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September 2005

# **INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS**

## **Information on U.S. Agencies' Efforts to Address Islamic Extremism**





Highlights of GAO-05-852, a report to congressional requesters

September 2005

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### Why GAO Did This Study

U.S. government and other experts have reported that Islamic extremism is on the rise and that the spread of Islamic extremism is the pre-eminent threat facing the United States. In addition, various sources alleged that Saudi Arabia is one source that has supported and funded the spread of Islamic extremism globally.

GAO was asked to determine (1) what efforts U.S. government agencies are implementing to identify, monitor, and counter support and funding for the global propagation of Islamic extremism, particularly support and funding originating in Saudi Arabia; (2) what U.S. agencies and other entities have reported regarding support and funding for the global propagation of Islamic extremism, particularly any provided by Saudi sources (private entities, individuals, and the Saudi government), as well as sources in other countries; and (3) what efforts the Saudi government has taken to address Islamic extremism.

GAO submitted this report to the intelligence agencies, the Departments of Defense (DOD), State, and the Treasury, and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) for their review and comment. The agencies had no formal comments, and their technical comments were incorporated, as appropriate.

[www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-852](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-852).

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Jess T. Ford at (202) 512-4268 or at [fordj@gao.gov](mailto:fordj@gao.gov).

### What GAO Found

The intelligence agencies, DOD, State, and USAID are implementing various efforts to identify, monitor, and counter the support and funding of the global propagation of Islamic extremism. The intelligence agencies and DOD are carrying out identification and monitoring efforts, primarily in counterintelligence and force protection. State and USAID are carrying out efforts to counter the global propagation of Islamic extremism, with State's efforts focused primarily on traditional diplomacy, counterterrorism, and public diplomacy and USAID's efforts focused on development programs to diminish underlying conditions of extremism. We are preparing a classified report, to be subsequently released, with a more complete description of U.S. efforts to address the global spread of Islamic extremism.

#### Examples of Agencies' Efforts to Address Islamic Extremism

Agency	Efforts to address Islamic extremism
DOD	Collection and All-Source Analysis by Air Force Office of Special Investigations: collects, analyzes, and disseminates threat information on Islamic extremism and provides threat notifications that could negatively impact the protection of U.S. Air Force personnel and resources worldwide.
State	Terrorist Exclusion List: places entities such as al Manar, the media arm of Hezbollah, on the terrorist exclusion list to help curb the propagation of Islamic extremism.
State and USAID	South Asia Regional Program: intends to address the root causes of extremism through education, democracy, economic cooperation and development, and conflict mitigation projects.

Sources: DOD, State, and USAID.

A number of sources have reported that Saudi private entities and individuals, as well as sources from other countries, are allegedly financing or supporting Islamic extremism. For example, in July 2005, a Treasury official testified before Congress that Saudi Arabia-based and -funded organizations remain a key source for the promotion of ideologies used by terrorists and violent extremists around the world to justify their agenda. However, according to the 9/11 Commission Report, the Commission found no persuasive evidence that the Saudi government knowingly supported al Qaeda. The agencies also told GAO that Islamic extremism is being propagated by sources in countries other than Saudi Arabia, such as Iran, Kuwait, and Syria. The agencies are still examining Saudi Arabia's relationship, and that of other sources in other countries, to Islamic extremism.

The Saudi government has announced and, in some cases, undertaken some reform efforts to address Islamic extremism. For example, the government is undertaking educational and religious reforms, including revising textbooks and conducting a 3-year enlightenment program, to purge extremism and intolerance from religious education. However, U.S. agencies do not know the extent of the Saudi government's efforts to limit the activities of Saudi sources that have allegedly propagated Islamic extremism outside of Saudi Arabia.

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## **Abbreviations**

AFOSI	Air Force Office of Special Investigations
DOD	Department of Defense
MEPI	Middle East Partnership Initiative
MWO	Muslim World Outreach
PACOM	Pacific Command
PCC	Policy Coordination Committee
TEL	Terrorist Exclusion List
UN	United Nations
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development
USCIRF	U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom

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**United States Government Accountability Office  
Washington, DC 20548**

September 16, 2005

The Honorable Susan M. Collins  
Chairman  
The Honorable Joseph I. Lieberman  
Ranking Minority Member  
Committee on Homeland Security and  
Governmental Affairs  
United States Senate

The Honorable Tom Davis  
Chairman  
The Honorable Henry A. Waxman  
Ranking Minority Member  
Committee on Government Reform  
House of Representatives

The Honorable Dan Burton  
The Honorable Diane E. Watson  
House of Representatives

U.S. government and other experts on the issue of Islamic extremism have reported that Islamic extremism is on the rise and that the spread of Islamic extremism is one of the major threats facing the United States. Some U.S. officials and experts believe that Islamic extremism, rather than al Qaeda—the organization responsible for the attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001—is the pre-eminent threat to U.S. interests. The Defense Intelligence Agency and other experts agree that the rise in Islamic extremism stems from various factors, including economic stagnation; a disproportionate concentration of population in the 15- to 29-year-old range (“youth bulges”), especially in most Middle Eastern countries; repressive and corrupt governments; and anti-Western sentiments, particularly due to negative perceptions of the United States’ foreign policy. In addition, various sources alleged that Saudi Arabia is one source that has supported and funded the spread of Islamic extremism

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globally. Moreover, according to a report by the 9/11 Commission,<sup>1</sup> some charitable organizations, such as the Saudi-based al Haramain Islamic Foundation, have been exploited by extremists to further their goal of violence against non-Muslims.<sup>2</sup> Pursuant to the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998,<sup>3</sup> in September 2004 the Secretary of State designated Saudi Arabia, for the first time, as a country of particular concern for its severe violations of religious freedom within its borders.<sup>4</sup> The Department of State's 2004 *International Religious Freedom Report* to Congress states that freedom of religion does not exist in Saudi Arabia and that basic religious freedoms are denied to all but those who adhere to Saudi Arabia's sanctioned version of Sunni Islam.

GAO was asked to answer the following questions:

1. What efforts are U.S. government agencies implementing to identify, monitor, and counter support and funding for the global propagation of Islamic extremism, particularly support and funding originating in Saudi Arabia?<sup>5</sup>
2. What have U.S. agencies and other entities reported regarding support and funding for the global propagation of Islamic extremism, particularly any provided by Saudi sources (private entities,

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<sup>1</sup>The 9/11 Commission—formally known as the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States—is an independent bipartisan entity created by Congress in 2002 to prepare an account of the circumstances surrounding the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks upon the United States.

