



# A DECADE OF COMBATING RADICAL IDEOLOGY

LEARNING FROM THE SINGAPORE  
EXPERIENCE (2001-2011)

RSIS Monograph No. 20

Muhammad Haniff Hassan  
Tuty Raihanah Mostarom



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**S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies**

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## INTRODUCTION

Since the highly consequential terrorist attacks on the United States in September 2001, counter-terrorism has been featured as one of the most important security concerns of governments and other relevant agencies worldwide. It is as though the world had suddenly been given the diagnosis of a fermenting chronic disease and she scrambles to her feet in search of a cure, along the way finding various options that induce unavoidable side effects and discovering other unrelated “festering” ailments. It is not as though terrorism is a new phenomenon. However, the securitisation of terrorism particularly by hegemonic states has led to much preoccupation of the subject which as years passed has aggrandised thematically to include other historic events such as the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq. The effect of the latter has subsequently resulted in the channelling of massive amounts of manpower, resources and time into tackling the issue of terrorism both operationally as well as academically.

Having been scrutinised with much intensity for over more than a decade, the study of terrorism has revealed numerous dimensions and spawned various inter-disciplinary studies with links to psychiatry, psychology, sociology, religion, discourse and linguistics, communication, finance and cyber security on top of the traditional security studies. This monograph will focus on a relatively new area that has been closely linked with counter-terrorism and the rising influence of Islamist extremism around the world, namely the importance of counter-ideology.

We argue that ideology represents one of the several key aspects in motivating acts of political violence or terrorism, particularly those that are religiously motivated. Thus, effective counter-ideology is one of the necessary measures that need to be adopted in order to mitigate the

problem. Also, while counter-ideology is increasingly being studied as a prospective component of an increasing number of counter-terrorism and terrorist rehabilitation programmes that are being developed around the world, it is necessary to also consider the social or public dimension to counter-ideology. We assert that it is imperative to integrate counter-ideological programmes into the closed walls of a detention or rehabilitation centre with a concurrent programme tailored for the broader community. This is on the premise that the community needs to be aware of and be “immunised” from being influenced by extremist interpretations of religion that promote intolerance and reject conventional political frameworks thus threatening peace and stability.

This monograph will explore and analyse the counter-ideological measures adopted in Singapore, both as part of the security measures undertaken to overcome the current threat of terrorism in the country as well as the public dimension of counter-ideology at the community level. This is to provide a comprehensive overview and an assessment of the developments that have taken place since the introduction and implementation of counter-terrorism and counter-ideological measures from 2001 to 2011. We will also highlight various aspects of the Singapore experience which may be used in improving present systems or serve as guidelines in building future counter-ideological capabilities across the globe. Ultimately, we will demonstrate that a complementary counter-ideological programme is essential in increasing the potential for effectiveness of counter-terrorism.

The monograph is divided into three parts, excluding this introduction. The first part will put forth a conceptual understanding of the role of ideology and the perpetuation of terrorism, thus arguing for the importance of counter-ideological work as an integral strategy of counter-terrorism against Al Qaeda and its associates. The second part will provide an overview of the Singapore government and the Muslim community initiatives to neutralise the threat of terrorism and the ideology that underpins it since the discovery of the Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) cell in late 2001. The third part will provide insights and lessons that we can extrapolate from a decade long of initiatives illustrated in the second part with the objective of improving the current ongoing work and sharing them with others.

Singapore’s relatively successful story in neutralising the threat of



Jl and managing this potentially destabilising event in its multi-racial society has attracted much interest from the academia, security and leadership of various foreign countries. It has often become a case study for the improvement of counter-terrorism work. This humble monograph is presented with the objective of documenting the counter-terrorism and counter-ideological works in Singapore and critically analysing them so that it may serve as a single reference point for those who are interested to learn from the experience.

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## IDEOLOGY AND TERRORISM\*

In order to fully understand the exigency of counter-ideology, it is imperative to first approach the topic from the angle that it is in vogue—via its close association with the phenomenon of terrorism and the accompanying project of counter-terrorism. According to those who conform to this “school of thought”, ideology often serves as one of the fundamental bases in motivating the adoption of political violence which includes terrorism as a tactic. In adopting a security framework to analyse the importance of ideology, it is thus critical to understand how ideology serves in feeding the mind of a terrorist or a potential terrorist, be it at the level of individual or organisation. This is in order to formulate effective ways to react to the thought-process and to pre-empt and prevent destructive acts where possible. This section will thus explore the centrality of ideology in the relevant circumstances of terrorism.

Stephen Biddle concludes in his article “War Aims and War Termination” that the real enemy in the “war against terrorism” is not terrorism itself, but Al Qaeda’s radical ideology. Unless the ideology is defeated, counter-terrorist efforts will inevitably fail. This subsequently requires combining a war of military means as well as a war of ideas to deny them the capacity to regenerate by replacing their lost membership by attracting those from among the generally politically-uncommitted Muslims.

\* This part was partially extracted and updated from Muhammad Haniff Hassan, *Key Considerations in Counter-Ideological Work against Terrorist Ideology*, M.Sc. dissertation, Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies, 2005, pp. 3–9. It was published in *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 29 No. 6 (September 2006).

He asserts that military means should not be allowed to overpower the ideological means. He is of the view that the centre of gravity in the war against terrorism lies in the hearts and minds of politically uncommitted Muslims. Terrorism is not the real enemy but is, in fact, just a tactic.<sup>1</sup> Like Biddle, many other scholars and analysts have also pointed out that terrorism cannot be defeated solely by military or law and order means. It requires a multi-pronged and multi-faceted approach, which includes strategies to eliminate the “root causes of terrorism”.<sup>2</sup>

### EXTREMISTS’ TREATMENT OF IDEOLOGY

One way to ascertain the centrality of counter-ideology in countering terrorism is by assessing the importance of ideology to Muslim extremists themselves through their words and deeds. Extremists place a tremendous effort on ideological work such as constructing and communicating their ideologies, criticising opposing ideologies and justifying their actions using the constructed ideology. Their objective is to spread their worldviews and ideas. With the rise of information technology and the increasing influence of the Internet, the cyber domain has served as a fast and effective platform for the dissemination of radical ideas and extremist ideologies. Here, it is evident that extremist groups and ideologues have devoted much effort and resources into exploiting this avenue for ideological propagation and have been rather successful in garnering support online. Their efforts are manifested in the form of elaborate websites with attention-grabbing graphics and a massive amount of extremist ideological content, often updated on a daily basis.

A good example of this is the Al-Qaeda’s official website<sup>3</sup>, which functions as the largest repository of extremist intellectual materials by various ideologues and groups. These are not mere narratives or stories about the world to win people over. There are hundreds of materials that

1. Stephen Biddle, “War Aims and War Termination”, *Defeating Terrorism: Strategic Issue Analyses*, edited by Colonel John R. Martin, Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, January 2002, pp. 7–8.
2. See Tore Bjorgo (Ed.), *Root Causes of Terrorism: Myths, Realities and Ways Forward*, Routledge, New York, 2005 and Omar Ashour, *The De-Radicalization of Jihadists: Transforming Armed Islamist Movements*, Routledge, New York, 2009.
3. See website Minbar Al-Tawhid Wa Al-Jihad, available at <http://www.tawhed.ws> (29 September 2010).

cover not only all matters of jihad but also the more important extremist worldview that underlies their actions and *fatwas* on various theological issues. The importance of this website and its contents was underscored in a study found in the *Militant Ideology Atlas* by Combating Terrorism Center, U.S. Military Academy.<sup>4</sup>

The propagators of extremist ideology have also pumped in a lot of resources into building an expansive publication enterprise for publishing extremist literatures. Some even set up small businesses and run fund-raising campaigns to sustain the publication enterprise. These publication houses produce numerous extremist literatures pregnant with extremist ideologies. The ideological work of the first Bali bombers<sup>5</sup> is another good example. Imam Samudra, the operational leader of the bombing, published a book detailing his worldview and theological justification of the action.<sup>6</sup> Despite being incarcerated, he and his two accomplices, Mukhlas and Amrozi, ensured a constant supply of their ideas through their writings. The trio published a book each to promote their ideologies just before their execution.<sup>7</sup> The thriving of extremist publications in Indonesia as reported by the International Crisis Group also pointed to the same motive. In its conclusion, the report noted, “As top leaders argue for consolidation and rebuilding, it is clear that recruitment of new members is critical—and publishing, dissemination and discussion of texts on jihad can play an important part in that effort.”<sup>8</sup>

The act of those who have renounced violence and Al Qaeda’s ideology is also a significant indicator of the centrality of ideology. These are the leaders of the Egyptian JI, Sayyid Imam Al-Sharif, alias Dr. Fadl,

4. See William McCants, *Militant Ideology Atlas*, Combating Terrorism Center, New York, November 2006. See main report and executive summary at <http://www.ctc.usma.edu/atlas/> (28 September 2010).
5. The first Bali Bombing took place in 2002 on the Indonesian island of Bali. A second bombing incident took place on the same island later in 2005. Both bombings have been linked to the Jemaah Islamiyah although they were carried out by different groups of members.
6. See Imam Samudra, *Aku Melawan Teroris*, Jazera, Solo, 2004.
7. See Imam Samudra, *Sekuntum Rosela Pelipur Lara*, Ar-Rahmah Media, Jakarta, 2009; Ali Ghufuran (Mukhlas), *Mimpi Suci Di Balik Jeruji Besi*, Ar-Rahmah Media, Jakarta, 2009; Amrozi bin Nurhashim, *Senyum Terakhir Sang Mujahid*, Ar-Rahmah Media, Jakarta, 2009.
8. “Indonesia: Jemaah Islamiyah’s Publishing Industry”, *International Crisis Group*, Asia Report No. 147, February 2008, p. 16.

an influential leader of Egyptian Islamic Jihad and ideologue within the jihadist<sup>9</sup> circle and senior members of the Indonesian JI such as Nasir Abas<sup>10</sup> and Ali Imron<sup>11</sup>. They have published more than 25 volumes to counter Al Qaeda's ideology and point out the fallacy of their previous views on jihad. Dr. Fadl's ideological refutation to Al Qaeda has even invited Ayman Al-Zawahiri to respond with a 200-page book, which again testifies to the importance of ideology among jihadists.<sup>12</sup>

It is important to note that extremists are not irrational. Despite their tendency to extreme measures, they work in accordance to rational calculation. Secondly, despite their prominence after the 9/11 attacks, many extremist groups and leaders have actually been operating for decades. The Indonesian JI, for instance, was formally established in the early 1990s and has its roots in the Darul Islam movement, which was in existence since 1945. Al Qaeda's roots can be traced back to the early 1980s during the Soviet-Afghan war and some of its members from the Egyptian Islamic Jihad have been operating since late 1960s.

Thus, taking into consideration their past experiences in jihadism and their rational behaviours, it logically follows that extremists would not have spent so much of their resources and effort on those ideological materials if they were not important to them, did not serve their cause or if there were no demand for such materials.

