

# HOW WE WIN

HOW CUTTING-EDGE ENTREPRENEURS, POLITICAL VISIONARIES, ENLIGHTENED BUSINESS LEADERS, AND SOCIAL MEDIA MAVENS CAN DEFEAT THE EXTREMIST THREAT

BY FARAH PANDITH

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“A new approach to countering global extremism. ... With great passion and commitment, Pandith, a perceptive observer and strategic thinker, argues that the fight must encompass elements of government, business, private sector organizations, and local communities and philanthropists, all working together with like-minded individuals to stem the extremist tide. ... An inspired, intensively focused examination of issues of and solutions about extremist ideology, sure to inspire spirited debate.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*

“Drawing on her decades of experience, Pandith unweaves the tangled web of extremism and demonstrates how government officials, tech CEOs, and concerned citizens alike can do their part to defeat it.”

— *Former Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright*

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There is a war being fought, and we are losing it.

Despite the billions of dollars spent since 9/11 trying to defeat terrorist organizations, the so-called Islamic State, Al-Qaeda, and other groups remain a terrifying geopolitical threat. In some ways the threat has grown worse: The 9/11 hijackers came from far away; the danger today can come from anywhere—from the other side of the world to across the street. Unable to stem recruitment, we seem doomed to a worsening struggle with a constantly evolving enemy that remains several steps ahead of us. Unfortunately, current policies seem almost guaranteed not to reduce extremist violence, but instead to make it easier for terrorists to spread their hateful ideas, recruit new members, and carry out attacks.

We actually possess the means *right now* to inoculate communities against extremist ideologies. In **HOW WE WIN**, Farah Pandith presents a revolutionary new analysis of global extremism, as well as powerful but seldom-used strategies for vanquishing it. Drawing on her visits to eighty countries, the hundreds of interviews and focus groups she’s conducted around the world, and her high-level experience in the Bush and Obama administrations, Pandith argues for a paradigm shift in our approach to combat extremism, one that mobilizes the expertise and resources of diplomats, corporate leaders, mental health experts, social scientists, entrepreneurs, local communities and most of all, global youth themselves.

There is a war being fought, and we can win it. This is how.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

**Farah Pandith** is a diplomatic entrepreneur, foreign policy strategist, and former diplomat. A world-leading expert and pioneer in countering violent extremism, she is a frequent media commentator and public speaker. She served as a political appointee under presidents George H.W. Bush, George W. Bush and Barack Obama. She was the first-ever special representative to Muslim Communities, serving both Secretaries Hillary Clinton and John Kerry. Under President George W. Bush, Pandith was the director for Middle East Regional Initiatives at the National Security Council, and chief of staff of the U.S. Agency for International Development's Bureau for Asia and the Near East. She has also served on the Department of Homeland Security's Advisory Council, chairing its task force on countering violent extremism. She is a senior fellow with the Future of Diplomacy Project at the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs at the Harvard Kennedy School as well as an adjunct senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations. She is a frequent international media commentator appearing on Sunday morning talk shows, CNN, CBS, NPR, BBC, ABC, Bloomberg and Fox News and a regular contributor to the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*.



## **HOW WE WIN: How Cutting-Edge Entrepreneurs, Political Visionaries, Enlightened Business Leaders, and Social Media Mavens Can Defeat the Extremist Threat**

by Farah Pandith

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## Key Takeaways from HOW WE WIN

**Farah Pandith's message is urgent:** America and its allies can defeat extremism, but only if we significantly shift our approach. Military responses remain vital, but we must undertake a sustained effort to counter extremism *intellectually* by engaging in a grassroots war of ideas.

**The stakes couldn't be higher:** When you consider that one-fourth of our planet—1.6 billion people—is Muslim, and that 62 percent of those Muslims are under thirty years of age, you realize the scope of this problem. Although the overwhelming majority of these Muslims pose no threat, the demographic trends still represent a potential bonanza for the bad guys.

**The time is now:** President Trump is making faulty claims about the “defeat of ISIS”; he is clearly ignoring the continued effective recruitment and radicalization of such terrorist groups. In fact, his claims about finding prayer rugs at the Mexican border and using that as a justification to build the wall could give bad actors more ammunition. And the so-called Islamic State is not the only challenge—Al Qaeda is still becoming more powerful with cells all over the world, including the United States. Over the next five to ten years, if nothing is done, extremist ideology will fuel even more instability, fear and conflict the world over.