<sup>2</sup>Charitable giving, or *zakat*, is one of the five pillars of Islam. *Zakat*, a form of tithe or charity payable for those in need, is an annual flat rate of 2.5 percent of a Muslim's assessable capital. *Zakat* is broader and more pervasive than Western ideas of charity, functioning as a form of income tax, educational assistance, and foreign aid and a source of political influence.

<sup>3</sup>Pub. L. 105-292.

<sup>4</sup>Countries so designated are subject to punitive actions, including economic sanctions by the United States. This designation applies only to violations in Saudi Arabia and does not address any alleged violations related to Islamic extremism outside of Saudi Arabia.

<sup>5</sup>In this report, “propagation of Islamic extremism” refers to the spread of an Islamic ideology that denies the legitimacy of nonbelievers and practitioners of other forms of Islam and that explicitly promotes hatred, intolerance, and violence that could lead to future terrorist activities that threaten U.S. national security interests. We derived this definition from various sources, including meetings with U.S. agency officials and outside experts, as well as a review of the literature on Islamic extremism and related issues.

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individuals, and the government of Saudi Arabia), as well as sources in other countries?<sup>6</sup>

3. What efforts has the government of Saudi Arabia undertaken to address Islamic extremism?

For a more complete description of U.S. efforts to address the global propagation of Islamic extremism, see our classified report.<sup>7</sup> We obtained information from intelligence agencies, the Departments of Defense (DOD), State (State), and the Treasury (Treasury),<sup>8</sup> and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). We focused on these agencies primarily because of their missions and goals relating to areas such as traditional diplomacy (exercising diplomatic relations with other countries and international organizations), public diplomacy (engaging, informing, and influencing key international audiences), intelligence collection, counterterrorism (including terrorist financing), economic and humanitarian assistance, and governance (including democracy and human rights), as well as our initial review of information indicating that these agencies may be involved in efforts to address Islamic extremism. To determine what U.S. government agencies are doing to identify, monitor, and counter sources and funding for Islamic extremism, we analyzed relevant agency documents. To determine what U.S. agencies and other entities have reported regarding support and funding for the propagation of Islamic extremism provided by Saudi and other sources, we obtained and analyzed documents from various U.S. agencies. To identify efforts that the government of Saudi Arabia has taken to address Islamic extremism, we reviewed public information on the government's Web site and U.S. documents related to this issue. We interviewed officials from each of the agencies we reviewed as well as numerous outside experts.

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<sup>6</sup>Throughout the report, distinctions are made when referring to the Saudi government, Saudi private entities, and Saudi individuals.

<sup>7</sup>We are preparing a classified report, to be subsequently released, with a more complete description of U.S. efforts to identify, monitor, and counter the global propagation of Islamic extremism.

<sup>8</sup>Officials from Treasury's Office of Foreign Asset Control informed us that it identifies, monitors, and counters terrorism through the designation of terrorists, terrorist groups, and their support structures, including those that are Islamic extremist to the extent they engage in terrorist activities or support. Once terrorists, terrorist groups, and their support structures are identified, Treasury participates in the U.S. government's process for determining the appropriate U.S. government actions to apply. However, Treasury does not identify, monitor, or counter the support and funding for the global propagation of Islamic extremism as it relates to an ideology.

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Information on agencies' efforts is incomplete because some of the agencies stated they wanted to ensure the protection of their sources and methods and therefore did not share such information. In addition, other agencies, such as the National Security Agency and the National Security Council, may also be undertaking efforts to address Islamic extremism. We performed our work from June 2004 through July 2005 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. (See app. I for further details on our scope and methodology.)

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## Results in Brief

The U.S. agencies we reviewed are implementing a variety of efforts to identify, monitor, and counter support and funding for the global propagation of Islamic extremism. Agencies' Arabia but also attempt to address the propagation of Islamic efforts focus on Saudi extremism worldwide, including diminishing the underlying conditions of extremism. Agencies' efforts to identify, monitor, and counter sources and funding focus primarily on counterintelligence, counterterrorism, traditional diplomacy, force protection, public diplomacy, and economic and humanitarian assistance. For example, DOD is implementing efforts to monitor international terrorism that may threaten U.S. interests, as well as provide humanitarian assistance and promote civic action programs to "win hearts and minds" in areas vulnerable to Islamic extremism. In addition, State and USAID are implementing efforts, including the South Asia Regional Program, intended to diminish the underlying conditions of extremism through education, democracy building, economic cooperation and development, and conflict mitigation projects.

A number of government and nongovernment sources reported that Saudi private entities and individuals, as well as sources from other countries, are allegedly financing or supporting Islamic extremism. For example, in July 2005, a Treasury official testified before Congress that Saudi Arabia-based and -funded organizations remain a key source for the promotion of ideologies used by terrorists and violent extremists around the world to justify their agenda. In addition, according to State's 2005 *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*, Saudi donors and unregulated charities have been a major source of financing to extremist and terrorist groups over the past 25 years. The 9/11 Commission reported that despite numerous allegations of the government of Saudi Arabia's involvement with al Qaeda, the commission has found no persuasive evidence that the government as an institution or senior officials within the government knowingly supported al Qaeda. The agencies we reviewed also told us that the threat of the global propagation of Islamic extremism is emerging not only from Saudi sources but also from sources in other countries, such as

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Iran, Kuwait, and Syria, as well as from indigenous groups within some countries. U.S. agencies we reviewed are still examining Saudi Arabia's relationship, and that of other sources in other countries, to Islamic extremism.

The government of Saudi Arabia has publicly announced and, in some cases, undertaken some reform efforts to address Islamic extremism; however, U.S. agencies do not know the extent of the Saudi government's efforts to limit the activities of Saudi sources that have allegedly propagated Islamic extremism outside of Saudi Arabia. First, the government is implementing educational and religious reforms, including revising textbooks and conducting a 3-year enlightenment program to purge extremism and intolerance from religious education. However, as of July 2005, agency officials did not know if the government of Saudi Arabia had taken steps to ensure that Saudi-funded curricula or religious activities in other countries do not propagate extremism. Second, the government is undertaking legal, regulatory, and institutional reforms to address vulnerabilities in Saudi financial and charitable systems. For example, according to the government of Saudi Arabia, and State and Treasury officials, Saudi Arabia is undertaking a number of charity reforms, including requiring all private Saudi donations marked for international distribution to flow through a new National Commission for Relief and Charity Work Abroad. However, as of July 2005, this commission was not yet fully operational, according to Treasury. In addition, in 2004, Saudi Arabia and the United States announced that they had jointly designated as terrorist financiers nine branch offices of the al Haramain Islamic Foundation under United Nations Security Resolution 1267. According to State, the government of Saudi Arabia also announced its intentions to close al Haramain Islamic Foundation and, but in May 2005, a Treasury official told us it was unclear whether the government of Saudi Arabia had implemented its plans. State officials also told us that the government of Saudi Arabia had undertaken some political reforms, including establishing a human rights association to implement human rights charters and a center for national dialogue to facilitate discussion of issues such as education and extremism.