## THE IDEOLOGY-TERROR NEXUS PYRAMID

The pyramid diagram below will help to facilitate a better understanding of the nexus between the current terrorism and ideology. This will

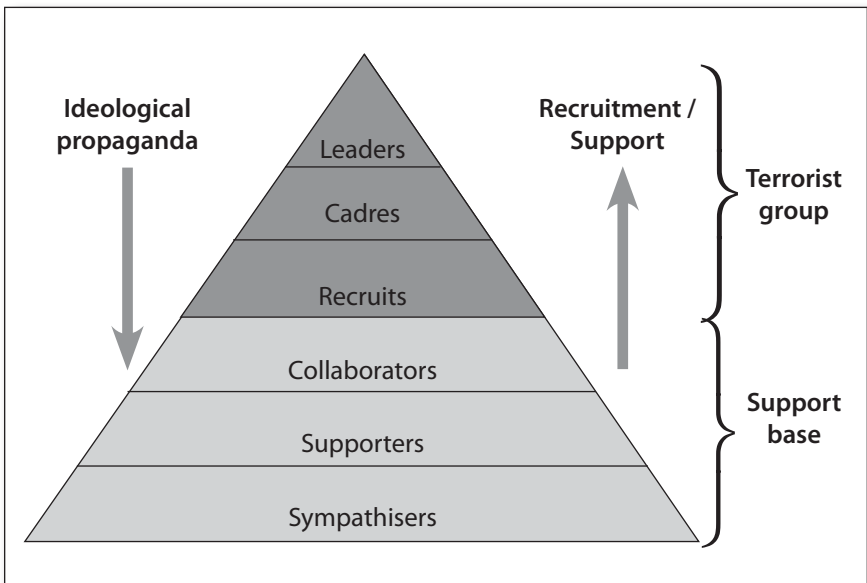
- 
9. Readers need to be aware of the distinction between the term "jihad" as described in the *Quran* and *hadith* and as when it is used by Muslim militants and terrorists who have adopted the same term to describe their actions and motivations. For the purpose of distinguishing between the two nuances, the authors have chosen to italicise the word when referring to the former.
  10. See Nasir Abas, *Membongkar Jamaah Islamiyah: Pengakuan Mantan Anggota JI*, Grafindo, Jakarta, 2005; Nasir Abas, *Melawan Pemikiran Aksi Bom Imam Samudra & Noordin M. Top*, Grafindo, Jakarta, 2007.
  11. See Ali Imron, *Ali Imron Sang Pengebom: Kesadaran & Ungkapan Penyesalan*, Republika, Jakarta, 2007.
  12. Omar Ashour, "Ending Jihadism? The Transformation of Armed Islamist Movements", *Arab Reform Bulletin*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, September 2009, available at <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/arb/?fa=show&article=23805> (21 September 2010).

then help to bring awareness on the important role of ideology in the perpetuation of terrorism, especially by the current Muslim extremists and the importance of countering this ideology.

Here, it has been observed that terrorism is generally committed when opportunity, motivation and capability meet. Subsumed under motivation, one of the root causes of terrorism is the ideology that drives terrorists. This ideology can be primarily ethno-nationalistic or politico-religious in nature, among others. As prevention of terrorism requires the elimination of at least one of the three elements mentioned above, ideology ought to be one of the key targets of countering terrorism as this can severely undermine the motivation that drives a terrorist to carry out his deed. Building on from this, ideology plays a critical role in mobilising support towards the adoption of terrorism within a particular terrorist's organisation and its immediate external support base of sympathisers.

The role of ideology can be explained from the above pyramid rep-

FIGURE 1  
Flow of and relevance of ideological propaganda in a terrorist organisation



representing a simplified model of a terrorist's organisational structure.<sup>13</sup> It illustrates how ideology may generally be transmitted and utilised within an organisation. In this pyramid structure, ideology formulation is the function of leadership and it is used to recruit fresh members. It also generates support in ensuring a channel for producing new personnel to replace the members killed or captured. Ideology and belief systems are also used, and play important roles in advancing terrorist aims and objectives.<sup>14</sup> Often at its formative period, terrorist organisations will go through “a period of mobilisation of discontent” during which the ideology is formulated to help rally people towards a perceived sense of common grievances.<sup>15</sup>

In order to build on the ideology used to mobilise support within an organisation, leaders may tap on emotions that are linked from varying sources of perceived grievances. At the most superficial or immediate level, they may simply draw on implacable hatred. Proximate causes usually invoke historical and economic roots, for example, attributing perceived Muslim grievances to the unfavourable and unjust policies of Western superpowers, the Russian government's and its predecessor's long repression of the Chechen people, and the economic backwardness of the Pattani people in Southern Thailand. The most critical is when strictly binary mindsets are constructed and encouraged, such as the bipolar view of good versus evil and the notion of “us” against “them”.<sup>16</sup> These ideas and their intended resultant emotions present a critical mechanism at work in influencing the minds of potential terrorists and supporters and are effective simply by operating at the level of the intellect.

However, it is necessary to note that the amount of ideological influence is not consistent among all types of terrorists. Generally, there are three types of terrorists: the political strategist, the radical theorist and the militant activist:

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13. Rohan Gunaratna and Peter Chalk, *Jane's Counter Terrorism*, Jane's Information Group, United Kingdom, 2002, pp. 8–9.
  14. *Ibid.*, pp. 8 and 11.
  15. *Ibid.*, pp. 11–13; Ted G. Groetzel, “Terrorist Beliefs and Terrorist Lives”, *Psychology of Terrorism*, edited by Chris E. Stout, Praeger, London, 2002, Vol. 1, p. 109.
  16. John E. Mack, “Looking Beyond Terrorism: Transcending the Mind of Enmity”, *Psychology of Terrorism*, Vol. 1, pp. 175–176.

- The political strategist strives for power so he can impose his will on society. He is politically driven.
- The radical theorist is more interested in the ideas that he believes in, than any political goal including power. He will not compromise his beliefs for the sake of power. The radical theorist may not be involved directly in terrorist acts, but acts as ideologues for the terrorist organisation. He develops and refines the belief system, and defends them from criticism. He is skilled in offering rational and religious justifications for the terrorists. To him, ideas are the end, not the means.
- Militant activists are those who are drawn to violence for the sake of it, either as a means of venting anger or as a source of excitement and adventure. They are capable of carrying out terrorist attacks and operations without any ideological motivation.<sup>17</sup>

Based on the above, the ideology is particularly important for the political strategist and radical theorist. The political strategist uses ideology to justify the imposition of his will and reduce resentment from the society against his actions, whereas the radical theorist considers ideology as the cause for his struggle. Often, the most dangerous terrorists are those who combine emotional, intellectual and political motivations. The militant activist whose tactic is largely dictated by an inclination towards violence may not have enough discipline to plan and sustain effective terrorist activities while the political strategist and the radical theorist are likely to continue the struggle through other means when violence is not possible.<sup>18</sup> The role of ideology is particularly critical with regards to religiously motivated terrorism; in particular here are those that were perpetrated by Al Qaeda and its associates.

Various examples can illustrate that not all Muslim terrorists commit the act because of poverty or economic marginalisation, which has been widely pointed to as potential driving factors in the increasing trend of terrorism. Ayman Al-Zawahiri, Al Qaeda's deputy leader, is a physician. Khalid Shaikh Mohammed, head of Al Qaeda's operations, reportedly attended Chowan College in North Carolina in the early 1980s before

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17. Ted G. Groetzel, "Terrorist Beliefs and Terrorist Lives", *Psychology of Terrorism*, pp. 99–100.

18. *Ibid*, p. 109.



transferring to another American university where he obtained an engineering degree. Yazid Sufaat, who was detained under the Internal Security Act (ISA) in Malaysia, was a former Malaysian army captain.<sup>19</sup> Azahari Husin, the JI's bomb expert killed in a shoot out by Indonesian security forces, was a lecturer at Malaysia Technological University. He held a doctorate in engineering. Zulkifli Abdul Hir, a JI fugitive, graduated as an engineer from an American university. Wan Min Wan Mat, a former lecturer, holds a M.Sc. (Construction) from Manchester University, United Kingdom. Noor Din Mohd Top, another JI leader who was finally killed in a police operation linked to the Jakarta Hotel Bombings in November 2009 after being on the run for many years, graduated from Malaysia Technological University. Shamsul Bahari Hussin was a lecturer with a Master's degree in mechatronics from Dundee University.<sup>20</sup> At least two of the JI members detained in Singapore are holders of diplomas in engineering.<sup>21</sup> Jason Burke described this type of jihadists as "intellectual activists," "men who can justify their attraction to radical Islam in relatively sophisticated terms."<sup>22</sup> In such cases, psychological or ideological difficulties are more likely to be the cause. These educated people could either have psychological problems or were driven by ideologies, in which case economic considerations were not a main factor.

## IDEOLOGY AND "AL QAEDAISM"

Today, the Al Qaeda network has become almost synonymous to Muslim perpetrated terrorism.<sup>23</sup> From its initial relatively small-sized group

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19. "Malaysia Extends Al Qaeda Suspect's Term", *Associated Press*, 28 January 2004; Marc Erikson, "The Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda of Southeast Asia", *Asia Times*, 6 February 2002, available at <http://www.atimes.com/se-asia/DB06Ae01.html> (20 October 2010).
  20. Royal Malaysian Police Press Release, *Tangkap Ketua Kumpulan Militan Malaysia Johor & Senarai Ahli KMM Yang Dikehendaki Polis*, 27 September 2002.
  21. Ministry of Home Affairs, *Particulars of detainees – Singapore government press statement on ISA arrests*, 11 January 2002.
  22. Jason Burke, *Al Qaeda: The True Story of Radical Islam*, Penguin Books, London, 2004, p. 281.
  23. For a detailed account of the history and developments of the core Al Qaeda organisation led by Osama bin Laden which was responsible for the September 11 attacks on the United States, see Lawrence Wright, *The Looming Towers: Al Qaeda and the Road to 9/11*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 2006.

which was responsible for the attacks on the United States in 2001, Al Qaeda has become a network that has broadly expanded, both in size and geographical expanse, with numerous cells and networks pledging allegiance to Osama bin Laden presently in many parts of the world. There are now groups that openly showcase their loyalty and shared identity with the “original” Al Qaeda such as Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), Al Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) in North Africa, Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and the recently uncovered Al Qaeda *Serambi Mekah* based in Aceh, Indonesia. The network also collaborates with other established militant and extremist organisations around the world. The understanding of how radical ideology factors in within the mindset of an Al Qaeda member or an affiliated organisation could help to better understand the growth of the network and ways to neutralise it.

