

**U.S. House of Representatives
Subcommittee on National Security of the
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
“Combating Homegrown Terrorism”**

July 27, 2017

**Remarks by Adnan Kifayat
Head of Global Security Ventures, Gen Next Foundation**

Mr. Chairman, members of the Subcommittee on National Security, thank you for this opportunity to testify before you on “Combating Homegrown Terrorism.” My name is Adnan Kifayat and I am honored to be here on behalf of the Gen Next Foundation, a community of private sector leaders who are passionate about finding solutions to some of the greatest challenges our country faces today.

In the tradition of John D. Rockefeller, III, the Gen Next Foundation leverages a venture philanthropy model to help private sector individuals use their talents, knowledge, and resources to solve big challenges. Countering violent extremism in the homeland is one of our core areas of focus.

I come here before you today as a private citizen. Before I became, again, a private citizen, I served in a number of senior roles, under both Republican and Democratic Administrations, for four secretaries of state, and five secretaries of the treasury.

I first became involved in countering violent extremism while coordinating counter terrorism policy at the National Security Council in 2007. Back then, it was known as the “war of ideas” — a battle of narratives. Since then, as we have learned more about the enemy, the “war of ideas” has evolved into what is commonly referred to as “countering violent extremism.” Indeed, there has been an evolution in our understanding of the tactics terrorist organizations use to radicalize, recruit, and activate would-be terrorists. As our enemy evolves and grows more sophisticated, we must find ways to cull the private sector for the best solutions, and ensure that we stay several steps ahead of those who would do us harm.

When I had the honor of serving at the White House for President Bush — and later at the State Department under Secretaries Rice, Clinton and Kerry — I had always hoped that there were nimble and innovative private sector entities out there to evolve with the threat, finding real-world solutions to this menace. These entities could do what government alone is not equipped to do. What we lacked in funding at the federal level, we made up for with an abundance of faith in the power of the private sector.

Today, there are small but committed groups of people, including Gen Next, who are finding ways to rally American ingenuity to counter homegrown terrorism.

From big companies to small start-ups, we all realize that violent extremism is dangerous and destructive — we must also realize that it's everyone's responsibility to confront it. There are strong, powerful and growing voices in the private sector that are echoing across our country, and we must listen to what they are saying.

Five years ago, the Gen Next Foundation, Google Ideas and the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) launched the Against Violent Extremism Network (AVE). AVE was the first global network of former extremists who provide their powerful and authentic voices to the world — both online and offline — to dissuade youth all over the world from being radicalized and recruited by groups like ISIS and Al Qaida (AQ). Today there are 470 members in that network. Almost a thousand online interventions have taken place and hundreds of deradicalizations, through person-to-person engagement, have occurred. For example, a member of AVE successfully helped prevent a young girl in Washington state, a Sunday school teacher named Alex, from getting on a plane to become an ISIS bride. Governments across the globe have adopted the model of utilizing former extremists and survivors of terrorism. Since our initial investment, multinational corporations, international institutions and foundations have all taken note and expanded AVE's footprint — because it works.

Last year, Gen Next helped launched the first online effort to redirect at-risk youth, searching for information about terrorist groups like ISIS and AQ, toward content that is nonviolent and non-extremist. By using marketing and advertising techniques, our partnership with Google Jigsaw and experts at MoonshotCVE, known as the Redirect Method, is leveling the playing field online. We are plugging the hole in the communications gap and standing up to violent extremist content. This venture was inspired by national security and entirely driven, tested and launched by the private sector: technologists, engineers, subject matter experts and venture philanthropists finding a solution.

There are other examples of the private sector organizing itself in this space. From passionate filmmakers, writers and producers in Hollywood, to world-class talent in our universities and research institutions, to business and community leaders who are positive role models — many private sector leaders want to find antidotes to homegrown terrorism. When Government finds ways to support and encourage more of these efforts, everyone wins — except for the violent extremists, of course.

For example, a peer-to-peer effort, the Global Digital Challenge, is leveraging university students to develop anti-extremist campaigns and tools across the globe. Lessons learned from deradicalizing neo-Nazis in Europe are being used to deradicalize Jihadists. Cartoons like Average Mohamed and Abdullah-X are reaching at-risk audiences with positive messages in Minneapolis, London and beyond. Technology used to remove child pornography from the internet is being adapted to detect and remove the worst of online terrorist content. Simply put, there are many promising examples of the private sector using technology and creativity to fight

homegrown terrorism that we should encourage and strengthen. Inaction is simply not an option and we can't say there aren't examples out there.