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## Background

U.S. government and nongovernment experts use different terms to refer to Islamic extremism. They agree that no single factor accounts for the rise of Islamic extremism in the Muslim world and that Islamic extremism or its rise stems from underlying factors such as political and economic failure resulting in repressive and corrupt governments; external funding and propagation of fundamentalism and extremism, particularly by Saudi

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sources; anti-Westernism, with the United States seen as the primary source; the lack of a forum for moderate Muslim voices; and the emergence of the new mass media.

Various government and nongovernment sources report that Saudi funding and export of a particular version of Islam that predominates in Saudi Arabia has had the effect, whether intended or not, of promoting the growth of religious extremism globally. In the 1960s, funding of religious outreach activities overseas became a central feature of Saudi policy through organizations such as the Muslim World League and the World Assembly of Muslim Youth. Activities of these organizations include providing medicine and food and building mosques, schools, and shelters. The Saudi donations to support its aid efforts and the spread of its religious ideology come from public and private sources and are channeled through a variety of foundations and middlemen to recipients around the world. Saudi Arabia's multibillion-dollar petroleum industry, although largely owned by the government, has fostered the creation of large private fortunes, enabling many wealthy Saudis to sponsor charities and educational foundations whose operations extend to many countries. U.S. government and other expert reports have linked some Saudi donations to the global propagation of religious intolerance, hatred of Western values, and support to terrorist activities. For example, Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda have Saudi roots and have accumulated millions of dollars using legitimate charities, nongovernmental organizations, and mosques, as well as businesses such as banks and other financial institutions, to help raise and move their funds.<sup>9</sup> However, experts agree that it is difficult to determine the extent to which donors are aware of the ultimate disposition of the funds provided. Although the government of Saudi Arabia has undertaken efforts to better monitor Saudi donations, the problem of controlling such funds is problematic because much of Saudi's private capital is held and invested outside Saudi Arabia and is beyond the government's control. In addition, the spread of Islamic extremism is a global problem and Saudi Arabia is but one source of funding and support for Islamic extremism.

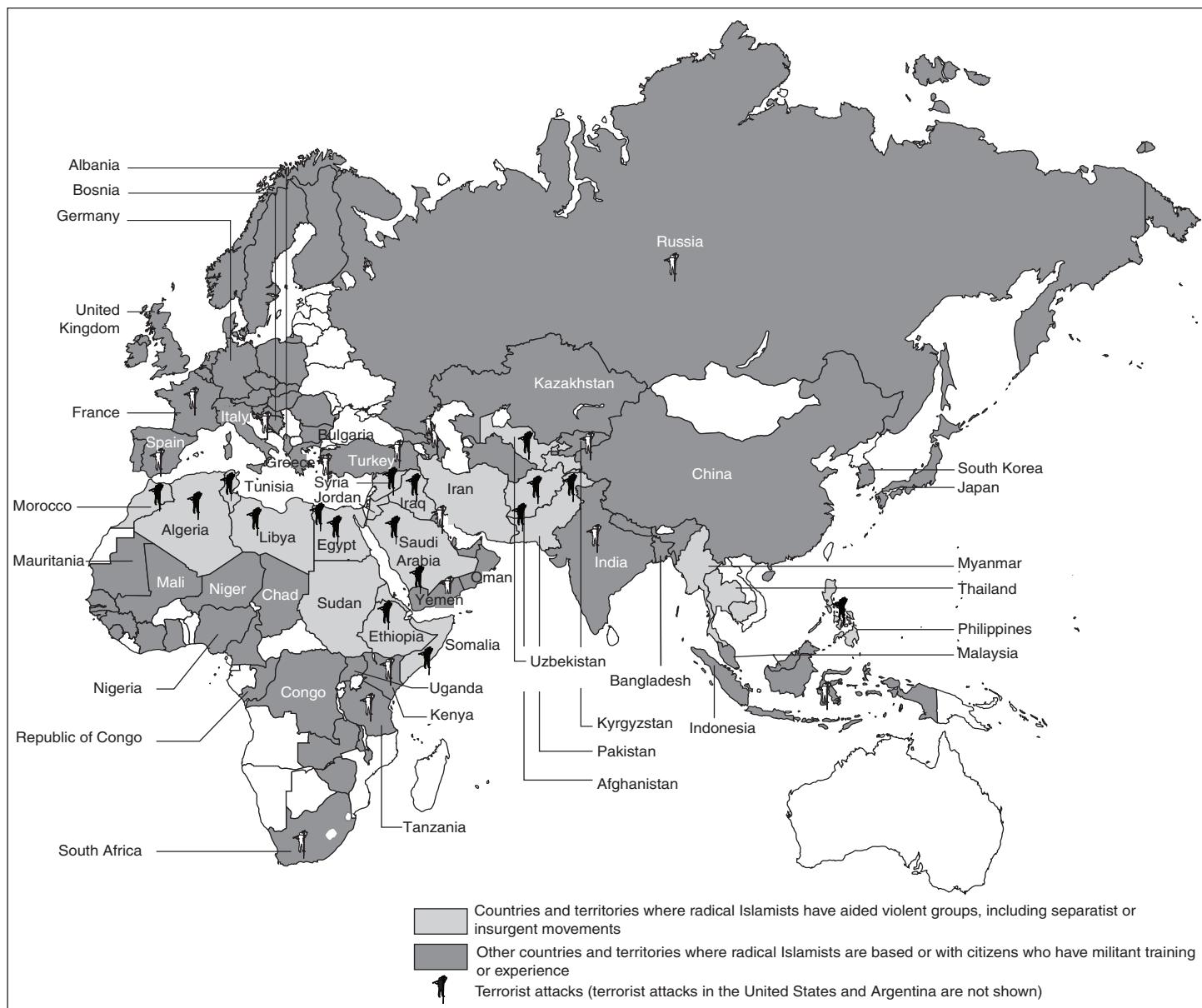
According to a 2004 National Intelligence Council report, *Mapping the Global Future*, radical Islamists have aided violent groups in countries

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<sup>9</sup>According to the Institute for the Analysis of Global Security, Osama bin Laden's wealth came from his family's construction company, which made its fortune from government contracts financed by oil money. The government of Saudi Arabia put strict controls on Osama bin Laden's sources of funding after 1994.

such as Afghanistan, Egypt, Iran, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia and are based and received militant training or experience in other countries such as China, India, Mali, Spain, Russia, and Turkey. Figure 1 shows key areas of extremist Islamic activities since 1992.