It is evident that ideology plays a role in Al Qaeda’s propaganda to attract followers and to win sympathy from general Muslims. Al Qaeda makes it clear that it is striving for Islam and that its ideas represent the “true Islam”. In every statement it makes, Al Qaeda does not fail to cite verses from the Quran, quotes from the Prophet’s tradition (*hadiths*) and opinions of classical Muslim scholars, hence giving the impression that its ideas are founded on Islam. It continuously uses *fatwa* (religious rulings) of various Muslim scholars and does not hesitate to couch its opinion as *fatwa* for the Muslim *ummah*. Its struggle is based on ideas such as armed jihad being the only means to change the current fate of the Muslims, that Muslims ought to be in constant war against non-Muslims until they obtain glory for Islam, that Muslims are obligated to re-establish the Caliphate, that killing oneself is not suicidal but an act of martyrdom and the ultimate way is to sacrifice for the religion, and that Allah will not neglect one who strives for the glory of His religion. Its ideas are founded on concepts such as submission and allegiance to Allah alone and the supremacy of Islam above all.<sup>24</sup> Al Qaeda views that

24. “Bin Laden’s fatwa”, *Online Newshour*, August 1996, available at [http://www.pbs.org/newshour/terrorism/international/fatwa\\_1996.html](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/terrorism/international/fatwa_1996.html) (29 September 2010); “Fatwa Urging Jihad Against Americans”, *Al-Quds Al-Arabi*, 23 February 1998, available at <http://www.fas.org/irp/world/para/docs/980223-fatwa.htm> (29 September 2010); “A New Bin Laden Speech”, *The Middle East Media Research Institute*, Special Dispatch Series No. 539, 18 July 2003, available at <http://www.memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page=archives&Area=sd&ID=SP53903> (20 October 2010); “Full transcript of Bin Laden’s speech”, *Aljazeera*, 1 November 2004;

the existing dominant culture founded by the West corrupts humanity and is destructive to the proper practice of faith and “true Islam”. To be a true and faithful servant of Allah, one has to reject it totally and commit oneself to fight against it. Conflict between the West and Islam is thus inevitable and Al Qaeda is “unlikely ever to accept long-term co-existence even if its other aims were somehow realised”. No compromise or concession will satisfy them ultimately except a “global imposition of their interpretation of the faith”.<sup>25</sup> Considering the implications of such ideological leanings of the Al Qaeda, direct refutation of their ideas may be the essential key to neutralise or reduce the threat of the organisation.

Whenever a leader of Al Qaeda is killed or captured, it will announce that its struggle will not die because it is founded not on individuals, but on ideas that its followers believe in. Hence, there will always be many others who will continue with the struggle and be ready to replace the losses. We may dismiss such a claim, but it illustrates that Al Qaeda strives to base its organisation on its ideology and not on individuals.<sup>26</sup> Jason Burke described Al Qaeda as “less an organisation than an ideology”.<sup>27</sup> As such, delegitimising and dismantling extremist ideology, indeed, is one of the important aspects of combating terrorism by Al Qaeda.<sup>28</sup> In fact, the real target in the battle against Muslim extremist

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“Imam Samudra: By Allah, It’s Not Over Yet”, *Tempo, Special Commemorative Edition, Bali Bombing: One Year On*, 14–20 October 2003; Christopher M. Blanchard, “Al Qaeda: Statements and Evolving Ideology”, *CRS Report for Congress*, 16 November 2004, available at <http://www.fas.org/irp/crs/RS21973.pdf> (29 September 2010); Christopher Henzel, *The Origins of Al Qaeda Ideology: Implications for U.S. Strategy*, 20 April 2004, available at <http://www.ndu.edu/nwc/writing/AY04/awardpapers/Nominated%20Paper--04--Henzel.pdf> (17 October 2007); A. Maftuh Abegebriel, “Al-Qa’idah: Arabists or Islamists?”, *Negara Tuhan: The Thematic Encyclopaedia*, edited by A. Maftuh Abegebriel, A. Yanti Abeveiro, SR-Ins Team, SR-Ins Publishing, Jogjakarta, 2004, pp. 574–576, 583–593, 607–629; Jason Burke, *Al Qaeda: The True Story of Radical Islam*, pp. 34–37.

25. Stephen Biddle, “War Aims and War Termination”, *Defeating Terrorism: Strategic Issue Analyses*, p. 9.
26. Jason Burke, “Think Again: Al Qaeda”, *Foreign Policy*, May/June 2004, pp. 18–19; Jason Burke, *Al Qaeda: The True Story of Radical Islam*, pp. xxv–xxvi.
27. *Ibid.*
28. See Llewellyn D. Howell, “Is The New Global Terrorism A Clash of Civilisations? Evaluating Terrorism’s Multiple Sources”, *The New Global Terrorism: Characteristics, Causes, Controls*, edited by Charles W. Kegley, Jr., Prentice Hall,

groups should not be the groups themselves, but their ideologies, which should be stopped from spreading beyond their current members.<sup>29</sup>

Increasingly, the threat of Al Qaeda has shifted from its core members to individuals unaffiliated but inspired by its ideology. This can be seen from various cases all over the world:

- Five individuals who were mainly United States naturalised citizens plotted attacks on the Fort Dix military base in New Jersey.<sup>30</sup>
- Six Yemeni Americans popularly referred to as the Lackawanna Six of the Buffalo cell provided support to Al Qaeda.<sup>31</sup>
- The London subway bombing on 7 July 2005 was carried out by four citizens of the United Kingdom.<sup>32</sup>
- The attempted bombing of the London subway on 21 July 2005 was organised by citizens and permanent residents of the United Kingdom. Five were convicted for charges related to the plot.<sup>33</sup>
- Four Australian citizens plotted to attack a military base in Melbourne in August 2009.<sup>34</sup>
- In December 2009, Umar Farouk Abdul Mutallab tried but failed to blow up a U.S. commercial flight from Amsterdam to Detroit with a device hidden in his underwear. He had allegedly been trained by Al Qaeda-linked militants in Yemen.<sup>35</sup>
- On 1 May 2010, the New York Police defused an amateurish but

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New Jersey, 2003, pp. 179–184 and Paul K. Davis and Brian Michael Jenkins, *Deterrence and Influence in Counter-terrorism: A Component in the War on al Qaeda*, RAND, Santa Monica, 2002, pp. 46–47.

29. Stephen Biddle, “War Aims and War Termination”, *Defeating Terrorism: Strategic Issue Analyses*, p. 10.
30. Amanda Ripley, “The Fort Dix Conspiracy”, *Time*, 6 December 2007.
31. Roya Aziz & Monica Lam, “Profile: The Lackawanna Cell”, *PBS Frontline*, 16 October 2003.
32. “In Depth: London Attacks”, *BBC News (Online)*, available at [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/spl/hi/uk/05/london\\_blasts/what\\_happened/html/](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/spl/hi/uk/05/london_blasts/what_happened/html/) (2 August 2010).
33. “Fifth July 21 bomber faces sentence for failed London terror attack”, *Mailonline*, 19 November 2007.
34. Cameron Stewart and Lauren Wilson, “Police swoop on Melbourne homes after Somali Islamist terror plot exposed”, *The Australian*, 4 August 2009.
35. “U.S. Reviewing Tape on Underwear bomber”, *Reuters*, 27 April 2010, available at <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE63Q5GZ20100427> (20 October 2010).

potentially powerful car bomb in Times Square.<sup>36</sup> The bomb was put together and placed at the target location by a U.S. citizen of Pakistani origin, Faisal Shahzad.

Marc Sageman in his study of various terrorism cases in the Western countries observed the shift of the threat of terror attacks from external sources to “home-grown wannabes” who were unrelated to jihadist groups but aggrieved by international events such as the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and inspired by militant jihad ideas such as Al Qaeda’s.<sup>37</sup>

### Self-radicalisation cases in Singapore

[Note: We will use initials only in this monograph to identify all Singaporeans involved in terrorism and radicalisation cases. This is in view of the need to protect them and/or their family members from negative stigma and to facilitate their re-integration to the society as the majority of them have been released for their cooperation and positive response to rehabilitation as indicated in the Appendix.]

Singapore has also had her fair share of the experience of individuals influenced by Al Qaeda-inspired ideology. In February 2007, one self radicalised individual who was not officially a member of a terrorist group was arrested. A. B. s/o<sup>38</sup> Abdul Kader, a 28-year-old former lawyer and lecturer, was arrested in a Middle East country by the local security agency, in collaboration with the ISD. The ISD came to know that he was planning to participate in armed jihad against the American led coalition forces after being radicalised by the Internet sources that he frequented to fulfil his thirst for knowledge on Islam. A plane ticket to Pakistan was found on him during the arrest. He had been released under Suspended Direction in February 2010. Two JI members, M. H. s/o Saynudin and M. Y. s/o O. P. Mohamed Nooh, who were hiding in the country and abetting him, were also arrested. All of them were deported to Singapore and detained. One local abettor, M. Y. K. bin Muhamad

36. “New York police defuse Times Square bomb”, *The Guardian*, 2 May 2010, available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/may/02/times-square-bomb-scare> (20 October 2010).

37. Marc Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad: Terror Networks in the Twentieth Century*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2008, pp. vii-viii, 133–136 and 145–146.

38. An initial for “son of”, commonly used by Singaporean of Indian descent.

Yunus was investigated and put under Restriction Order (RO).<sup>39</sup> A subsequent case of self-radicalisation through the Internet was uncovered involving three persons; M. Z. bin Abdullah, M. bin Mohd Shah and M. T. bin Andjah Asmara. The first two were put under detention and the latter was issued with a RO on 5 December 2007. The three were planning to undertake armed jihad in foreign countries, experimenting with bomb-making, raising funds for militant groups and networking with fellow militants through the Internet.<sup>40</sup> The most recent case involved the detention of a full-time national serviceman in the Singapore Armed Forces, M. F. Abdul Hamid. He was influenced by the teachings of radical clerics who posted their sermons and works online and subsequently became convinced that it was his religious duty to participate in armed jihad and to strive for martyrdom. M. F. Abdul Hamid has been placed under detention for two years under the ISA.<sup>41</sup>

There were also two related cases of self-radicalisation. M. A. Jailani and M. T. bin Shaik Dawood were placed on RO for two years from 23 June 2010. M. A. Jailani was an unaccredited<sup>42</sup> religious teacher who had distributed numerous copies of CDs which contained the audio recordings of Anwar al-Awlaki,<sup>43</sup> encouraging participation of armed jihad against non-Muslims and other “enemies” of Islam. Bin Shaik Dawood was one of M. A. Jailani’s students and had travelled to Yemen, seeking out al-Awlaki although he was not successful in doing so and subsequently returned to Singapore.<sup>44</sup>

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39. Ministry of Home Affairs, *Press release – Further Detentions, Releases & Issuance of Restriction Orders under the Internal Security Act*, 8 June 2007.

40. Ministry of Home Affairs, *Press release – Further Releases, Issuance of Restriction Orders & Detentions under the Internal Security Act*, 24 January 2008.

41. Ministry of Home Affairs, *Detention, Imposition of Restriction Orders and Release Under The Internal Security Act*, 6 July 2010.

42. See Asatizah Recognition Scheme in the next part of this monograph.

43. Anwar al-Awlaki is a U.S. born cleric who has been accused of having links to Al Qaeda. He has been accused of influencing terrorist activities, notably that of the attempt by Nigerian Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab to blow up the airliner bound for Detroit on Christmas Day in 2009 as mentioned earlier in the text as well as the Fort Hood shootings by Nidal Malik Hasan, in November 2009. Awlaki is also a prominent figure in the virtual world, where he has posted numerous online sermons.

44. Ministry of Home Affairs, *Detention, Imposition of Restriction Orders and Release Under The Internal Security Act*, 6 July 2010.

Thus it can be concluded from the above cases and those in other parts of the world<sup>45</sup> that the threat of radical ideology is not only limited within organised terrorist groups. In fact, the problem has evolved into something much more complex with the phenomenon of “cyber jihad” as the extremists take to the Internet to perpetuate their radical ideas, using it as a convenient platform and medium in transmitting and receiving information. Although there has been no in-depth study committed to assessing the extent to which information found online may be translated into actual actions, the influence of radical online materials should not be underestimated, as demonstrated by numerous cases whereby individuals have taken further actions subsequent to having been exposed to radical ideas via the Internet.