**There is a global system underlying extremism:** In thousands of informal discussions, focus groups, and interactions over the past decade, Pandith has engaged with Muslim youth and heard the emotions of Muslim youth to their own identity crisis, American foreign policies and perceived “hypocrisy” and revealing connections with global peers. She has witnessed firsthand how a preacher in Gainesville, Florida who threatens to burn the Qur'an can lay a foundation of distrust and hate for America from the city of Paris to the jungles of Cambodia.

**Farah Pandith courageously calls out the “Plague from the Gulf”:** Saudi Arabia has embarked on a four-decade project to confuse and attract Muslims to a monolithic, severe interpretation of Islam. While many are seeing Saudi actions for the first time through the brutal killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi, Pandith exposes the tactics they use to brainwash Muslim youth – not just in classrooms and mosques but through a strategic program of Wahhabi Islam.

**Farah Pandith introduces new global trends** A phenomenon Pandith names “halalization” is taking place whereby youth are changing local ideas, culture diversity and identity to conform to a common conception of a “real” Muslim. Her information is shocking and introduces an aspect of identity that has never been exposed before.

**Muslim millennials are adrift:** Extremists are preying on a rising generation of nearly one billion Muslim millennials. These kids are in the midst of an identity crisis, and they're vulnerable to extremists' seductive, intolerant, “us” versus “them” ideology, delivered using the latest technologies in the virtual world and the real world.

**Think Dumbledore's Army:** Young people are on the front lines of the fight against extremism and need to be galvanized—and consulted—to fight the battle against extremist ideology. It is possible to extend a hand in friendship to young Muslims and speak honestly with them about violent extremism and how to solve it.

**Extremists groups mobilize technology:** Extremists are using methods on/offline to establish their authenticity and attract followers from around the world better than we are. “Sheikh Google” offers answers to identity that extremists profit from. Deploying technology from AI chatbots to traditional social media platforms is essential to countering violent extremism, yet we have hardly tried.

**Going “all in” is the only way to defeat the ideology of extremists:** This means scaling up what we know and have invested in, and dramatically increasing the operational capacity of governments in the soft power toolbox.

**Government can’t do this alone:** The only way to “win” is to collaborate with the private sector and civil society. We need a global strategy—from Trinidad to Tajikistan—to make progress. There is no comprehensive strategy to deal with ideology today and exceptionally limited personnel and expertise. Programs at a local level are critical and local peer influencers are vital tools.

**Solutions are available and affordable:** Pandith’s solutions include a new form of power she calls “open power” in which government “opens the aperture” to new kind of thinking and skill sets that connect to the issue of youth and identity. A design thinking method will revolutionize the way we find solutions to the ability of the bad guys to recruit.

## A conversation with Farah Pandith, author of HOW WE WIN

### TERRORIST ATTACKS HAVE GROWN MORE FREQUENT AND WIDESPREAD IN RECENT YEARS. ARE WE LOSING THE WAR ON TERROR?

**Farah Pandith:** At present, yes, we are losing, and I find that tragic. Intractable problems confront us today, but after spending more than a decade working in government and visiting hundreds of Muslim communities around the world, I know that stopping extremist recruitment isn't one of them. With the right policies and dedication, we can contain this threat in relatively short order, and relatively cheaply.

We have responded to extremism primarily by attempting to stop groups like Al Qaeda and ISIS using military means. By contrast, our approach to stopping recruitment has been incomplete, fragmented, underfunded, misguided, and ineffectual. We've contented ourselves with small-scale and "one-off" campaigns, and we haven't built the infrastructure we need to fight and win the "war of ideas".

Military action is important—we need to hit extremist groups hard. But ISIS, Al Qaeda, Al Shabaab, and others are specifically targeting Muslim youth for their armies. If we can stop, or slow, recruiting, we can defang and ultimately defeat the extremist threat. We haven't even begun to try.