**Figure 1: Key Areas of Islamic Extremist Activities Since 1992**



Sources: CIA (data); MapArt (map); Art Explosion (clip art).

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Some experts on Islamic extremism believe that a significant factor in the rise of Islamic extremism has been the failure of many governments in the Muslim world to address the overwhelming challenges of development arising from rapid social, demographic, and economic changes over the past century. According to the United Nations, many Middle Eastern and North African countries face enormous human development deficits, including limited political and personal freedoms and low economic growth. According to USAID, its research and work in the field also find that terrorism will continue to flourish as long as weak or predatory states fail to guarantee security for their citizens, provide access to basic services, and address the issue of political exclusion. Because of concern that these issues could sharpen extremism, the U.S. government has shown a growing interest in improving socioeconomic and political conditions in the region. For example, in December 2002, the U.S. Department of State announced the establishment of the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) as a Presidential initiative to support the administration's policy of promoting democracy in the Middle East and North Africa.

U.S. officials and other experts believe that some U.S. policies have contributed to the increased threat of Islamic extremism against the United States. The 9/11 Commission report of July 2004 stated that perceptions of the United States' foreign policies as anti-Arab, anti-Muslim, and pro-Israel have contributed to the rise in extremist rhetoric against the United States. According to the Council on Foreign Relations, extremists have targeted the United States because of a belief that the United States supports authoritarian governments in the Middle East while promoting democracy elsewhere. These negative perceptions of the United States further stem from issues such as U.S. support for Israel and the U.S. military presence in Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, and Iraq, as well as from other U.S. foreign policy issues related to, for example, the Afghan civil war, Gulf War of 1991, global war on terrorism, and Iraq War. Both Pew and Zogby surveys have revealed that anti-American sentiment among the Muslim population worldwide seems to be growing.

U.S. agency efforts to identify, monitor, and counter the global propagation of Islamic extremism generally emanate from various strategies, including the National Security Strategy, National Defense Strategy, *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism*, and State Department and USAID Joint Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2004-2009. For example, one of the U.S. government's objectives stated in the *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism* is to "win the war of ideas," including reversing the spread of extremist ideology. In addition, these

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efforts are often included within broader activities, such as intelligence collection, traditional diplomacy, conflict prevention, public diplomacy, governance, and the use of instruments of development to diminish the underlying causes of extremism.

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## Agencies Are Implementing Efforts to Identify, Monitor, and Counter Islamic Extremism

The U.S. agencies we reviewed are implementing a variety of efforts to identify, monitor, and counter support and funding for the global propagation of Islamic extremism. Agencies' efforts include Saudi Arabia but also attempt to address the propagation of Islamic extremism worldwide.<sup>10</sup> Agencies' efforts to identify, monitor, and counter sources and funding for the global propagation of Islamic extremism focus primarily on counterintelligence, force protection, traditional diplomacy, counterterrorism, public diplomacy, governance, and economic and humanitarian assistance.

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## Agencies Are Implementing Efforts to Identify and Monitor Extremism

DOD

DOD has implemented several efforts to identify and monitor the threat of Islamic extremism, including tracking facilitators and terrorist financing, as part of its counterterrorism force protection efforts. For example, the Air Force Office of Special Investigations (AFOSI) Collections and All-Source Analysis effort was implemented to collect, analyze, and disseminate threat information on Islamic extremism as part of its counterintelligence effort.<sup>11</sup> The purpose of this effort is to increase the situational awareness of senior U.S. Air Force leaders and field commanders. According to AFOSI, it gathers threat information at assigned locations, synthesizes information from all available sources and provides timely and reliable notifications of threats that could negatively impact the protection of U.S. Air Force personnel and resources worldwide.

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<sup>10</sup>Most of the agencies' efforts are classified and are described in our classified report.

<sup>11</sup>According to AFOSI, Iran's Islamic Revolution in 1979 was a key event that marked the beginning of AFOSI's interest in Islamic extremism.

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State	<p>State monitors and reports on incidents and patterns of governmental and societal discrimination, harassment, and abuse that are primarily or partly motivated by Islamic extremism. For example, State's annual <i>International Religious Freedom Report</i> and <i>Country Reports on Human Rights Practices</i> also cite incidents and patterns of governmental and societal discrimination, harassment, and abuse when they are primarily or partly motivated by Islamic extremism. State also issues an annual report on terrorist activities, including terrorist acts that may have been motivated by Islamic extremism.</p>
<b>Agencies Are Implementing Efforts to Counter Islamic Extremism and, with Other Experts, Have Identified Particular Areas of Focus</b>	<p>U.S. agencies are implementing a variety of efforts to counter the global propagation of Islamic extremism. In addition, some agencies and outside experts have conducted studies identifying particular areas of focus that could address Islamic extremism. Many of these areas of focus have recurring themes and are similar in nature, and some are being implemented by U.S. agencies.</p>
DOD	<p>DOD's Pacific Command (PACOM) has provided logistical support for the U.S. government's humanitarian assistance and civic action programs in Southeast Asia. According to PACOM, apart from having a general objective of relieving human suffering, the programs also aim to create a better view of the United States, particularly in places where negative perceptions of the United States are widespread. By doing so, these programs also contribute to the overall public diplomacy campaign to "win the hearts and minds" of the Muslim world.</p>
State and USAID	<p>State and USAID are implementing several efforts, including the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), Muslim World Outreach (MWO), and the South Asia Regional Program, to address the root causes of extremism. MEPI seeks to expand political participation and increase the economic and educational opportunities available to the people of the Middle East and North Africa.<sup>12</sup> MWO includes a Policy Coordination Committee (PCC), comprising representatives from State and USAID; the Departments of Commerce, Defense, Homeland Security, and Justice; the</p>

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<sup>12</sup>For further information on MEPI, see GAO, *Foreign Assistance: Middle East Partnership Initiative Offers Tools for Supporting Reform, but Project Monitoring Needs Improvement*, GAO-05-711 (Washington, D.C.: Aug. 8, 2005).

