prisoners have on their hands, and the fact that they are often eager to develop a new perspective on life makes prisoners especially vulnerable to recruitment. The lack of trained imams in many European prisons for inmates 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. Thus, it is important to ensure that all religious figures who interact with prisoners are properly trained.

The importance of providing prisoners with adequate educational and job training possibilities so as to offer them activities in which to invest their time and to facilitate their future reintegration into civil society was emphasized. Some participants encouraged UNESCO and ISESCO to expand upon their existing prisoner education efforts.

Some highlighted the importance of addressing prisoners' lack of trust in judicial institutions, which is brought about by their conviction that they are victims of abuse. This feeling of being victims of injustice, it was pointed out, can lead to violent radicalizations.

Further, the need for strong adherence to rule of law implementing the UN counter-terrorism and human rights frameworks and to ensure fair trial for suspected criminals and adequate training for judges in MENA countries was highlighted. Participants suggested a number of possible steps that could be taken to stem radicalisation processes in prisons. These could include keeping extremists separate from the general prison population, preventing visits of extremists from outside of prison, preventing dissemination of extremist literature and propaganda and online access to radical websites, chatrooms, and other similar Internet fora, controlling prison correspondence, promoting public/private partnerships aimed at helping to ensure that inmates have adequate job opportunities upon their release, providing religious facilities and services to prisoners in their native language to those who request it, selecting and training all religious figures who work with prisoners, and providing appropriate training to prison officers to enable them to detect early warning signs of extremist behavior.

Session V: Women, the Family and the Social Environment

The role of women in Muslim societies deserves special attention, as women are increasingly becoming more active participants in terrorist attacks and have become both targets for recruitment and more vulnerable to radicalisation. The fact that young women represent the majority of the uneducated and unemployed youth only heightens this vulnerability. Therefore, the specific needs of women must to be taken into consideration, in particular by elaborating gender-specific data and implementing

targeted strategies for groups of women. It was stressed the efforts could focus on empowerment through education, particularly literacy, and increased job training and employment opportunities to enhance the livelihood of women at all ages. Efforts to support local female community leaders and women's groups, it was pointed out, could also contribute by enhancing the position of women and decreasing their vulnerability to extremist ideologies.

Turning to the larger question of the relationship between Europe and Islam, some stated that there is a historically embedded suspicion towards Islam in Europe. Contemporary European society is usually blind to religion: there is an acceptance of the historical legacy of Christianity, but religion seems to be refuted as a mobilising factor within European societies. Such societies, it was further suggested, are no longer characterised by religious pluralism, but by cultural and ethical pluralism with strong religious foundations.

The recent terrorist attacks perpetuated or planned in Europe have led to a climate of exacerbated suspicion and enhanced the sense of marginalisation of Muslim societies in European countries. Too often, it was argued, media portrayals of Muslims have been associated with terrorism. Paradoxically, however, there have also been positive developments in the UK after the 7/7 attacks in London: alongside security measures that have inevitably alienated Muslim communities in the UK, a series of programs were also implemented to foster social cohesion. For example, Scotland Yard created a Muslim Contact Unit, whose members are trained to work closely with members of the Muslim communities, with the aim of regaining their trust. Additionally, the UK has established a small government ministry to work in this area. It also allocates funds to faith communities for micro projects at the grass roots level. Some participants, however, questioned the efficacy of directing funds towards Muslim communities as a means for fostering social cohesion and reconciliation. They voiced scepticism concerning the idea of giving large amounts of money to traditional Muslim communities, which themselves may be centres of radicalisation.

Some participants expressed the view that European countries still do not seem prepared to confront the challenge of integrating second and third generation Muslim communities into "mainstream" society. Generally speaking, there is a lack of recognition of the contribution of migrants to the well-being of European countries. The view was expressed that European leaders are not equipped with adequate knowledge about immigrant communities and their countries of origin to deal effectively with integration policies. Moreover, there is often inadequate representation of such communities at the political level.

While some participants advocated a community-based approach to furthering Muslim integration and inclusion in European societies, others saw this as putting Muslims in a "box." The creation of artificial bodies in which people identify themselves with their religious beliefs is dangerous, they argued. Instead, they favoured treating Muslims as individuals and focusing on allowing them to participate fully in the political discourse, by genuinely opening up the political systems in Europe. Being part of European society, Muslims do not need a special representation. Even if a change in political life is possible, however, some participants argued that the biggest challenge remains the

need to stimulate a change in mentality. In the end, some participants thought that the question is whether Europe is facing a crisis of multiculturalism. The fact that, as experience shows, there are differences among Muslim communities in Europe, including in relation to their attitudes towards women, which largely depends on the country (and even the region within the country) of origin of the members of individual communities, must also be taken into account by those interested in addressing these issues.