### WHAT MAKES SOME MUSLIM YOUTH SO VULNERABLE TO EXTREMIST IDEOLOGY?

**Farah Pandith:** Since 9/11, Muslim youth have experienced an identity crisis. Imagine growing up a digital native and seeing negative images of your co-religionists, culture, and heritage everywhere you look in the global media. That's what Muslim youth have experienced. Unlike their parents, these youth have come to believe that America and the West are "at war with Islam", and that their own, personal identity is all that matters. In this context, religious practice and the traditional way of life espoused by their families, teachers, and Imams seem inadequate and outdated to them.

This prevailing focus on and uncertainty about identity, global in scope, is unprecedented in modern Islamic history. It also colors how these kids see everything. The media constantly reinforces an "us and them" mentality, as do peer groups and daily behaviors. Like other millennials, Muslim youth live online, so they migrate there seeking insight into religious identity as well as a chance to meet like-minded "friends". Unfortunately, extremists lie in wait, offering easy answers and proactively using the latest trends and techniques to connect to these young people. Most Muslim youth see through extremist ideology but, sadly, a small percentage don't.

### WHAT SHOULD AMERICA DO TO COMBAT VIOLENT EXTREMISM AT HOME AND ABROAD?

**Farah Pandith:** First, **take a grassroots approach.** We need to engage daily with local Muslim communities around the world. We need to solicit *their* ideas, and further, we need to play the role of ethnographers, looking for broader trends in the emotional and intellectual lives of Muslim youth.

Second, **scale up our support of "influencers"**. Muslim youth don't care what governments say. But they do listen to "credible" peer voices within Muslim communities. During my time in government, I pioneered a number of successful programs to galvanize such influencers. Sadly, no funding or other resources existed to expand these programs. Such programs could make a massive difference if we brought them to scale. Government should see itself as the convener, facilitator, and funder of credible voices, not as the sole bulwark against extremist ideology.

Third, **be more entrepreneurial.** Extremism is a fast moving, dynamic threat. Governments must become fast moving and dynamic, too. We must seek out great ideas and experiment with them.

We must take creative risks. We must look for ideas and partners in unfamiliar places. Government talks all the time about being “entrepreneurial”, yet it lumbers around like an elephant. Let’s change that.

Fourth, **get tough with our allies and partners**. Saudi money has funded the global spread of Wahhabism, a brand of Islam that continues to inspire extremist groups and their ideology. In local communities, Wahhabism has displaced indigenous forms of Islam, destroying the religion’s traditional diversity. Today, that lack of diversity plays into extremist narratives about the one, true, “authentic” Islam they purportedly represent. To win the war of ideas, we have to stop Wahhabism’s global hijacking of Islam. That means pressuring our allies and partners to cut off financial and cultural lifelines to Wahhabi ideology.

## **DO GOVERNMENTS TODAY HAVE AN OVERARCHING COHESIVE GLOBAL STRATEGY TO COMBAT EXTREMIST IDEOLOGY?**

**Farah Pandith:** They don’t—and this needs to change. We need to unite disparate global government bureaucracies relevant to the ideological battle behind a single, comprehensive strategy. In framing this strategy, we need to break with existing practice and consult with an array of experts, including psychologists, ethnographers, technologists, social media experts, cultural activists, communication specialists, historians, theologians, and so on.

We also need to change our underlying, *theoretical* approach to this issue. Instead of traditional “hard power” (military force) or “soft power” (attempts to change behavior through influence, coercion, and persuasion), we need to practice an updated form of soft power that I call *open power*.

We need to open up policymaking, in every sense of the word: “open-sourcing” solutions from the community; opening up our strategic approach to encompass many academic and professional disciplines; “opening the aperture” to see extremism holistically and organically, in its full nuance and complexity; and making policymaking more “open-ended”, so that it can keep maturing as global issues change and move.

Again, we can extinguish the appeal of extremism in our time. But only if we have the courage to rethink, reinvent, reimagine.

## **WHAT CAN THE AMERICAN GOVERNMENT DO RIGHT NOW AS THEY THINK DIFFERENTLY ABOUT SOLUTIONS?**

**Farah Pandith:** In addition to focusing on the issue of ideology and increasing the funds committed to countering violent extremism, American policy-makers must deploy what I call “Open Power” and bring a new creativity and understanding to the problem of the appeal of the ideology and how to snuff out a youth’s interest in it. The “us” versus “them” ideology is present on/offline and without a new approach and a new commitment to addressing it, America and its allies will lose. The moment is now. We can win. And we know how.