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National Security Council; the Broadcasting Board of Governors; and other agencies. MWO/PCC was formed in July 2004 with the objective of encouraging informed dialogue with Muslim populations and thereby diffusing some of the tensions that might trigger terrorism. While some MWO/PCC efforts include Saudi Arabia, they also target Muslims around the world. The South Asia Regional Program is intended to address the underlying conditions that facilitate extremism through education, democracy, economic cooperation and development, and conflict mitigation projects.

In addition, USAID implements some programs that seek to provide an alternative to political expression through extremism. Some of these programs include, among other things, providing former combatants with job skills to help reintegrate them into their communities, increasing small business loan services, and expanding banking and other systems to help businesses thrive. For example, USAID works with the Philippine government to strengthen the foundation for peace in Mindanao, where Muslim extremists have been engaged in conflict. In addition, in the West Bank and Gaza, USAID supports political stability and democratic governance through dynamic programs that bolster critical political processes such as elections, lay the foundations for the rule of law and a viable justice system, and promote a robust civil society.

As part of its effort to combat terrorism, State has designated the media arm of Hezbollah, al Manar, on the terrorist exclusion list<sup>13</sup> to help curb the propagation of Islamic extremism. State has also worked with other governments to try to ensure fairer and more accurate reporting on other Arabic language news outlets and to minimize their use as a vehicle for propagating extremist messages.

According to USAID, it has published three parts of a four-part series of studies on the Muslim world to better understand the root causes of extremism and the dynamics in different regions. Studies on education, economic growth, and governance are finished. A fourth on philanthropy is near completion. Each study contains recommendations for USAID action. The first study was issued in June 2003 and contains

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<sup>13</sup> According to State, the Terrorist Exclusion List (TEL) authorizes the Secretary of State, in consultation with or upon request of the Attorney General, to designate terrorist organizations for immigration purposes. A TEL designation bolsters homeland security efforts by facilitating the U.S. government's ability to exclude aliens associated with entities on the TEL from entering the United States.

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recommendations for better support of the educational needs of the Muslim world.<sup>14</sup> This study was conducted by the Center for Development Information and Evaluation in USAID's Bureau for Policy and Program Coordination, which examined the strengths and weaknesses of secular and Islamic educational systems in 12 Muslim countries. According to USAID staff, USAID missions in the Muslim world have used this report widely in planning their programs—for example, to include Islamic education in the Nigeria Mission's new Country Strategic Plan for 2004–2009. The study found that the best educational strategies in Muslim countries encourage both public (secular) and moderate-Islamic school systems to complement each other to reach all learners with enriched content. The study also found that, in some countries, public schools are the preferred educational choice of most parents, as long as they are affordable. In these countries, especially where there is concern about extremism being fostered in some Islamic schools, concentrating on making public schools more affordable for poor parents and increasing the number of schools in rural areas are a reasonable strategy. In addition, for the public schools, USAID recommends increasing the number of school-readiness programs, establishing a system of incentives to attract and retain more qualified teachers, and encouraging greater teacher commitment. USAID also said that for Islamic schools, there is a need to strengthen the quality of the secular education they provide and to encourage moderate religious teachings.

#### DOD, State, and USAID

One objective of the *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism* is diminishing the underlying conditions that terrorists seek to exploit by enlisting the international community to focus its efforts and resources on the areas most at risk. The Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Initiative is one example of a U.S. government multiagency effort involving USAID and the Departments of Defense and State that seeks, among other goals, to strengthen regional counterterrorism capabilities and promote democratic governance and human rights in the Sahel region of Africa.<sup>15</sup> According to State, the Sahel region, due to its vast, low density geography, nomadic populations, and porous borders, is potentially vulnerable to Islamist terrorist groups. The initiative includes development assistance and expanded public diplomacy campaigns.

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<sup>14</sup>USAID Bureau for Policy and Program Coordination, "Strengthening Education in the Muslim World," issue paper no. 2 (Washington, D.C., 2003).

<sup>15</sup>The Sahel includes parts of Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, and Sudan.

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Other Experts	Several other nongovernment and government experts have also conducted studies to identify areas of focus that could address the global propagation of Islamic extremism.
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### ***Djerejian Report***

A 2003 report, *Changing Minds, Winning Peace*—also known as the *Djerejian Report* (for diplomat Edward Djerejian)—addresses U.S. efforts to communicate with audiences in the Arab and Muslim world.<sup>16</sup> Compiled at the request of U.S. lawmakers, in part to address the root causes of Islamic extremism, the *Djerejian Report* criticizes the absence of a U.S. voice in public discourse in the Muslim world. The report offers a number of recommendations to confront the problem and calls for greater human and financial resources to be channeled into engaging the Arab and Muslim world. The report argues that the United States needs to improve its ability to address the people of the region in their own languages, particularly focusing on the Internet and other communication technologies. In response to the report, State reinvigorated an interagency Policy Coordinating Committee (PCC), concentrating initially on Muslim outreach.

### **9/11 Commission**

The 9/11 Commission's July 2004 report contained various recommendations for reforming areas of U.S. public diplomacy. These recommendations included increasing resources for satellite television and radio outreach to Muslim populations (e.g., broadcasting efforts in Afghanistan and Iran); rebuilding scholarship, exchange, and library programs to reach out to youths; supporting a new International Youth Opportunity Fund; and measuring results from these endeavors.

### **RAND Corporation**

In 2004, the RAND Corporation published the results of a study<sup>17</sup> that built on previous RAND work on counterterrorism. RAND's study had several purposes: (1) to develop a typology of ideological tendencies in the

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<sup>16</sup>This report was prepared by the Advisory Group on Public Diplomacy for the Arab and Muslim world and was submitted to the Committee on Appropriations, House of Representatives.

<sup>17</sup>RAND, *The Muslim World after 9/11* (Arlington, Virginia, 2004).

