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# United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON  
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WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6250

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April 9, 2010

The Honorable John Brennan  
Assistant to the President for Homeland Security and  
Counterterrorism and Deputy National Security Advisor  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear John:

I am writing to express my strong concern about reports that the Administration is considering deleting the term “Islamist extremism” from our National Security Strategy, in favor of using the nebulous term “violent extremism.” This is the most recent in a series of Administration statements that refuse to acknowledge that we are engaged in a war with an enemy that has killed thousands of Americans based not on a vague policy of extremism but on a specific and violent ideology of Islamist extremism.

I have previously noted that the term “Islamist extremism” does not appear in two critical national security documents released by the Administration in 2010: the Department of Homeland Security’s *Quadrennial Homeland Security Review Report* and the Department of Defense’s *Quadrennial Defense Review Report* – both of which guide our government’s numerous and costly policies and programs that have as their major purpose protecting the American people from terrorism inspired by violent Islamist extremist ideology and carried out by violent Islamist terrorists. The term “Islamist extremism” also did not appear in the report by the Department of Defense’s Independent Review Related to Fort Hood entitled *Protecting the Force*. This omission is particularly difficult to understand since the alleged assailant who murdered thirteen Department personnel reportedly was in direct and sustained contact with the notorious purveyor of violent Islamist extremism, Anwar al-Aulaqi, and reportedly shouted “Allahu Akbar” as he committed his mass murder.

The failure to identify our enemy for what it is – violent Islamist extremism – is offensive and contradicts thousands of years of accepted military and intelligence doctrine to “know your enemy.” Knowing our enemy is the essence of the craft of intelligence as taught by the father of U.S. intelligence analysis, Sherman Kent, and exemplified by you during your decades of distinguished service in the U.S. Intelligence Community. Accurately identifying our enemies is

critical to understanding their motivations, capabilities, and tactics – and to countering them effectively and defeating them decisively.

Therefore, an important part of stopping the deadly terrorist threat facing us now is to label it for what it is: the fanatical, totalitarian ideology of violent Islamist extremism as conceptualized and advocated in our time by Sayyid Qutb, Osama bin Laden, and similar ideologues and advocates of hatred and violence. The Administration's resistance to using the term "violent Islamist extremism" may well work against the vast majority of Muslims across the world who do not follow or accept this totalitarian and fanatical ideology. For example, the London-based Quilliam Foundation, which is staffed by former Islamist extremists, explicitly defines its mission as countering "Islamism" (*see* [www.quilliamfoundation.org](http://www.quilliamfoundation.org)).

I support the Administration's economic and political outreach to the Muslim World which – in President Obama's words – is "based on mutual interest and mutual respect." As the President said in Cairo, America and Islam "share common principles – principles of justice and progress; tolerance and the dignity of all human beings." But those principles are totally and brutally rejected by Islamist extremists and terrorists. That is why any reluctance to describe our enemies as exactly what they are – violent Islamist extremists – disrespects the non-violent Muslim majority and compromises our ability to defeat the extremists. How can we win what has been repeatedly described as "the larger war for the hearts and minds of the Muslim world" if we do not accurately name and describe our enemy in that larger conflict which is fundamentally ideological?

I strongly urge you to stop efforts within the Administration to refuse to identify accurately the ideological source of the great and violent threat that now faces the American people every day.

Sincerely,



Joseph I. Lieberman  
Chairman