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### Additional Praise for HOW WE WIN

“The private sector has a vital role to play in stopping violent extremism. Farah Pandith’s revelatory *How We Win* is the playbook we’ve been waiting for. Read it and join in. Farah has much to tell us. The world will benefit from her insights.”—**Shelly Lazarus, Chairman Emeritus, Ogilvy & Mather**

“Farah Pandith draws on her wide-ranging experience as a diplomat and communicator to lay out a comprehensive strategy against violent extremism. A timely book for government and civil society leaders.” —**Michael Chertoff, former U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security and Co-Founder and Executive Chairman of the Chertoff Group**

“Farah has written a vitally important book on an incredibly important topic that for too long has received short shrift. Every policy maker involved in national security and foreign affairs needs to focus on how we still face a generational ideological challenge.”—**Michael Leiter, former Director of the U.S. National Counterterrorism Center (2007-2011)**

“Farah Pandith offers a much needed critique of nearly two decades of failed American efforts to counter violent extremist ideology. More importantly, she charts a thoughtful alternative course that demands the attention of policymakers and practitioners in the United States and around the world.”  
—**Ambassador William J. Burns, President, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and former Deputy Secretary of State**

“One of the most critical tools in the fight to keep our country and world safe is the effort to combat the ideology that underlies extremist activity. Farah Pandith offers a comprehensive look at the war of ideas and provides concrete solutions to this vexing problem. Her book is essential for anyone who cares about security and the resilience of democratic values.”—**Leon E. Panetta, former United States Secretary of Defense and former CIA Director**

“As former Supreme Allied Commander of NATO, I was on the frontlines of the war against violent extremists, searching for strategies to thwart deadly attacks by eradicating recruitment of future terrorists and increasing the power of those who could be our best allies in the fight. *How We Win* is a much-needed corrective to those who argue primarily for military “hard power” solutions. Farah Pandith is a big thinker with a compelling global vision on what is truly a global problem. A smart, powerful thinker who discerns the hidden links underlying the phenomenon of extremism, she is uniquely qualified to write *How We Win*. I wish I’d had Farah Pandith’s groundbreaking book then, and hope that everyone concerned with stopping extremist violence and destruction will read it now.”—**Admiral James Stavridis, U.S. Navy (Ret.), former Supreme Allied Commander of NATO**

“When the threat of terrorism triggers our instincts to lock ourselves down or shout each other down, Ms. Pandith tells us to suit up and open up. Having survived from the frontlines of bureaucratic infighting, she optimistically calls us to be outgoing.”—**Matthew Barzun, former U.S. Ambassador to the United Kingdom and Sweden and former Chief Strategy Officer at CNET Networks**

“As the former commander of the NATO International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and US forces in Afghanistan, and later as President Obama’s Special Envoy to the Counter ISIL Coalition, I know how crucial it is that we win the war of ideas ... ideological war. No one knows more about appeal of the ideology on Muslim youth than Farah Pandith. She’s served multiple presidents—Democrat and Republican—traveled to almost 100 countries, consulted the highest ranks of the military and our diplomats, in her search to reverse the catastrophic course we seem to be following. I wish I’d had *How We Win* as a resource during my critical leadership efforts against Al Qaeda, the Taliban, and the Islamic State.”—**General John R. Allen, U.S. Marine Corps (Ret.), former Commander of the NATO International Security Assistance Force and U.S. Forces Afghanistan (2011-2013) and Special Presidential Envoy to the Global Coalition to Counter the Islamic State**

“For decades, policymakers, academics and community leaders have struggled with the question: how do people of good faith stop extremism in their midst? Pandith doesn’t just ask the question but provides—for the first time—a concrete, detailed, and engaging answer: the solution lies with all of us. From the private sector to family members, Pandith tells us how to mobilize for action. She engages us rather than terrifies us. With sympathy and also hard-nosed realism, Pandith’s *How We Win* is ultimately inspiring. If this is a war of ideas, Pandith is now our intellectual General.”  
—**Juliette Kayyem, former Assistant Secretary at the Department of Homeland Security and Faculty Chair of the Homeland Security Project at the Harvard Kennedy School of Government**