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different regions of the Muslim world to identify the sectors with which the United States can find common ground in promoting democracy and stability and countering the influence of extremist and violent groups; (2) to identify the factors that produce religious extremism and violence; (3) to identify key divisions and fault lines among sectarian, ethnic, regional, and national groups and to assess how these divisions generate challenges and opportunities for the United States; and (4) to identify possible strategies and political and military options to help the United States meet challenges and exploit opportunities presented by changed conditions in the Muslim world. According to RAND, the outcome of the “war of ideas” under way throughout the Muslim world is likely to have great consequences for U.S. interests in the region, but it is also the most difficult for the United States to influence. RAND suggested a number of social, political, and military options that the United States could focus on to respond to these challenges and opportunities:

- promote the creation of moderate networks to counter radical messages;
- disrupt radical networks and deny resources to extremists;
- foster an education system that is relevant to the modern world and that produces graduates who can find productive jobs in the global economy;
- foster madrassa (religious schools) and promote mosque reforms;
- expand economic opportunities;
- support Islam within civil society;
- balance the requirements of the war on terrorism and of stability and democracy in moderate Muslim countries;
- seek to engage Muslim diasporas and Islamists in mainstream politics;
- rebuild close military-to-military relations with key countries; and
- build appropriate military capabilities.

Information on the extent of U.S. agencies’ efforts to identify, monitor, and counter the sources and funding of Islamic extremism was complicated by the following factors:

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- Interviews and documents revealed that U.S. government and nongovernment sources use different terms to refer to a form of Islam that promotes hatred, intolerance, and, in some cases, violence, fueling terrorism and creating threats to U.S. interests and security. These terms include “Islamic extremism,” “militant Islam,” “radicalism,” “fundamentalism,” “jihadism,” “Wahhabism,” and “Salafism.” For example, DIA defines an “Islamic extremist” as “any individual or group using Islam to justify violence or terrorist acts,” whereas the National Intelligence Council’s report, *Mapping the Global Future*, defines “Muslim extremists” as Islamic activists who are committed to restructuring political society in accordance with their vision of Islamic law and are willing to use violence. U.S. agencies are continually refining their respective definitions of Islamic extremism as they acquire more information on the identifiers, motives, and sources of funding and support of Islamic extremism.
  - The agencies we reviewed do not disaggregate some of their activities to address Islamic extremism from broader efforts or goals, such as force protection, counterterrorism, and public diplomacy; therefore, it was difficult to obtain data regarding funding and staff for specific efforts.
  - The agencies do not distinguish between efforts or programs intended to target Islamic extremism indigenous to a country and those intended to target outside influences, such as Saudi Arabia. Thus, our reporting does not differentiate between agency efforts addressing internal sources of support and agency efforts addressing external sources of support; rather, we report on efforts to address Islamic extremism globally.

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## Various Sources Have Reported That Saudi Sources and Sources from Other Countries Support and Fund Propagation of Islamic Extremism

A number of sources have reported that Saudi private entities and individuals,<sup>18</sup> as well as sources from other countries, are allegedly financing or supporting Islamic extremism. However, U.S. agencies are still examining Saudi Arabia's relationship, and that of other sources in other countries, to Islamic extremism. For example, in July 2005, a Treasury official testified before Congress that Saudi Arabia-based and - funded organizations remain a key source for the promotion of ideologies used by terrorists and violent extremists around the world to justify their agenda. In addition, according to State's 2005 *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*, Saudi donors and unregulated charities have been a major source of financing to extremist and terrorist groups over the past 25 years. In July 2003, a former State Department official testified before Congress that a Saudi-based charity, al Haramain Islamic Foundation, had allegedly financed assistance to the Egyptian terrorist group Gamma al Islamia. In May 2004, the same former State official also testified that some half dozen of the most visible charities, including two of Saudi Arabia's largest, the International Islamic Relief Organization and the World Muslim League, have been linked to supporting Islamic terrorist organizations globally. In addition, a former Treasury official identified Wa'el Hamza Julaidan as a senior figure in the Saudi charitable community who provided financial and other support to several terrorist groups affiliated with al Qaeda operating primarily in the Balkans. Moreover, the 9/11 Commission report states that al Qaeda raised money in Saudi Arabia directly from individuals and through charities.

According to the 9/11 Commission report, despite numerous allegations about the government of Saudi Arabia's involvement with al Qaeda, the commission found no persuasive evidence that the government of Saudi Arabia as an institution, or senior officials within the government of Saudi Arabia, knowingly supported al Qaeda. The agencies we reviewed also told us that the threat of the global propagation of Islamic extremism is emerging not only from Saudi sources but also from sources in other countries, such as Iran, Kuwait, and Syria, as well as from indigenous groups within some countries.<sup>19</sup> A current DOD official and a former

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<sup>18</sup>U.S. government officials and outside experts cautioned that it is important to distinguish among the Saudi government, Saudi private entities (such as charities and nongovernmental agencies), and Saudi individuals when discussing allegations of Islamic extremism. However, the distinction between the government's support and funding versus that provided by entities and individuals, especially in the case of Saudi charities' alleged activities, is not always clear.

<sup>19</sup>Further details regarding Saudi Arabian sources' alleged link to Islamic extremism can be found in our classified report.

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Treasury official told us that Iran currently poses a larger threat in this regard than does Saudi Arabia. In addition, indigenous groups have been a source of support for Islamic extremism. For example, the State Department terrorist list includes the Filipino group Abu Sayyaf, Algeria's Armed Islamic Group, the Palestinian group Hamas, the Kashmiri militants of Harakat ul-Mujahedeen, Lebanon's Hezbollah, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, and Egyptian Islamic Jihad.

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## The Government of Saudi Arabia and U.S. Agencies Have Reported Saudi Efforts to Combat Domestic Extremism, but Extent of Saudi Arabia's International Efforts Is Not Known

### The Government of Saudi Arabia Is Implementing Domestic Educational and Religious Reform Efforts

To address Islamic extremism, the government of Saudi Arabia has announced and, in some cases, undertaken domestic educational and religious reforms; legal, regulatory, and institutional reforms with the assistance of State and Treasury; and political reforms. However, U.S. agencies do not know the extent of the Saudi government's efforts to limit the activities of Saudi individuals and entities that have allegedly propagated Islamic extremism outside of Saudi Arabia.<sup>20</sup>

The government of Saudi Arabia is implementing domestic educational and religious reform efforts, but as of July 2005, U.S. agency officials did not know if the government of Saudi Arabia had taken steps to ensure that Saudi-funded curricula or religious activities in other countries do not propagate extremism. According to the 9/11 Commission report, although Saudi Arabia has been a problematic ally in combating Islamic extremism, since the May 12, 2003, bombing in Riyadh, the Saudi Arabian government has taken steps to reduce official support for religious activities overseas.