What is certain, however, is the fact that counter-terrorism alone is insufficient and ought to be augmented by the ideological dimension and that any efforts at counter-ideology must not be limited to those directed to members of extremist groups. The general public must also be made aware of the dangers of extremist ideology, particularly so if it is so intrinsically woven with religion. Hence, counter-ideology must also extend to the public domain in order to immunise them from being easily influenced and affected by radical ideology.

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45. In many different parts of the world, there have been numerous cases of self-radicalisation via the Internet or of which the Internet had been a central source of influence for establishing networks and lines of communication among individuals having the intent of carrying out terrorist activities. The attempted car bombing at the Times Square in the United States in 2010 was purportedly inspired by Anwar al-Awlaki via the Internet. Investigations had revealed that the culprit, Faisal Shahzad, had then subsequently received bomb-making training from the Pakistan Taliban. In another case, Colleen Renee LaRose, otherwise known in the cyber domain as Jihad Jane, was accused of using the Internet to actively recruit terrorists to carry out attacks. She was arrested in October 2009 by U.S. authorities.

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## SINGAPORE'S EXPERIENCE\*

### COUNTER-TERRORISM AND COUNTER-IDEOLOGY

Singapore's approach to counter-terrorism locally is multi-pronged. Due to the nature of the terrorist threat in this region which is politico-religiously motivated, counter-ideology is one of the central features in the comprehensive programme set in place to tackle the threat of terrorism. Other features of Singapore's counter-terrorism programme include security-centric responses in the form of operational capacities and also the community outreach programmes. The latter component serves to better equip the multi-racial and multi-religious social fabric in understanding and maintaining resilience in the face of a possible terror attack. In Singapore, the community engagement programme is also an integral part of the counter-ideological component. The examples mentioned in this section highlight the various key initiatives that have been carried out thus far.

#### THE JEMAAH ISLAMIYAH IN SINGAPORE: THE REPRESENTATIVE OF AL QAEDA INTERESTS

In Singapore, Al Qaeda's interests is represented by elements of JI, a splinter group of Indonesian Darul Islam movement, formed by former Darul Islam fugitives based in Malaysia. Its actual strength was unknown but it

\* This part was updated from Muhammad Haniff Hassan, "Counter-ideological work: Singapore experience", *The Ideological War on Terror: Worldwide Strategies for Counter-Terrorism* edited by Anne Aldis and Graeme P. Herd, Routledge, London, 2007, pp. 143–159 and Muhammad Haniff Hassan & Kenneth George Pereire, "An Ideological Response to Combating Terrorism: The Singapore Perspective", *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Vol. 17 No. 4, December 2006, pp. 458–477.



has been estimated to be around 60 to 80 members.<sup>1</sup> Its nucleus started when I. Maidin was inducted into JI in between 1988 and 1989 by a JI element and subsequently appointed as its leader, the *Qoid Wakalah*.<sup>2</sup> I. Maidin led Singapore JI until 1999 but remained as its primary spiritual leader. He was succeeded by M. S. Kastari.<sup>3</sup> JI's presence in Singapore was not known until a member of the Muslim community in Singapore tipped off the Internal Security Department (ISD), a security agency overseeing the internal security of Singapore under the Ministry of Home Affairs, about a Singapore citizen who was believed to have a link with Al Qaeda. The person was identified as M. A. bin Yar Ali Khan. The ISD immediately conducted investigations to confirm the information and started to trace bin Yar Ali Khan's contacts and connections. Bin Yar Ali Khan left the country and fled to Afghanistan in November 2001 and was arrested by the Northern Alliance there.<sup>4</sup>

In the White Paper entitled "The Jemaah Islamiyah Arrests and The Threat of Terrorism" released by the Ministry of Home Affairs in Singapore in 2003, it was revealed that there was a total of four cells (or "*fiah*", as used by the organisation) in the Singapore branch of the JI. They were the *fiah* Ayub, *fiah* Musa, *fiah* Ismail and *fiah* Yakub. At the initial stages, the members of the cells believed that they were only to provide logistical support for operations in Singapore to be eventually carried out by foreign terrorists. However, it was pointed out that after the September 11 attacks against the United States, *fiah* Ayub was inspired to be directly involved in the legislation of the attacks.<sup>5</sup>

The Singapore cell of the JI has had several attempted terrorist attack plots against numerous targets in the country.<sup>6</sup> Across all the cases high-

1. Farah Abdul Rahim, "ISD Questioning 10–12 Others Linked to JI: Wong Kan Seng", *Channelnewsasia.com*, 24 September 2002.
2. Ministry of Home Affairs, *White Paper: The Jemaah Islamiyah Arrests and the Threat of Terrorism*, Ministry of Home Affairs, Singapore, 2003, p. 10.
3. *Ibid.*
4. Walter Fernandez, "Arrest of Singaporean in Afghanistan Forced ISD to act: Wong Kan Seng", *Channelnewsasia.com*, 23 January 2002; Ministry of Home Affairs, *Government Responses to Media Queries on the ISA Arrest*, 18 January 2002.
5. Ministry of Home Affairs, *White Paper: The Jemaah Islamiyah Arrests and the Threat of Terrorism*, p. 11.
6. For an overview of the various terrorist plots against targets in Singapore uncovered between 2002 and 2011, see Appendix B.

lighted in the White Paper, it is evident that many of the plans involved initiation, instructions and guidance from a more senior member of either the JI wing based elsewhere in the region such as Indonesians Hambali or Fathur Rohman Al-Ghozi, or members of the Al Qaeda. Examples of the latter include Mohammed Mansour Jabarah, a Canadian-Arab who admitted to being the liaison person between Al Qaeda and the Southeast Asian operatives; and Mohamed Atef alias Abu Hafs, one of Osama's lieutenants.<sup>7</sup> In addition, the members of the Malaysian cell of the JI also rendered assistance and, at times, instructions from the leaders such as F. bin A. B. Bafana, to the Singapore operatives.

### COUNTER-TERRORISM: OPERATIONS, ARRESTS AND DETENTIONS

On the side of security, two major operations were conducted against JI elements locally. The first was between 9 and 24 December 2001. The ISD arrested 13 JI members and two individuals linked to the Moro Islamic Liberation Force (MILF).<sup>8</sup> The second round of arrests was made in August 2002. Nineteen JI members and two individuals linked to the MILF were arrested.<sup>9</sup> However, not all of the arrested individuals were detained under the ISA. A minority were issued with RO by the ISD.<sup>10</sup> Since then, several minor arrests had been made involving Singaporeans by the Singapore government, foreign authorities or by the collaboration of both. One was bin Yar Ali Khan who was handed over by the Afghan authority.<sup>11</sup> The other was A. Ali who was handed over by the Thai authority.<sup>12</sup> A much sought after M. S. Kastari, Singapore JI's head who threatened to crash an airplane on Changi airport, was arrested in

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7. Ministry of Home Affairs, *White Paper: The Jemaah Islamiyah Arrests and the Threat of Terrorism*, p. 29.

8. Ministry of Home Affairs, *Singapore Government Press Statement on ISA Arrests*, 11 January 2002.

9. Ministry of Home Affairs, *Singapore Government Statement on Further ISA Arrests Under the Internal Security Act*, 16 September 2002.

10. For the full list of arrests and sentencing of Singaporean JI members, please see Appendix B.

11. Ministry of Home Affairs, *Comments by the Minister for Home Affairs on Mohd Aslam's Return*, 27 January 2003.

12. Ministry of Home Affairs, *Press Statement on the Arrest of Jemaah Islamiyah Fugitive – Arifin bin Ali @ John Wong*, 10 June 2003.

Riau by the Indonesian authority.<sup>13</sup> He was charged with immigration offences and sentenced to 18 months' jail in 2003. Upon release from the sentence, he was not deported immediately to the Singapore authority because the two countries do not have an extradition treaty. In January 2006, he was arrested again in East Java, Indonesia, for having a fake identification document, subsequently handed over to the Singapore authority in February 2006 and immediately detained under the ISA in March 2006.<sup>14</sup> In February 2008, M. S. Kastari managed to escape from the ISD's Detention Centre in Whitley Road, sparking a massive manhunt by personnel from the Singapore Police Force, the Gurkha Contingent and the Singapore Armed Forces.<sup>15</sup> The initial search was called off after 17 hours without success. His escape put the entire country on alert and an urgent worldwide security alert was issued by the Interpol.<sup>16</sup> To encourage the flow of information that would lead to the arrest, two private individuals approached the Ministry of Home Affairs in July 2008 and put up a million dollar reward.<sup>17</sup> He was eventually arrested by the Malaysian Special Branch in May 2009<sup>18</sup> and was deported to Singapore in September 2010 where he remains in detention.

In February 2008, there was the arrest of R. Y. bin Jumari, a member

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13. "Jakarta arrests 'Singapore JI head'", *CNN.com*, 3 February 2003, available at [http://articles.cnn.com/2003-02-03/world/indonesia.singapore\\_1\\_erwin-mappaseng-bali-attack-bintan?\\_s=PM:asiapcf](http://articles.cnn.com/2003-02-03/world/indonesia.singapore_1_erwin-mappaseng-bali-attack-bintan?_s=PM:asiapcf) (20 October 2010); Mark Baker, "JI Plotting More Attack, Manila Warns", *The Age (Australia)*, 2 July 2003; Hasnita A. Majid, "Home Affairs Minister Confirms JI Man in Indonesia is Mas Selamat Kastari", *Channelnewsasia.com*, 7 February 2003.
  14. Ministry of Home Affairs, *Reponse to Queries on Mas Selamat*, 6 February 2006; S. Ramesh, "JI terror suspect sent back to Singapore after arrest in Indonesia", *Channelnewsasia.com*, 6 February 2006; Ministry of Home Affairs, *Singapore Government Press Statement on Release of 5 Detainees & Detention of 5 JI Members*, 30 June 2006.
  15. "Massive manhunt for escaped JI terror leader", *The Straits Times*, 27 February 2008, available at <http://www.asiaone.com/News/AsiaOne%2BNews/Crime/Story/A1Story20080227-51767.html> (20 October 2010).
  16. Interpol, *Interpol issues global alert for suspected terror leader following escape from Singapore jail*, 28 February 2008, available at <http://www.interpol.int/Public/News/2008/OrangeNotice20080228.asp> (20 October 2010).
  17. "Singapore's JI leader Mas Selamat Kastari arrested in Malaysia", *Channel News Asia*, 8 May 2009, available at <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/stories/singaporelocalnews/view/427691/1/.html> (20 October 2010).
  18. *Ibid.*

of JI Al-Ghuraba cell which was based in Pakistan. He had undergone military training at Al Qaeda's Al-Farouq camp and met bin Laden on a number of occasions. After completion of the training, he returned to this region but went on the run when the security authority in Singapore commenced operation against JI. The authority, however, managed to track and arrest him and he was subsequently brought back to Singapore with the cooperation of regional security authorities. An Order of Detention was issued to him on 20 March 2008.<sup>19</sup> In another case of a Singaporean JI member operating overseas, M. H. s/o Saynudin alias Fajar Taslim, a Singaporean JI member, was arrested in October 2008 in Palembang by the Indonesian authority.<sup>20</sup> He was later convicted for killing a Christian teacher in Palembang and plotting attacks in Indonesia and sentenced to 18 years' jail.<sup>21</sup> In April 2009, A. J. Sanawi, a Singaporean MILF member, surrendered to the Singapore authority after being on the run since December 2001. He was later issued with a RO in May 2009.<sup>22</sup> In June of the same year, two Singaporean JI fugitives, H. Ismail and S. Subari, were arrested by the Indonesian authority in Central Java. H. Ismail and S. Subari were on the run since 2001. H. Ismail's wife and two of his sons were also arrested together with him.<sup>23</sup> As already mentioned above, three self-radicalised cases were announced by the ISD in which one Detention Order and two ROs were issued in 2010.

