

Obama: No religion responsible for terrorism

by [David Jackson](#)

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WASHINGTON (RNS) President Obama said Thursday he doesn't use terms like Islamic extremism because doing so would promote the false idea of a Western war with Islam, which would help extremists recruit more terrorists.

"No religion is responsible for terrorism—people are responsible for violence and terrorism," Obama told delegates at the White House Summit on Countering Violent Extremism.

Obama also said military force alone will not defeat terrorism, and the nation must work with local communities to reduce the influence of those who advocate violent extremism.

"They are not religious leaders," Obama said. "They are terrorists."

He also said: "We are not at war with Islam—we are at war with people who have perverted Islam."

The summit—in which officials from cities in the United States and across the globe discussed their attempts to dissuade young people from embracing hateful ideologies—takes place as conservatives criticize Obama for avoiding the term "Islamic extremism."

In his summit remarks, Obama cited the "fair amount of debate in the press and among pundits" about the words that used should be used to "describe and frame this challenge" of violent extremism.

Groups like the Islamic State and al-Qaeda "try to portray themselves as religious leaders, holy warriors in defense of Islam," Obama said, but "we must never accept the premise that they put forward, because it is a lie."

Obama also said Muslim communities have responsibilities to confront the abuse of religion.

“Of course, the terrorists do not speak for a billion Muslims who reject their ideology,” Obama said. “They no more represent Islam than any madman who kills innocents in the name of God, represents Christianity or Judaism or Buddhism or Hinduism.”

In fighting extremism, Obama said the United States and allies must also address the economic and political “grievances” that often fuel violent ideology. Governments must work to help provide economic opportunity, education, democracy, and the rule of law to their citizens, he said.

The “best partners” for these efforts are local communities, Obama said. Family members, schools, churches and mosques, and law enforcement officials can help dissuade young people from falling for the “false promises of extremism.”

That said, Obama warned that “engagement with communities can’t be a cover for surveillance,” and governments should deal with vulnerable people “through the prism of law enforcement.”

The nation must stay true to its heritage of tolerance and diversity and not target specific religious groups.

“It will take time,” he said. “This is a generational challenge.”