According to the government of Saudi Arabia, the Ministry of Islamic Affairs is implementing a 3-year enlightenment program in Saudi Arabia to educate imams, monitor mosques, and purge extremism and intolerance from religious education. The U.S. Acting Assistant Secretary of State for

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<sup>20</sup>The National Intelligence Reform Act (P.L. 108-458, Dec. 17, 2004) contains a requirement (Section 7120 (b)) that the President submit to designated congressional committees a strategy for collaboration with Saudi Arabia, as part of a larger report on U.S. government activities to implement the provisions of this act.

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Near Eastern Affairs also said that the Saudi government's religious reform initiative involves a multiyear program to educate imams and monitor religious education. Treasury reported that the Ministry of Islamic Affairs had begun vetting domestic clerics to eliminate the radical extremists among them.

In February 2003, the Saudi government reported that it had recently conducted an audit that determined that about 5 percent of school textbooks and curriculum guides contained "possibly offensive language" and that a program was in place to eliminate such material from schools.<sup>21</sup> Speaking at the Counter-Terrorism International Conference, which Saudi Arabia hosted in Riyadh in February 2005, the Saudi Minister of Foreign Affairs said that "we tried to eliminate any flaws or what might hinder progress and we tried to ensure that the new curriculum focuses more on understanding, humanity, and tolerance." Further, the final communique of the conference, known as the Riyadh Declaration, emphasized the importance of enhancing the values of understanding, tolerance, and combating ideology that calls for hatred, instigates violence, or justifies the terrorist crimes that are denounced by all religions and laws. In March 2005, a representative for the government of Saudi Arabia reported that the Saudi government is working to ensure that textbooks and teachers do not espouse intolerance and extremism.

In an effort to educate imams and monitor mosques, according to the Saudi government, when imams preach intolerance or hate toward others, they are dismissed, punished, and retrained. In addition, the Saudi Arabian government Web site contains "Public Statements by Senior Saudi Officials Condemning Extremism and Promoting Moderation."<sup>22</sup> For example, in September 2003, the Saudi government reported that former King Fahd bin Abdulaziz, in a message to the 19th session of the World Supreme Council for Mosques, emphasized the important mission of the mosque in Islam, which is to promote peace, tolerance, moderation, and wisdom.

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<sup>21</sup>The Saudi government statement we reviewed did not elaborate on what is meant by the phrase "possibly offensive language."

<sup>22</sup>See <http://www.saudiembassy.net/ReportLink/Extremism-Report-January-2005.pdf>.

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## **State and Treasury Have Assisted the Government of Saudi Arabia with Domestic Legal, Regulatory, and Institutional Reforms**

State and Treasury reported that they have assisted the government of Saudi Arabia with implementing legal, regulatory, and institutional reforms to address vulnerabilities in Saudi financial and charitable systems since about 2001. In May 2003, the Saudi government asked the al Haramain Islamic Foundation and all Saudi charities to suspend activities outside Saudi Arabia until mechanisms are in place to adequately monitor and control funds to prevent their misdirection for illegal purposes. According to the government of Saudi Arabia, State, and Treasury, in February 2004, the Saudi government created the new National Commission for Relief and Charity Work Abroad, requiring all private Saudi donations marked for international distribution to flow through this commission. However, as of July 2005, according to Treasury, this commission had not yet become fully operational. In 2004, Saudi Arabia and the United States announced that they had jointly designated as terrorist financiers nine branch offices of the al Haramain Islamic Foundation under United Nations (UN) Security Resolution 1267.<sup>23</sup> In addition, according to State, the Saudi government ordered the closure of the al Haramain Islamic Foundation. However, in May 2005, a Treasury official told us that it was unclear whether al Haramain's offices had been closed.

In addition, according to the Saudi government, State, and Treasury, banking reforms have included restrictions against cash disbursements from charitable accounts, transfers from charitable accounts outside Saudi Arabia, and cash contributions in local mosques and cash collection boxes in shopping malls. In December 2002, to ensure that no funds reach terrorists, the Saudi government also established a special financial intelligence unit to track charitable giving. In July 2005, a State official testifying before Congress stated that the department continues to stress, in its discussions with the Saudis, the need for full implementation of charity regulations, including a fully functioning commission. The State official further stated that appropriate regulatory oversight of organizations headquartered in Saudi Arabia, such as the World Muslim League, the International Islamic Relief Organization, and the World Assembly of Muslim Youth, is absolutely necessary.

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<sup>23</sup>The UN Security Council 1267 Committee oversees states' implementation of the sanctions imposed by the council on individuals and entities belonging or related to the Taliban, Osama bin Laden, and the al Qaeda organization and maintains a list of individuals and entities for this purpose. The council obliged all states to freeze the assets; prevent the entry into or transit through their territories; and prevent the direct or indirect supply, sale, and transfer of arms and military equipment with regard to the individuals or entities included on the list (S/Res/1267, Para. 6, (1999)).

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## The Government of Saudi Arabia Reports That It Is Implementing Some Political Reforms

Finally, as reported in public documents from the Saudi Embassy Web site and confirmed by State officials, the government of Saudi Arabia has implemented some political reforms, including reforms related to Islamic extremism. For example, the government established the National Human Rights Association in March 2004 with a mandate to implement international human rights charters. The government also established the King Abdulaziz Center for National Dialogue in August 2003 to bring together leaders to discuss issues such as education, extremism, the role of women, and problems facing young people. According to the Saudi government, some of the national discussions on extremism include topics such as "Characteristics of the Extremist Personality" and "The Relationship between Ruler and Ruled, Rights and Duties of Citizens and Their Relationship with Extremism." In addition, in early 2005, the Saudi government held its first municipal elections, which, according to State officials, is an important step toward democracy.

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## Conclusions

Recognizing that the global propagation of Islamic extremism represents a growing threat to U.S. interests, U.S. agencies are implementing a variety of efforts to identify, monitor, and counter its support and funding. Agencies' efforts focused on Saudi Arabia but also attempt to address the propagation of Islamic extremism worldwide. Despite the lack of a common definition for Islamic extremism, several agencies are working to counter it by addressing the underlying conditions that facilitate extremism—for example, through programs aimed at humanitarian assistance, educational reform, economic assistance, public diplomacy, and governance, including the promotion of democracy and respect for human rights.

Determining the resources that agencies have committed for these efforts is complicated by the fact that the agencies do not disaggregate data for some of their activities addressing Islamic extremism from their broader efforts or goals, such as force protection, counterterrorism, and public diplomacy. However, since the attacks on the United States in September 2001, some agencies' officials told us they have been devoting increasing resources to addressing the global propagation of Islamic extremism. Moreover, since the May 2003 bombing in Riyadh, the government of Saudi Arabia, with some assistance from the United States, has announced and, in some cases, reportedly undertaken a number of reform efforts to address Islamic extremism, including educational, religious, legal, and political reforms.