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“In the all-out effort to defeat Al Qaeda and other terrorist groups, we have struggled to win the war of ideas. Pandith, who has served on the front lines of this ideological conflict, is uniquely qualified to confront the enduring system that gives rise to the extremist threat. In this indispensable book, Pandith sets forth a detailed and comprehensive approach to countering violent extremism that serves as a call to arms for governments, businesses, and communities alike.”—**Matthew G. Olsen, former Director of the National Counterterrorism Center**

“In *How We Win*, Farah Pandith offers fresh thinking, both profound and practical, on one of our most vexing challenges—combating violent extremism. She unearths ground truths, challenges assumptions, and questions orthodoxies in eye-opening ways. Drawing upon her extensive, firsthand experience, Pandith gets to the root causes of the problem and, as important, offers a clear, feasible path forward to solve it.”—**Eric J. McNulty, Associate Director, National Preparedness Leadership Initiative, a joint program of the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health and the Center for Public Leadership at Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government**

“For more than decade, Farah Pandith has been on the front lines of the battle against extremist ideologies across the world. She’s provided her expertise to religious and political leaders, to diplomats and global leaders, and to two US presidents. Now that expertise is available in this remarkable and timely book. This is the new paradigm in the fight against global extremism.”—**Reza Aslan, author of *God: A Human History and Zealot: The Life and Times of Jesus of Nazareth***

“It is hard to think of anyone more knowledgeable than Farah Pandith when it comes to countering violent extremism. After traveling the world serving two presidents, she brings enormous experience and common sense to the task. This book is full of wisdom about how to deal with one of our great challenges.”—**Joseph S. Nye, Jr., Distinguished Service Professor Emeritus at Harvard University and author of *The Future of Power***

“*How We Win* is a smart, original and timely look at the ground reality of extremism in the Muslim world; and more important, how an unlikely alliance of entrepreneurs and technologists could provide the antidote. This is a must read for policy-makers and scholars alike, and all those interested in the future of the Muslim world.”—**Vali Nasr, Dean of Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies and author of *The Dispensable Nation: American Foreign Policy in Retreat***

“*How We Win* is surely the best book about how the US government and others need to think about how best to counter violent extremism and also how to act to curb the spread of extremist ideologies. It is also a lively and well written memoir of Farah Pandith’s many years working for the State Department combating extremism around the world.”—**Peter Bergen, author of *United States of Jihad: Who Are America’s Homegrown Terrorists, and How Do We Stop Them?***

“Farah Pandith was a pioneer for Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama and appointed America’s first emissary to the Moslem World. Now a Harvard Senior Fellow, she illuminates in this indispensable book how America and her friends and allies can defeat the extremist threat and build a new and more positive relationship with the one fourth of humanity who are Moslems.”—**Ambassador (ret.) Nicholas Burns, former Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, Professor at the Harvard Kennedy School.**

“I witnessed Farah Pandith innovate and shape the U.S. government and private sector’s approach since 9/11 to confront the generational and global problem of violent extremism in its most virulent forms, while helping define a new form of power and diplomacy. Her travel to every corner of the world as America’s first-ever Special Representative to Muslim Communities to understand and affect the manifestations of this ideological threat became a groundbreaking part of America’s counter-terrorism work and is richly described in this book with revealing glimpses of how the world has viewed the United States after 9/11 and how we tried to wage the “battle of ideas.” There is no more important voice on how we should recognize and confront these morphing ideological threats; how to enlist social, corporate, and economic power including Millennials and new technologies to confront the underpinnings of terror globally; and ultimately how we win through the power of our ideas. For anyone who wants to understand how the field of countering violent extremism was born and what we must do in the face of continued threats, this is your book and Pandith is your guide.”—**Juan Zarate, former Deputy Assistant to the President and Deputy National Security Advisor for Combating Terrorism for President George W. Bush and Chairman, Financial Integrity Network.**

“Farah is a well-respected expert with extensive government experience in this field. Her insights and first-hand perspective offer a unique vantage point on the cultural, ideological, and political forces that effect Muslim youth worldwide. Her book is much more than a provocative analysis of why we have yet to defeat



the appeal of extremist ideology that is the backbone of terrorist organizations like Al Qaeda and ISIS. How We Win shows us exactly what we need to do, and can do, to turn the tide.”

—*The Honorable Stephen J. Hadley, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs (2005-2009) and Board Chair at the U.S. Institute of Peace.*