Since the first arrests in 2001, several releases had been made. Based on pre-release assessments on a case-by-case basis, the released individuals were either placed under RO or Suspended Direction (SD). There have also been cases whereby the ROs issued were not extended after the date lapsed. In such cases, the ISD assessed that these individu-

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19. Ministry of Home Affairs, *Press release – Further Detention, Release & Issuance of Restriction Order under the Internal Security Act*, 23 March 2008.

20. Wahyudi Soeriaatmadja, "Suspects may face death – Singaporean and nine others nabbed in Palembang could face firing squad", *The Straits Times*, 14 October 2008.

21. Ali Kotarumalos, "Singaporean gets for 18 years jail on terror charges", *Associated Press*, 28 April 2009.

22. Ministry of Home Affairs, *Press Release – Release of ISA Detainee and Issuance of Restriction Orders under the Internal Security Act*, 16 June 2009.

23. Ministry of Home Affairs, *Press Release – Release of ISA Detainee and Issuance of Restriction Orders under the Internal Security Act*, 16 June 2009; Salim Osman, "Changi plot suspect captured in Java", *The Straits Times*, 24 June 2009; "Hunt on for 2 more Jemaah Islamiyah suspects", *The Straits Times*, 28 June 2009.

als had cooperated with the authority and responded positively to the rehabilitation programme, thus the detention and restrictive order were deemed to be unnecessary.<sup>24</sup>

The Singapore authority's counter-terrorism operations since 2001 have succeeded in dealing with most of the Singapore JI's leaders and key operatives. This has tremendously weakened Singapore JI's operational capability. However, the threat to Singapore remains primarily from foreign operatives and Singapore JI fugitives at large.

Aside from the various arrests and detentions and major operations directed at the Singapore JI, the government also carried out numerous comprehensive counter-terrorism exercises and programmes between 2001 and 2011 directed at addressing the general threat of terrorism in the country. In January 2006, Exercise Northstar V was carried out involving 22 agencies and 2,000 emergency personnel. This exercise was aimed at building up emergency preparedness and involved a simulated terrorist bomb attack on four MRT stations and one bus interchange. A more recent exercise of a similar nature was held in July 2009. Exercise Northstar VII recreated simultaneous terror attacks similar to the Mumbai terror incident in 2008. The exercise involved the nation's police special operation's units as well as the Singapore Armed Forces' Special Operations Task Force. The entire exercise was carried out in two phases at 10 different locations, including a shopping mall as well as an MRT station.<sup>25</sup>

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24. Ibid; Ministry of Home Affairs, *Government Press Statement – Extension of 17 Detention Orders and One Restriction Order, Release of 2 Detainees and Lapse of 2 Restriction Orders*, 15 September 2004; Ministry of Home Affairs, *Government Press Statement – Update on Counter-Terrorism Investigations in Singapore*, 14 January 2004, 22 April 2005 and 11 November 2005; Ministry of Home Affairs, *Singapore Government Press Statement on Release of 5 Detainees & Detention of 5 JI Members*, 30 June 2006; Ministry of Home Affairs, *Release of 2 JI Detainees on Restriction Orders*, 15 September 2006; Ministry of Home Affairs, *Press release – Further Releases, Issuance of Restriction Orders & Detentions under the Internal Security Act*, 24 January 2008; Ministry of Home Affairs, *Press release – Further Releases and Lapse of Restriction Order under the Internal Security Act*, 12 March 2009; Ministry of Home Affairs, *Press Release – Release of ISA Detainee and Issuance of Restriction Orders under the Internal Security Act*, 16 June 2009.
25. "Exercise Northstar tests Singapore's response to terrorist attack", *Channel News Asia*, 15 July 2009, available at <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/stories/singaporelocalnews/view/442497/1/.html> (20 October 2010).

Singapore has also participated in numerous regional exercises in counter-terrorism. Between 17 and 25 June 2010, the Republic of Singapore Navy participated in the annual Southeast Asia Cooperation against Terrorism (SEACAT) exercise which is in its ninth round since the series began in 2002. The aim of the exercise was to enhance maritime information-sharing and coordination of security responses among the participating navies.<sup>26</sup>

Aside from such exercises, Singapore also built up capacities in dealing with terrorism for its frontline security agencies. Counter-terrorist specialised units have been set up or further reinforced, including the Singapore Armed Forces Special Operations Task Force Command, the Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Explosive Defence Group made up of various Singapore Armed Forces units and the Special Operations Command which is a frontline unit of the Singapore Police Force.

Singapore is also a signatory to various bilateral, regional and international agreements and conventions. One example is the ASEAN Convention on Counter-Terrorism ratified in 2007 which is aimed at providing “the framework for regional cooperation to counter, prevent and suppress terrorism in all its forms and manifestations and to deepen cooperation among law enforcement agencies and relevant authorities of the Parties in countering terrorism.”<sup>27</sup> Under the U.N. framework, Singapore was also involved in establishing a legal foundation for international action against terrorism and also signed the U.N. Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism in December 2001. Singapore has also established close working partnerships with various countries in fighting against terrorism with countries such as the United States, Japan, China, India and Indonesia.

## COUNTERING RADICAL IDEOLOGY: A MULTI-LEVEL APPROACH

As mentioned earlier in this paper, we assert that given the nature of the threat of terrorism, it is imperative that any hard security measures be complemented by initiatives and programmes that target the ideo-

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26. Ministry of Defence, *Singapore Participates in Counter-Terrorism Naval Exercise*, available at [http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/news\\_and\\_events/nr/2010/jun/17jun10\\_news2.html](http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/news_and_events/nr/2010/jun/17jun10_news2.html) (17 June 2010).

27. ASEAN Secretariat, *ASEAN Convention on Counter-Terrorism*, 13 January 2007, available at <http://www.aseansec.org/19250.htm> (20 October 2010).

logical dimension of terrorism. This is clearly demonstrated in the case of Singapore, whereby numerous initiatives targeted at addressing the radical ideology were carried out, right from the initial stages when the issue of terrorism rose to prominence in the nation's security agenda. Furthermore, much of the counter-ideological work also extends into community engagement, whereby the general public is inoculated with the relevant knowledge on Islam and the values of good social behaviour and community values to better inform and equip them against any radical ideas that may be perpetuating in society. In this section, we will elaborate on the various counter-ideological initiatives and subsequent developments from 2001 to 2011.

## THE RESPONSE OF THE SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT

The Singapore government recognised the importance of ideological response as an integral part of counter-terrorism measures against the threats of Al Qaeda and JI right from the beginning. However, the government was of the viewpoint that the primary responsibility of combating Al Qaeda and JI's ideologies ought to be led by the Singapore Muslim community themselves due to the ideology's religious underpinnings. Leaders in the government called on the generally moderate Singapore Muslims to voice out their views. They also called on the local Muslim scholars and leaders to come forward and help ensure that others will not be influenced by such radical ideas. Unlike government security personnel, Muslim scholars and leaders were able to reach the community through mosques and *madrassahs* and to inoculate them against perverse and dangerous religious teachings. In this manner, it can be argued that the project of countering radical Islamist ideology was a joint effort of both the Singapore government and the leaders of the Muslim community right from the start. The overall efforts can be divided into initiatives that directly deal in countering the ideology and those that indirectly contribute in preventing its spread.

### Direct initiatives

An important initiative taken by the Singapore government was the formation of Religious Rehabilitation Group (RRG), which was launched on 23 April 2003. When the ISD realised through their investigations on the first batch of detained Singapore JI members that the plots were hatched

as a result of their religious ideology, two prominent local Muslim scholars were approached to assist with the ISD's assessment. They were Ali bin Mohamed, the chairman of a local mosque and Mohamed Hasbi bin Hassan, the President of the Singapore Association of Muslim Scholars and Teachers (Pergas). Both scholars volunteered their services and acted in their personal capacities. They served as the primary consultants and points of contact with the ISD. Later on, this resulted in the formation of a broader and more structured RRG.

The aim of the group is to study the JI's ideology, offer expert opinions in understanding JI misinterpretation of Islam, produce necessary counter-ideological materials on relevant religious matters and to conduct public education for the Muslim community on religious extremism. As of 2010, there is a total of 37 RRG personnel. Some members of the RRG hail from highly reputable Islamic institutions recognised globally, including the Al-Azhar University in Egypt, Madinah University as well as the International Islamic University in Malaysia, on top of the numerous graduates from local *madrasahs* as well. Other than the above two principal consultants, the RRG consists of (i) a Secretariat Group made up of volunteers from various Islamic bodies with the main function of assisting in the administrative aspect of the group and in preparing counter-ideological materials for the RRG's Resource Panel;<sup>28</sup> (ii) a Resource Panel which consists of Muslim scholars from the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore, a judge from the Shariah Court of Singapore and two independent Muslim scholars who vet the counter-ideological materials and provide feedback and advice to the two principal consultants in performing their duties; and (iii) the Rehabilitation Counsellors Panel made up of religious counsellors who are local Muslim scholars working on a voluntary basis.<sup>29</sup> The panel conducts religious counselling for JI detainees, JI supervisees and JI family members, especially the wives of the detainees. In the beginning, the counselling programme covered JI detainees and supervisees (under RO). This was later extended, on a voluntary basis, to the family members, wives and children as some of

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28. Mohamed Feisal Mohamed Hassan, *Roles of Religious Rehabilitation Group (RRG) in Singapore*, p. 5, available at [http://www.rrg.sg/edisi/data/The\\_roles\\_of\\_RRG.pdf](http://www.rrg.sg/edisi/data/The_roles_of_RRG.pdf) (13 September 2010).

29. Zakir Husin, "Countering extremists: Five years on", *The Straits Times*, 13 September 2008.



the wives of the detainees were either members of JI or exposed to JI's ideology through their husbands.<sup>30</sup> To date, more than 1,200 counselling sessions for the detainees and 150 sessions for the family members have been held.<sup>31</sup>

To help members of the RRG perform their roles, regular briefings, trainings and dialogue sessions were held by the ISD. The members were briefed on the developments of terrorism by lecturers and researchers from the Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies (IDSS).<sup>32</sup> RRG members also go through training in counselling and psychology that leads to a certified Specialist Diploma in Counselling Psychology conducted by the Academy of Certified Counsellors.<sup>33</sup> To assist all members of the RRG in their counselling work, the RRG has written two manuals as a guide to rehabilitation work and produced presentation materials related to JI's ideology with the help of materials from Pergas and the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies based in the Nanyang Technological University of Singapore. The first manual addresses JI's key ideas that have misinterpreted Islamic concepts.<sup>34</sup> The second "goes beyond addressing misinterpretations of Islamic concepts to deal with broader issues, like how one becomes radicalised and what could induce feelings of hatred towards others. The guide aims to better help the Muslim scholars convince hardcore detainees and self-radicalised individuals that their extreme beliefs are not part of Islamic teachings,

30. See The RRG Secretariat Report 2006–2007, available at <http://www.rrg.sg/edisi/data/RRG%20SECRETARIAT%20REPORT%202006%20-%202007.pdf> and information at [http://www.rrg.sg/subindex.asp?id=A211\\_07](http://www.rrg.sg/subindex.asp?id=A211_07) (13 September 2010).