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## Agency Comments

The intelligence agencies, the Departments of Defense, State, and the Treasury and the U.S. Agency for International Development did not formally comment on this report but provided technical comments, which we discussed with relevant officials and included in the report, where appropriate.

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We are providing copies of this report to the Secretaries of Defense, State, and the Treasury and the Administrator for USAID. We will also make copies available to others on request. In addition, this report will be available at no cost on GAO's Web site at <http://www.gao.gov>.

Please contact me at (202) 512-4268 or [fordj@gao.gov](mailto:fordj@gao.gov) if you or your staff have any questions about this report. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. GAO staff who made key contributions to this report are listed in appendix II.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jess T. Ford".

Jess T. Ford  
Director, International Affairs and Trade

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# Appendix I: Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

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We were asked to determine: (1) What efforts are U.S. government agencies implementing to identify, monitor, and counter support and funding for the global propagation of Islamic extremism, particularly support and funding originating in Saudi Arabia?<sup>1</sup> (2) What have U.S. agencies and other entities reported regarding support and funding for the global propagation of Islamic extremism, particularly any provided by Saudi sources (private entities, individuals, and the government of Saudi Arabia), as well as sources in other countries? (3) What efforts has the government of Saudi Arabia undertaken to address Islamic extremism?<sup>2</sup>

Our work focused on the efforts of the intelligence agencies; the Departments of Defense, State, and the Treasury; and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). We focused on these agencies primarily as a result of the agencies' missions and goals relating to areas such as public diplomacy, intelligence collection, counterterrorism, terrorist financing, and democracy and human rights, as well as our initial review of information indicating that these agencies may be involved in efforts to address Islamic extremism.

To determine what efforts U.S. government agencies are implementing to identify, monitor, and counter support and funding for the global propagation of Islamic extremism, particularly support and funding originating in Saudi Arabia, we analyzed relevant agency documents, including the *National Security Strategy*, *National Defense Strategy*, *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism*, *State Department and USAID Joint Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2004-2009*; reports of the Defense Intelligence Agency; project documents; and specific country plans. We also reviewed more than 100 State cables identified through a State-performed search using specific search terms provided by GAO. Search parameters included cables dating from 1998 through 2004; various related terms (including “extremist ideology,” “intolerance,” “hatred,” “Wahhabism,” and “Saudi charities”); and countries such as Afghanistan,

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<sup>1</sup>In this report, “propagation of Islamic extremism” refers to the spread of an Islamic ideology that denies the legitimacy of nonbelievers and practitioners of other forms of Islam and that explicitly promotes hatred, intolerance, and violence that could lead to future terrorist activities that threaten U.S. national security interests. We derived this definition from various sources, including meetings with U.S. agency officials and outside experts, as well as a review of the literature on Islamic extremism and related issues.

<sup>2</sup>Throughout the report, distinctions are made when referring to the government of Saudi Arabia, Saudi private entities, and Saudi individuals.

Albania, Bangladesh, Bosnia, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Mali, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Saudi Arabia.

To determine what U.S. agencies and other entities have reported regarding support and funding for the global propagation of Islamic extremism provided by Saudi sources (private entities, individuals, and the government of Saudi Arabia), as well as sources in other countries, we interviewed agency officials and obtained and analyzed various documents. Those documents include State's cables; State's Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs' *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*; congressional testimonies from various departments such as the Treasury and State; the National Intelligence Council's December 2004 report *Mapping the Global Future*; the RAND Corporation's report *The Muslim World after 9/11*; and the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom's 2003 *Report on Saudi Arabia*.

To determine what efforts the government of Saudi Arabia has undertaken to address Islamic extremism, we reviewed public information on the Saudi government's Web site and U.S. documents related to this issue.

We interviewed officials from the intelligence agencies; the Departments of Defense, State, and the Treasury; and USAID. In addition, we interviewed former U.S. agency officials and numerous outside experts, including officials at the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, Georgetown University's Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding, the RAND Corporation, the Middle East Media Research Institute, the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, the Middle East Institute, and the Muslim Chaplain at Georgetown University.

As part of our work, we traveled to Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim country. We interviewed numerous U.S. agency officials, as well as officials of the government of Indonesia, including the Ministries of Religion, Education, and Foreign Affairs. In addition, we met with officials of Indonesia's two largest Islamic organizations—Nahdatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah. In Indonesia, we also met with officials of the Asia Foundation, Ford Foundation, International Crisis Group, Center for Strategic and International Studies, International Center for Islam and Pluralism, Liberal Islam Network, State Islamic University Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, and Australian Embassy in Indonesia.

On the basis of our document reviews and interviews with agency officials, we compiled information on U.S. government agency efforts to identify,

monitor, and counter the propagation of extremist Islam and then vetted this information with the respective agencies to ensure accuracy.

Information on agencies' efforts is incomplete, because some of the agencies stated that they wanted to ensure the protection of their sources and methods and therefore did not share such information. In addition, agencies other than those we reviewed, such as the National Security Agency and the National Security Council, may also be undertaking efforts to address Islamic extremism.

We performed our work from June 2004 through July 2005 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

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# Appendix II: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

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## GAO Contact

Jess T. Ford, (202) 512-4268

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## Staff Acknowledgments

In addition to the individual named above, Zina Merritt (Assistant Director), Laurie Ekstrand, Barbara Shields, Simin Ho, Michelle Cullen, Bruce Kutnick, Mark Dowling, Philip Farah, Joel Grossman, Joe Carney, and Reid Lowe made key contributions to this report.

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*Homeland Security: Observations on the National Strategies Related to Terrorism.* [GAO-04-1075T](#). Washington, D.C.: September 22, 2004.

*U.S. Public Diplomacy: State Department and Broadcasting Board of Governors Expand Post-9/11 Efforts but Challenges Remain.* [GAO-04-1061T](#). Washington, D.C.: August 23, 2004.

*Combating Terrorism: Federal Agencies Face Continuing Challenges in Addressing Terrorist Financing and Money Laundering.* [GAO-04-501T](#). Washington, D.C.: March 4, 2004.

*U.S. Public Diplomacy: State Department and the Broadcasting Board of Governors Expand Efforts in the Middle East but Face Significant Challenges.* [GAO-04-435T](#). Washington, D.C.: February 10, 2004.

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