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White House: 'War on terrorism' is over

'Jihadists' and 'global war' no longer acceptable terms

By Jon Ward and Eli Lake WASHINGTON TIMES

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It's official. The U.S. is no longer engaged in a "war on terrorism." Neither is it fighting "jihadists" or in a "global war."

President Obama's top homeland security and counterterrorism official took all three terms off the table of acceptable words inside the White House during a speech Thursday at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a Washington think tank.

"The President does not describe this as a 'war on terrorism,'" said John Brennan, head of the White House homeland security office, who outlined a "new way of seeing" the fight against terrorism.

The only terminology that Mr. Brennan said the administration is using is that the U.S. is "at war with al Qaeda."

"We are at war with al Qaeda," he said. "We are at war with its violent extremist allies who seek to carry on al Qaeda's murderous agenda."

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said in March that the administration was not using the term "war on terror" but no specific directive had come from the White House itself. Mr. Obama himself used the term "war on terror" on Jan. 23, his fourth day as president, but has not used it since.

Mr. Brennan's speech was aimed at outlining ways in which the Obama administration intends to undermine the "upstream" factors that create an environment in which terrorists are bred.

The president's adviser talked about increasing aid to foreign governments for building up their militaries and social and democratic institutions, but provided few details about how the White House will do that.

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He was specific about ways in which Mr. Obama believes words influence the way America prosecutes the fight against terrorism.

Mr. Brennan said that to say the U.S. is fighting "jihadists" is wrongheaded because it is using "a legitimate term, 'jihad,' meaning to purify oneself or to wage a holy struggle for a moral goal" which "risks giving these murderers the religious legitimacy they desperately seek but in no way deserve."

"Worse, it risks reinforcing the idea that the United States is somehow at war with Islam itself," Mr. Brennan said.

As for the "war on terrorism," Mr. Brennan said the administration is not going to say that "because 'terrorism' is but a tactic — a means to an end, which in al Qaedas case is global domination by an Islamic caliphate."

"You can never fully defeat a tactic like terrorism any more than you can defeat the tactic of war itself," Mr. Brennan said.

He also said that to call the fight against al Qaeda and other terrorist groups — which he said remains "a dynamic and evolving threat" — should not be called "a global war."

While Mr. Brennan acknowledged that al Qaeda and its affiliates are active in countries throughout the Middle East and Africa, he also said that "portraying this as a 'global' war risks reinforcing the very image that al Qaeda seeks to project of itself — that it is a highly organized, global entity capable of replacing sovereign nations with a global caliphate."

The president's adviser said that in discussing counter terror operations, Mr. Obama "has encouraged us to be even more aggressive, even more proactive, and even more innovative" than they have been proposing.

But Mr. Brennan lamented "inflammatory rhetoric, hyperbole, and intellectual narrowness" surrounding the national security debate and said Mr. Obama has views that are "nuanced, not simplistic; practical, not ideological."



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