We must do everything we can to encourage the development of these campaigns, tools and platforms that will challenge and defeat violent extremism now and far into the future because the threat is continually evolving: After AQ there was ISIS, and after ISIS we will be met with its more insidious offspring. Despite our advances on the battlefield, the war of hateful ideology will long persist.

Last year, I co-chaired the Department of Homeland Security's Advisory Sub Committee Report on Countering Violent Extremism — which had strong bipartisan support. It detailed a national blueprint for partnership and action across all 50 states. It called on mayors and city leaders to take the lead, and it called on the federal government to do more to engage local leaders. In today's maze of complex networks, we can't just pay lip service to partnering with people outside Washington, we must find concrete ways to do so.

Partnering with the private sector can not be, should not be and does not need to be an antagonistic undertaking. There are many good people in many organizations across the country who want to help — they only need an extended hand, not a wagging finger. The challenge for government is not a lack of such energy but finding effective mechanisms to channel and unleash it. Good old fashioned diplomacy should be government's first line of engagement with the private sector. Cooperation and collaboration should be the shared goal.

Some of these efforts will also require resources like money, talent or access to technology. While Gen Next Foundation serves as a convener and incubator of new solutions, driven entirely by the private sector, this space is by no means saturated. As we have done with the defense and intelligence communities — both of which are innovative, sophisticated, and the envy of the world — a dedicated quasi government entity such as DARPA (the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency) or a non profit venture capital firm like In-Q-Tel (IQT) can help bridge the divide between public and private, provide risk capital, eliminate some unnecessary and slow processes and outdated measurements, and potentially reduce the fierce politicization of this issue.

We have moved beyond asking ourselves the simplistic question of “Why do they hate us?” and measuring ourselves against a yardstick of popularity and assuming that “if they just knew us better, they would like us, and if they liked us, they won't kill us.” We have moved beyond just “winning hearts and minds.” The basic narrative the enemy employs is based on “us versus them.” It's a strategy of divide and conquer. We know today that to be lured by Islamist or Jihadist ideology, one can be rich or poor, a boy or girl, religiously observant or not. The demographics we are dealing with are varied, and they require varied solutions.

We know more about behavioral psychology, sociological drivers, and mental health than ever before. While there are still gaps in our understanding, we know that the narratives terrorist recruiters use to radicalize and activate are far more basic to human nature than a simple religious text, foreign policy argument, or ethnic or cultural excuse.

We also know that the vast majority of radicalization — at least the inception of the process — is happening online. The same internet that helps shape our society for good is the same that can be darkly manipulated to seed hatred and destruction from within.

The last two Administrations understood that giant tectonic plates of culture, identity and civilization are colliding against each other: young people are not just observing these collisions, but they are also a part of the conversations shaping them. The last two Administrations also realized that we will never, ever get ahead of this problem without unleashing the power of our people, the private sector and institutions across the country to take control of the conversation — to take control away from groups like ISIS and Al Qaida.

Those conversations, I can tell you, are not happening enough here in Washington, D.C. They are happening in your states, in your districts, at the community and city level. Through one of our ventures, for example, we are learning about some of the geographies in the US where online searches for violent extremist content is taking place – places like California, Texas, Virginia, and Pennsylvania. These conversations are happening incredibly fast, and, all too often the bad guys’ propoganda is at the ready, shaping that conversation. Homegrown violent extremism is a common threat that manifests itself locally and rapidly.

While we have grown smarter about how to organize and what tools to use, our enemy has also grown more sophisticated in their techniques. Not because they are better or smarter — most certainly not — but because they are committed, organized and learning. They run a 24/7 radicalizing and recruitment machine sustained by a well-funded, complex network of supporters around the world. It is highly nimble, and it evolves with the internet, using hidden networks of content production, distribution, amplification, and of course financing.

The examples I have shared with you, AVE and Redirect, are just two examples of the private sector innovating in this space. We must work together and welcome innovation if we want to counter violent extremism that leads to terrorism. We must fight the “war of ideas” today radically differently than we did 15 years ago. There are solutions out there now, and there are solutions waiting to be found. We just need to get it done.

Thank you Mr. Chairman, and members of the Subcommittee.