31. RRG presentation at the Workshop on Terrorist Rehabilitation Implementation, National Library, Singapore, 25–30 November 2009.

32. The Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies (IDSS) at Nanyang Technological University (NTU) was established on 30 July 1996 by Dr. Tony Tan Keng Yam, then Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Defence. On 1 January 2007, ten years after its establishment, the IDSS was formally inaugurated to become the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS). In the new School, the IDSS remains a key component Institute focusing on security research to serve national needs while the School took over teaching functions.

33. The RRG Secretariat, *Winning Hearts & Minds, Embracing Peace*, Khadijah Mosque, Singapore, 2008, p. 36.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 33; Mohamed Feisal Mohamed Hassan, *Roles of Religious Rehabilitation Group (RRG) in Singapore*, p. 5, (Online).

but a gross violation of these teachings and a result of indoctrination.”<sup>35</sup> Aside from training in psychology, RRG members also undergo certified courses to help them develop their writing skills in order to produce effective literature on counter-ideology. In addition, various Muslim and non-Muslim organisations were briefed on the efforts taken by the RRG as part of the government updates and assurance initiatives. Since June 2005, talks delivered by members of the RRG, as part of a public education programme to counter extremism in Islamic understanding, have been intensified. Numerous appearances have been made in the form of presentation sessions to various parties, public forums and conventions for students in junior colleges, Islamic schools and Muslim youths in general. The media have also been invited to provide coverage of some of the community outreach events conducted by the RRG in order to increase awareness of their activities and on the importance of countering extremist ideology.<sup>36</sup>

The response to the religious counselling programme varied from individual to individual. However, there had been positive signs. Most of those detained had eventually been receptive to the counselling and religious guidance given by the RRG members. Many detainees had been released after series of counselling sessions and placed under RO while there had been cases of those who were under the RO not having their restrictions extended due to their positive responses to the counselling.

### Indirect initiatives

As part of the soft approach in combating terrorism and countering ideological extremism, the Singapore government had been extremely concerned for the welfare of families of the JI detainees. Most of the detainees were the sole breadwinners and their wives were homemakers. Their arrests meant that the families would experience financial difficulties. The ISD facilitated Muslim organisations in providing financial

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35. Zakir Husain, “New manual to counter extremist ideas”, *The Straits Times*, 4 June 2009; See FAQs on RRG available at [http://www.rrg.sg/subindex.asp?id=A221\\_07&pgno=2](http://www.rrg.sg/subindex.asp?id=A221_07&pgno=2) (13 September 2010).

36. See The RRG Secretariat Report 2006–2007, available at <http://www.rrg.sg/edisi/data/RRG%20SECRETARIAT%20REPORT%202006%20-%202007.pdf> and information at [http://www.rrg.sg/subindex.asp?id=A212\\_07](http://www.rrg.sg/subindex.asp?id=A212_07) and [http://www.rrg.sg/subindex.asp?id=A226\\_07](http://www.rrg.sg/subindex.asp?id=A226_07) (13 September 2010).

assistance to ensure that the education of the children was not disrupted or their future jeopardised. The money came from various funds managed by Muslim organisations. The immediate family members were also offered psychological and emotional support by trained counsellors who visited them regularly to assess their conditions and offer the necessary assistance. They also functioned as communication channels between the families, the ISD and the detainees.<sup>37</sup> These initiatives were significant in helping to win over the hearts and minds of the detainees and their family members, and to integrate them back into the society. It was particularly important to minimise the risks of the children being radicalised in the future due to the detention of their fathers or by economic setbacks that might have been a result of disruptions to their education and loss of financial security.<sup>38</sup>

At the community level, the Singapore government also took steps to ensure that the Muslim community not be stigmatised due to the religious character of the radical ideology. The government acknowledged that the Muslim community would feel uneasy with the exposure of the JI and feared prejudices, discrimination or being targeted for hate crimes. Some saw it as a conspiracy to tarnish the image of Muslims and Islam and also to further marginalise the community, which is a minority in this country. The government realised that there was the danger that the community could become sympathetic to the JI's cause instead of supporting the government to combat extremism. Grievances, prejudices and discrimination could potentially radicalise elements within the Muslim community who were not JI members to begin with. To avert this, the government had to assure the community and make clear its position that it does not view JI's ideology as representative of "true Islam" and Muslims.<sup>39</sup> Consecutively, to win over the hearts and minds of the community, the government showed utmost sensitivity in communicating the JI issue. The government ensured that Muslim community

37. The RRG Secretariat, *Winning Hearts & Minds, Embracing Peace*, p. 16.

38. Melvin Singh, "Back to Society", *The New Paper*, 26 September 2002; "Taking care of family matters", *The Straits Times*, 18 September 2004.

39. Goh Chok Tong, *Speech during a dialogue session with union leaders/members and employers 8.00 p.m. at Nanyang Polytechnic*, 14 October 2001; Goh Chok Tong, *Speech at the Singapore Institute of International Affairs 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration Lunch 12.30 p.m. at Hotel Fullerton*, 27 November 2002.

leaders were briefed on the arrests before details were disclosed to the media. Closed-door sessions were held where evidences were shown,<sup>40</sup> and questions answered. Special visits and sessions were held by the ISD upon requests.<sup>41</sup> The ISD and members of the RRG also toured various organisations to update the community on developments in their work.<sup>42</sup>

As mentioned earlier, consideration for sustaining racial and religious harmony in Singapore in facing the threat of terrorism in Singapore is also of paramount importance and hence an integral part of the programmes has been set up, particularly to the counter-ideological component which deals with the hearts and minds. Realising also that JI's ideology sought to drive a wedge between the Muslim community and the broader Singaporean community, the government called on Singaporeans not to place the blame on the Muslim community or Islam. It asserted that JI was a fringe group supported by a small minority among the Muslim community. The organisations that JI members were involved in also should not be prejudiced because they were neither aware of the links nor supported JI. Many of them condemned terrorism and extremism. The government also pointed out that it was a member of the Muslim community that had tipped off the ISD about JI, triggering the arrests. It called on all Singaporeans to stay united and maintain social harmony, an essential element for the survival of the country. The government held special briefings and dialogue sessions with the non-Muslim communities to bring these points across.<sup>43</sup>

An important initiative in this respect was the formation of the Inter-Racial Confidence and Harmony Circle "at community levels,

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40. A closed-door session with Muslim community leaders was held at the Parliament building on 19 September 2002, at 8.30pm. See Melvin Singh and Arul John, "Not the Last Episode in the Terror Threat Drama...," *The New Paper*, 19 September 2002, pp. 12–13.

41. The ISD held a visit and special briefing for *Pergas* after the second major arrest on 6 October 2002.

42. Briefings were held by the Islamic Religious Council on 18 July 2005, *Pergas* on 17 July 2005 and Fellowship of Muslim Students Association on 6 August 2005, at 10.30 am, Kampong Ubi Community Club. The Singapore Home Affairs Minister visited and had dinner with *Pergas* leadership on 1 December 2004, followed by a visit by newly appointed Director of the ISD on 8 December 2004.

43. Noor A. Rahman, "Kan Seng: Isu JI Adalah Isu Keselamatan Negara," *Berita Harian*, 25 September 2002; S. Ramesh, "Singaporeans Urged To Play Their Part And Help Disrupt Terror Plot," *Channelnewsasia.com*, 30 September 2005.

schools and work places to promote better inter-racial and inter-religious understanding between different communities and to provide a platform for confidence building among the different communities as a basis for developing, in time, deeper friendship and trust.”<sup>44</sup> The underlying philosophy was that “if Singaporeans of all races and religions build for themselves a more cohesive and tolerant society, groups such as JI would find it much harder to establish a foothold in Singapore.”<sup>45</sup> A programme with similar objectives but at a greater scale known as the Community Engagement Programme (CEP) was introduced.<sup>46</sup> Its stated objective is to “strengthen the understanding and ties between people of different races and religions, and build up our society’s skills and knowledge in coping with emergencies.”<sup>47</sup> In anticipation of a terrorist incident, the CEP is aimed at building up community resilience in order to cope with the aftermath. A comprehensive portal was launched by the Ministry of Home Affairs in conjunction with the CEP ([www.singaporeunited.sg](http://www.singaporeunited.sg)). Nevertheless, the CEP also comprises the involvement of multiple support groups such as religious groups, ethnic-based organisations, educational institutions, the media, businesses and unions as well as grassroots organisations, with each group referred to as a cluster. Each cluster is then supported by a relevant ministerial body.

## THE RESPONSE OF THE SINGAPORE MUSLIM COMMUNITY

Although the discovery of JI and the announcement of the arrests of its members came as a shock to the Muslim community in Singapore, they did not fall into long denial. Earlier, Muslim organisations had issued statements of condemnation against the 9/11 attacks and initiated public debates about the moderate Muslim. Hence, they were quick to condemn the JI’s plots in Singapore and expressed disapproval of its ideology and

44. Ministry of Home Affairs, *White Paper: The Jemaah Islamiyah Arrests and the Threat of Terrorism*, p. 23.

45. *Ibid.*

46. Radio Singapore International, “The need to maintain social harmony in the event of terror attack”, *Rsi.sg*, 10 February 2006; Ministry of Home Affairs, *Comment from DPM and Minister for Home Affairs Mr. Wong Kan Seng on the Community Engagement Programme (or CEP)*, 29 January 2007.

47. See Singapore United website, available at [www.singaporeunited.sg](http://www.singaporeunited.sg) (17 August 2010).

links with Al Qaeda, the perpetrator of the 9/11 attacks. These condemnations and disapprovals came in two waves. In the beginning, public statements were made by individual Muslim organisations and leaders. Realising the importance of showing unity due to the gravity of the issue, 122 Muslim organisations representing almost all the registered Muslim civil societies came together to issue a public statement condemning terrorism, rejecting ideological extremism and reinforcing their commitment to Singapore as their country.<sup>48</sup> The statement offered assurances to the government and others that the community leaders were committed and united in the battle against extremism amidst them. It also sent strong signals to members of the Muslim community that extremism that promotes violence and poses as a security threat to the country would not be tolerated. Commendably, this act was done long before the Muslims in the United Kingdom, the United States and Australia could rally together after the London attack.<sup>49</sup>

### Reaching out to the public

Friday sermons were capitalised to promote moderation and to combat extremism among the Muslim community in Singapore by the Islamic Religious Council (MUIS).<sup>50</sup> Every now and then, MUIS will issue Friday

48. Arlina Arshad and Laurel Teo, "S'pore Muslims Unite to Condemn", *The Straits Times*, 10 October 2002; Fatonah, "Learning To Get Along – Muslim Leaders Pledge Commitment To Enlarge Common Space In S'pore", *The Straits Times*, 10 October 2002; Zubaidah Nazeer, "The Love of the Homeland is Part of the Faith", *Streets*, 10 October 2002.

