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Published: July 19, 2007 at 12:50 PM
 By MARIANNA BELENKAYA
 UPI Outside View Contributor
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Published: July 19, 2007 at 10:27 AM
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ANALYSIS: DETERRING EXTREMISM AMONG YOUTH

Published: July 13, 2007 at 1:53 PM [E-mail Story](#) | [Print Preview](#) | [License](#)
 By MEGAN HARRIS
 UPI Correspondent
 WASHINGTON, July 13 (UPI) -- Improving opportunities and inclusion for Muslim youth in the Middle East and in Western countries may be key to crowding out extremist ideologies.

Economic and social exclusion plagues the so-called youth bulge, those ages 15-29 who make up about 30 percent of the population of the Middle East region, where unemployment rates hover above 30 percent. In response, the Middle East Youth Initiative from the Wolfensohn Center for Development at the Brookings Institution and the Dubai School of Government aims to enhance the economic inclusion of youth in the region, focusing on Egypt, Iran, Syria and Morocco, and improve understanding of the phenomenon. Examining integration and the appeal of extremism in host countries, witnesses testifying before the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs June 27 argued that the situation of Muslim immigrants in the United States and Europe varies greatly, but, broadly speaking, immigrants to the United States tend to be well-educated professionals, whereas immigrants in Europe are often recently arrived guest workers and students.

Tarik Yousef, dean of Dubai's School of Government, generally agrees with the argument that because Muslim immigrants to European countries tend to be less integrated and have close bonds with groups from the Muslim world, they are more likely to be drawn to extremism.

"It's a combination of their own social standing and inability to integrate and remaining linked to problems they've left behind." He cited as a counterexample the Turkish population, which is now second or third generation and tends to be better integrated into society.

In his written Senate testimony, consultant Marc Sageman noted that recruitment usually occurs in the West but believes it also occurs among second- or third-generation Muslim immigrants.

The witnesses at the Senate hearing noted that Muslim Americans are quite diverse and lack sufficient civic organizations to express their views and engage with society.

A more pan-national, civic-oriented group is necessary, said Yousef, to "integrate people in the public sphere, so that they feel that they have stakes in the system and feel obliged to participate." He noted that when he was growing up in the United States, "most organizations were dealing with problems migrants face in adjusting rather than on integrating at the local or national level."

As for the goal of increasing economic inclusion in the Middle East as a way to diminish the pull of extremism, numerous experts have recently dispelled the notion that being poor is a cause of terrorism, pointing to such examples as last month's attempted explosions in London and Glasgow, which were carried out by medical professionals.

Navtej Dhillon, director of the Middle East Youth Initiative, also discounts the economic deprivation link: "I think it's important to recognize that the evidence we have that explains why young people are drawn to extremist groups is pretty thin and context specific. There are some studies that show why youth are drawn to Hezbollah or Hamas, but these are context specific."

Dhillon notes that this approach also excludes half the youth population. "You're talking about a male problem when actually women are an integral part of the region."

Still, he doesn't entirely dismiss economic inclusion as a strategy, citing groups like Hezbollah and Hamas that are part ideological, part militia and part social service

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Analysis: PA's Abbas plans early elections

Published: July 18, 2007 at 7:52 PM

By JOSHUA BRILLIANT
 UPI Correspondent
 Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has called for new elections to both the presidency and the Legislative Council in a bid to regain legitimacy and weaken his main rival, the Islamic Hamas.

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"What we can assume is that in a society that has an adequate amount of hope and economic development, you have a stronger chance of blunting the draw to these organizations," Dhillon said.

For Dhillon, it's more important to focus on improving conditions for people in the Middle East rather than on assumptions about what causes terrorism. "I'd rather have us involved in a different fight -- over bread and butter issues."

To that end, the initiative aims to develop policy and programs to help Middle Eastern countries take advantage of the oil boom to restructure their economies and create more economic opportunities for the sizeable youth workforce. This is critical because by 2035 the Middle East region is projected to have a higher dependency ratio, when more elderly will be dependent on the state for various forms of support.

In this revolution of expectations, Dhillon said, "The younger generation has huge expectations but is getting very low returns to education."

Sageman argued that most young people are drawn to extremism by ideology and close kinship bonds, which also creates the desire to impress their peers. They are highly idealistic and pursue glory "by fighting for justice and fairness as they define it."

Similarly, the Interfaith Youth Core aims to inspire young leaders to initiate public service projects. "What young people want is a clear identity and opportunity to make a powerful impact," said the organization's founder and executive director, Eboo Patel. IYC provides "a sharp articulation of the importance of building pluralism" by cooperating with people of different faiths.

Patel thinks what he calls "one of the important movements of the 21st century" could deter some from extremism in that it competes at the level of ideas. He explained that while "religious totalitarians want to spread the idea that a clash of civilizations is inevitable and that different religious societies are inherently at odds with each other, IYC can show "examples of people of different faiths working together." Patel added, "That's the highest level at which we can compete and win."

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