49. "Joint statement", *The Muslim Council of Britain website*, 15 July 2005, available at [http://www.mcb.org.uk/features/features.php?ann\\_id=1061](http://www.mcb.org.uk/features/features.php?ann_id=1061) (20 October 2010); "U.S. Muslim Religious Council Issues Fatawa Against Terrorism", *Cair*, 28 July 2005, available <http://www.cair.com/AmericanMuslims/AntiTerrorism/FatwaAgainstTerrorism.aspx> (20 October 2010); "Aussie Muslims Vow Anti-Terror Action", *IslamOnline*, 23 Aug 2005, available at <http://islamonline.net/English/News/2005-08/23/article02.shtml> (20 October 2010).

50. The Islamic Religious Council is a government statutory body. It was established by a parliamentary act known as The Administration of Muslim Law Act. Although the Council is a government agency, the writers choose to categorise its contribution in counter-ideology as community initiatives because, from the writers' viewpoint, the operation of the Council is very much rooted to the community. Furthermore, the bulk of the Council's annual budget comes from the money contributed by the community, not from the government. For more information about the council, visit <http://www.muis.gov.sg> (20 October 2010).

sermons to remind Muslim congregations of the dangers of extremism and highlight the deviant tendency of the extremist ideology.

There were also several initiatives by representatives within the local Muslim community to reach out to the broader public in response to and in support of the efforts to promote counter-ideology, both in the form of publications and forum platforms. In early 2003, a book entitled *Muslim ... Moderate ... Singaporean* was jointly published by two Muslim bodies. In essence, the book proposed six principles of moderation as guidelines for Singapore Muslims in making their ideological stand on various issues; upholding peaceful means, upholding the principles of democracy, upholding the principles of rule of law, being contextual in thinking and practices, respecting the opinions and rights of others and upholding Islamic teachings.<sup>51</sup> In September 2003, Pergas, the only registered association of Muslim scholars in Singapore, took personal and direct initiatives in counter-ideological efforts against Al Qaeda and JI ideology by organising the “Convention of *Ulama* (Muslim scholars)”. The objective of the convention was to rally Muslim scholars in defining and combating extremism. Pergas presented three position papers for consultation and adoption by the 130 participants who were mainly Muslim scholars and members of Pergas during the convention.<sup>52</sup> The papers were amended based on the feedbacks and inputs from the convention and, later on, published as a book in English and Malay concurrently entitled *Moderation in Islam in the Context of Muslim Community in Singapore*. The book is particularly relevant in counter-ideological efforts in two respects. It highlighted key ideas in the extremist ideology and common misinterpretations of Islam, and offered rebuttals to them using the theological approach adopted by Al Qaeda and JI, i.e. using the Quran, the *hadiths* and the opinions of the Muslim scholars. Secondly, it offered a Charter of Moderation for the Muslim community in Singapore, which contained 27 points as a common basis. The Charter has been useful in guiding the community to practise Islam in the context of Singapore, particularly for Muslim scholars and religious teachers in

51. Muhammad Haniff Hassan, *Muslim ... Moderate ... Singaporean*, Al-Khair Mosque and Perdaus, Singapore, 2003, p. 6.

52. See Pergas, *Moderation in Islam in the Context of Muslim Community in Singapore*, Pergas, Singapore, 2004.

guiding the community towards moderation.<sup>53</sup>

As a follow up to the convention and to disseminate the ideas in the book, Pergas organised various public talks and forums at mosques and closed-door discussions with its members. The book was made available to the public. Sessions were also held for Singaporean undergraduates studying at overseas Islamic institutions when they returned to Singapore during their term breaks. A special session was also held in Cairo for Singaporeans studying in Al-Azhar University.<sup>54</sup> The book was also used as a reference by the RRG as well as the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research in its counter-ideological research programme.

In 2006, another book entitled *Unlicensed to Kill: Countering Imam Samudra's Justification for the Bali Bombing* was published to counter misinterpretations of jihad.<sup>55</sup> The book, which was subsequently available in Malay and also Bahasa Indonesia, offers a point by point rebuttal to Imam Samudra's book *Aku Melawan Teroris (I'm fighting terrorist)* who was the head of the first Bali bombing operation.

MUIS seeks to lead the Singapore Muslim community a step further beyond promoting moderation and tolerance. It seeks to develop a progressive and modern Muslim identity rooted in Singapore and well-integrated with fellow Singaporeans. After much consultation, MUIS constructed for Singaporean Muslims 10 "Desired Attributes" documented in a book entitled *Risalah (Document) for Building a Singapore Muslim Community of Excellence* published in 2006. Today, the 10 attributes become the answer for "What does it mean to be a Muslim Singaporean?"<sup>56</sup> Another publication initiative was the publication of a book *Fighting Terrorism: The Singapore Perspective* by *Taman Bacaan*, a local Muslim organisation.<sup>57</sup> This book is a compilation of articles edited by Abdul Halim Kader, the President of *Taman Bacaan*. The organisa-

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53. Ibid, pp. 185–324.

54. Interview with Haja Mohaideen Kamal Batcha, Assistant Executive Director of Pergas, 1 October 2010.

55. Muhammad Haniff Hassan, *Unlicensed to Kill: Countering Imam Samudra's Justification for the Bali Bombing*, Peace Matters, Singapore, 2006.

56. See The Office of Mufti, *Risalah for Building a Singapore Muslim Community of Excellence*, Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura, Singapore, 2006.

57. See Abdul Halim bin Kader (Ed.), *Fighting Terrorism: The Singapore Perspective*, Taman Bacaan, Singapore, 2007.



tion also took the initiative in collaborating with the RRG to organise seminars for youths and students. In an effort to broaden the readership and outreach of the book, the Mandarin translation of the book was subsequently published. Also, two conventions were held for students of government schools (20 January 2007) and students of local Islamic schools (14 July 2007).

To simplify the message for the general public, a pamphlet entitled *Questions and Answers on Jihad* was published in English, Malay and Tamil in 2006. The pamphlet contains 22 questions and answers on jihad and terrorism.<sup>58</sup> This was made easily available for public circulation at relevant institutions. In 2008, another booklet entitled *Don't Be Extreme* was published. The booklet focuses on explaining some of the preventive steps that need to be taken in order to protect an individual from being influenced by the ideas of extremist and terrorist groups. It is also targeted at those who are in search of Islamic religious knowledge. It is also a useful resource for parents who wish to monitor the religious activities of their children. Like the first booklet, the second one was also published in three languages.<sup>59</sup>

In early 2010, MediaCorp Singapore in collaboration with the Media Authority of Singapore and *Taman Bacaan*, produced a four-part documentary entitled "Misguided". The documentary was aired on Channel News Asia starting from 22 January 2010, for four weeks. Subsequently between 23 June and 14 July 2010, Singapore's dedicated Malay channel, *Suria*, broadcast the same series in the Malay language entitled "*Sesat Dalam Nyata*".<sup>60</sup> The documentary gave details on how to identify radical ideology, how it spreads and also elaborated on the various concepts that are commonly misunderstood and leads one to become misguided and hence radicalised.

58. See Muhammad Haniff Hassan and Mohamed bin Ali, *Questions & Answers on Jihad*, The Islamic Religious Council of Singapore and Perdaus, Singapore, 2007, available at [http://counterideology.multiply.com/video/item/11/Q\\_A\\_on\\_Jihad\\_English\\_version](http://counterideology.multiply.com/video/item/11/Q_A_on_Jihad_English_version) (20 October 2010).

59. See Muhammad Haniff Hassan and Mohamed bin Ali, *Don't be extreme in your religion*, The Islamic Religious Council of Singapore and Perdaus, Singapore, 2008.

60. For more information on the documentary, see [http://hanifyah.multiply.com/journal/item/488/Satu\\_lagi\\_inisitif\\_Masyarakat\\_Islam\\_Singapura\\_menangani\\_masalah\\_pelampauan](http://hanifyah.multiply.com/journal/item/488/Satu_lagi_inisitif_Masyarakat_Islam_Singapura_menangani_masalah_pelampauan) (20 October 2010).

Other than the above, many other Muslim institutions such as mosques and civil society groups also played their parts. They initiated cultural and inter-faith exchanges between Muslim and non-Muslim communities and organised visits to places of worship to promote better understanding among them. In response to the fact that extremist ideology seeks to promote exclusivist tendency and intolerance between Muslim and non-Muslim Singaporeans and has misrepresented Islam among non-Muslims, is the establishment of “The Harmony Centre” housed at a newly built An-Nahdhah mosque by MUIS. It was officially launched on 7 October 2006 with two broad aims: (i) to promote understanding about major religions in Singapore among Muslims so they can better relate with their fellow Singaporeans, (ii) to promote better understanding about Muslims and Islam among non-Muslim Singaporeans so they would not have any prejudice towards Singaporean Muslims. The Centre is designed like a mini museum for Islamic civilisation. It provides exhibits, audio-visuals and artefacts divided into four sections; images of Islam, civilisational Islam, essence of Islam and Islamic lifestyle.

To counter extremist ideology in the Internet, various initiatives were taken by individuals and organisations. Some of these initiatives are:

- A dedicated counter-ideological blog was set up in October 2006 which is currently located at <http://counterideology.multiply.com>.
- A website for the RRG was launched. It is located at <http://www.rrg.sg>. The website quickly gained popularity. 13,000 visitors were recorded within one month of its launch.
- The Islamic Religious Council of Singapore set up two websites: (i) a religious query platform located at <http://www.iask.com.sg> for Muslim youths with the objective of preventing them from seeking religious guidance from wrong websites which was later incorporated into [invoke.sg](http://www.invoke.sg)<sup>61</sup>, a sharing portal to reach out to young Muslims; and (ii) a dedicated website to counter extremist ideology and promote moderation at [http://radical.mosque.sg/cms/Radical\\_Ideology/index.aspx](http://radical.mosque.sg/cms/Radical_Ideology/index.aspx).

Hence, it is clear that a large component of the broader counter-terrorism efforts in Singapore simultaneously involves counter-ideology.

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61. See (19 August 2010).

While the hard security aspect falls under the purview of the government in the form of surveillance, arrests and detentions, security exercises as well as transnational and regional agreements and cooperation, much of counter-ideological work is shared with relevant non-governmental institutions and representatives from the local Muslim community.

### **Regulatory measure: The Asatizah (Religious Teachers) Recognition Scheme**

The Asatizah Recognition Scheme was another important initiative taken by Pergas. It was a self-regulatory system to monitor religious education that lay down the pre-requisites for the certification and registration of religious teachers who provided the public with guidance and lessons on Islam. Although the idea was mooted several years earlier, the JI arrests, and subsequently, the inclusion in the White Paper that such a measure was necessary in countering terrorism, placed urgency on its implementation. While this self-regulatory system cannot be enforced by law, a person can be struck off from the database of recommended religious teachers if he was found guilty of misconduct as stipulated in the system.<sup>62</sup> The cases of self-radicalisation uncovered in the middle of 2010, however, has generated discussion and interest from the RRG, Pergas and political leaders on the possibility of giving the system its legal and enforcement power.

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62. See Asatizah Recognition Scheme, available at (20 October 2010); Ministry of Home Affairs, *White Paper: The Jemaah Islamiyah Arrests and the Threat of Terrorism*, pp. 22–23.

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## OBSERVATIONS, LESSONS LEARNT FROM THE SINGAPORE EXPERIENCE AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS\*

Having elaborated on Singapore's approaches in making counter-ideology an essential and significant component in broader counter-terrorism measures, it is apt to highlight some aspects that may assist in building or improving on counter-ideological capacities in other parts of the world.

Overall, the Singapore model for countering terrorism and radical ideology has constantly evolved and adapted itself to various developments, constantly making self-assessments and maintaining strong inter-agency ties, especially between government bodies, grassroots level institutions and at the community level as well. However, this is not to say that the system is foolproof. A 10-year period is still not long enough to assess whether terrorist rehabilitation/counter-ideological work has truly been effective in reversing the ideologies of ex-terrorists. Furthermore, there is also a constant need to battle with external elements, which, in a highly globalised city-state like Singapore, is a difficult task. Nevertheless, the number of cases of extremism and terrorist activities has been relatively low and the authority has been able to detect such cases, with the help of the community and the various systems in place. Ultimately, there is still the need to remain vigilant and not to become too complacent.

The efforts made by the government and the local community have made counter-terrorism and counter-ideology in Singapore a suit-

\* This part was partially extracted and updated from Muhammad Haniff Hassan & Kenneth George Pereire, "An Ideological Response to Combating Terrorism: The Singapore Perspective", *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Vol. 17 No. 4, December 2006, pp. 458–477.

able case study by other countries. In this section, we will elaborate on the potential areas of improvement and key areas for consideration by practitioners who are seeking to build up counter-terrorism and counter-ideological capacities and are looking to the Singapore model as a point of reference.

## THE SUFI-SALAFI POLARISATION

Not unlike elsewhere, the Muslim community in Singapore is made up of several religious orientations. This diversity which exists within the Muslim community itself can and has at times led to tension and polemic arising out of differences in opinions on particular matters. Two main orientations that are relevant to be mentioned here are that of the Sufism<sup>1</sup> and Salafism<sup>2</sup>. The Sufi orientation had its presence in Southeast Asia since the arrival of Islam to this region. Sufi scholars and preachers played important roles in spreading Islam to the Malay Archipelago.

The actual emergence of the Salafi orientation in Singapore cannot be easily determined. However, its presence had become more prominent after the spread of the Indonesian Muhammadiyah influence among the locals in the 1960s and was accelerated further when hundreds of local Muslims received scholarships to study Islam at diploma and degree levels from Saudi Arabia since the middle of 1970s till to date and returned to serve as religious teachers. Hence, in part due to the return of these graduates, Salafism in Singapore is bent towards Wahhabism (a variation within Salafism founded by Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab which is also the official and dominant religious orientation in Saudi Arabia). With the increasing numbers of graduates who were educated in Salafism in Singapore and their respected status among the local Muslim community, a parallel increase in the influence and voices of such individuals can be observed. Subsequently, they are also able to shape the understanding of Islam among the Muslim community

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1. Sufism is an orientation that enjoins the focus on purification of self from lowly desires through spiritual exercise (prayers, *zikr*, fasting, etc) and ascetic life in order to attain an ideal Muslim as exemplified by the Prophet.
  2. Salafism can be broadly defined as a movement that seeks to purify Muslim community from the perceived excesses and heretical practices not found in the Quran and *hadiths* and the tradition of early pious Muslim generations (the Salaf).

and voice their criticisms towards other orientations of Islam with the intention of purifying religious practices from unacceptable innovations, interpretations and adaptations that are deemed to have deviated from the original teachings of the Quran and exemplary practices of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions. Among the regular targets of Salafi's criticism are the Sufis.<sup>3</sup>

While such circumstances have existed long before the September 11 attacks and the exposure of JI activities in Singapore, this polarisation between the Salafi and Sufi orientations of Islam among the Muslim community in Singapore, as in numerous other issues and cases pertaining to religious interpretations, can also affect the tackling of radical religious ideology as each side may prescribe contrasting approaches and solutions. This polarisation can be argued to have had posed a challenge at the initial stage of counter-ideological work against the JI in Singapore.

In the initial period of the RRG coming to the public through forums and talks, it was not well received by some segment of the community, especially among the Salafis. The initiative was perceived as an effort to promote Sufism not only to counter the extremist ideology of JI but more so as an alternative to Salafism which is not regarded as part of the Sunni's four major *mazhabs* (schools of Islamic jurisprudence). This was primarily due to the fact that individuals put at the forefront of these initiatives were well known leaders and practitioners of *Sufi* orders in Singapore who inadvertently shaped the content and the ideas. The perception was aggravated when one of the regular panellists who is a Sufi practitioner made statements that could be construed as anti-Salafi—equating it with extremism—in the forum and media.<sup>4</sup> The reaction could be felt in the few letters that were sent and published by the newspaper defending Salafism.<sup>5</sup> This was an unfortunate development as it did not only water

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3. Salafism is strongly against many of the common and popular *Sufi* practices such as intercession with dead saints, saint adoration and visiting of tombs which are regarded as *bid'ah* (forbidden innovation / abomination / heresy).
  4. Chairul Fahmy Husaini, "Jihad pakar bom JI terpesong" and "Berjihadlah melalui derma, niaga dan pendidikan", *Berita Harian*, 28 November 2005, p. 4; Chairul Fahmy Husaini, "Awas fahaman mengganas", *Berita Harian*, 3 December 2005, p. 12.
  5. Haji Abdul Rashid Haji Ramli, "Forum Jihad: Usaha dipuji, tetapi isu *mazhab* tidak perlu dikaitkan", *Berita Harian*, 10 December 2005, p. 15; Mohamad Nazri Shaari, "Tolak pendapat universiti Timur Tengah sumbang kepada fahaman

down the good unpublicised work the RRG has done but it was also seen as executing a wrong strategy in counter-ideology.

For a more nuanced understanding of the initial Sufi face of the RRG, a few points must be highlighted. It must be noted that JI ideology has strong roots in Salafism. Before the discovery of the JI plot, its members were attending public classes and had personal contact with local *asatizah* of Salafi orientation. Thus, in the initial stage where the real picture was still obscure, the authority may have to be prudent in ascertaining the true nature of the connections between JI members and the local Salafi *asatizah* first before engaging them for counter-ideological work. This has resulted in the exclusion of key Salafi *asatizah*.

Secondly, the discovery of JI plot caught everybody by surprise and disbelief. Significant segments of the community and *asatizah* were apprehensive about the facts disclosed by the authority, similar to the apprehension they had towards the official version of the 9/11 attacks. Naturally, only a few of *asatizah* were willing to offer their cooperation with the authority. The authority then had limited options but to react based on available resources that were offered to them by the two key founders of the RRG, who are recognised religious figures and community leaders.

It is observed that these two factors shaped the initial Sufi face of the RRG, rather than by design.

Fortunately, the Sufi face of the RRG was quickly rectified. The progress of the investigation allowed the authority to have a better picture and context of JI members' connection with local Salafi *asatizah* and to disclose more information to the community. The latter contributed to the overcoming of the initial distrust and apprehension. This had paved the way for widening the composition of the RRG members to Salafi *asatizah*. After a few public letters and comments by members of the *asatizah* community, the RRG started to field young and non-Sufi *asatizah* in its public forums and expanded its content beyond what is commonly associated with Sufi ideas. This is thus a critical learning point and potential area of improvement for other counter-ideological efforts

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ekstrem”, *Berita Harian*, 28 December 2005, p. 9; Mohamed Farhan Mohamed Samsudin, “Sokong usul cerdik pandai Islam tampil perjuang Al-Quran, Sunnah”, *Berita Harian*, 21 December 2005; Hajah Fatimah Hussein, “Sanjungti teguran demi kemuliaan Islam”, *Berita Harian*, 17 December 2005.

around the world.

While the ideas of JI and Al Qaeda are essentially Salafi, to frame the counter-ideology as essentially counter Salafi and to prescribe Sufism as the counter-force to it are both inaccurate and imprudent. Like many other schools of thought, Salafi is not homogenous. It consists of various sub-cultures and orientation, from moderate to extreme.<sup>6</sup> A good case in point is the Muhammadiyah, the second largest Islamic organisation in Indonesia with millions of followers. It has been recognised and has proven itself as a moderate organisation. However, a study on Muhammadiyah's history will show that it has its origins in Saudi Arabia. Muslim scholars will acknowledge that up till now, the Muhammadiyah practises Salafism in matters pertaining to ritual and its interpretation. Yet it remains moderate by adopting civil society approach in affecting changes or reforms. Instead of condemning the authority, Muhammadiyah constructively offers alternative solutions by establishing schools, hospitals and social programmes for the society.<sup>7</sup>

The International Crisis Group (ICG) in its report on Salafism and terrorism also pointed out that the notion Salafism promotes violence is misleading.<sup>8</sup> The report concluded:

The *salafi* movement in Indonesia is not the security threat that it is sometimes portrayed as. It may come across to outsiders as intolerant and reactionary, but for the most part, it is not prone to terrorism, in part because it is inwardly focused on faith ... In some ways, the purist *salafis* are a more potent barrier against *jihadis* like JI than the pluralist Muslims who often become the recipients of Western donor aid.<sup>9</sup>

In addition, a study of extremist ideological materials have shown that the ideological contestation of fellow Salafis pose greater concern to and are taken more seriously by the extremist themselves. Al-Zawahiri

6. See "Indonesia Backgrounder: Why Salafism and Terrorism Mostly Don't Mix?," *International Crisis Group*, Asia Report No. 83, 13 September 2004, p. I.

7. See Abdul Mu'ti, "Boosting Moderate Islam," *The Jakarta Post*, 23 October 2003; see "Muhammadiyah", available at <http://philtar.ucsm.ac.uk/encyclopedia/indon/muham.html> (20 October 2010; Ahmad Syafii Maarif, Chairman of Islamic Movement Muhammadiyah, Indonesia, wrote on the organisation, available at [http://www.santegidio.org/uer/2003/int\\_508\\_EN.htm](http://www.santegidio.org/uer/2003/int_508_EN.htm) (20 October 2010).

8. "Indonesia Backgrounder: Why Salafism and Terrorism Mostly Don't Mix?," *International Crisis Group*, p. I.

9. *Ibid*, p. 29.



has had to dedicate extensive efforts in responding to Al-Sharif's revisionist views and harsh criticisms of him and Al Qaeda by publishing a book of more than 200 pages.<sup>10</sup> His letter to Al-Zarqawi indicates his sensitivity of the Muslim's public criticism of attacks made on ordinary Shiites, posting beheading videos and indiscriminate bombings.<sup>11</sup> Brynjar Lia also observes Abu Musab Al-Suri's preoccupation with Salafi's criticism of jihadists,<sup>12</sup> regarding non-jihadist Salafis as the major stumbling block for jihadist objectives. Imam Samudra, the leader of the First Bali Bombing and a member of the Indonesian JI, also criticised those from the Salafi movement in his published and unpublished works.<sup>13</sup>

It is very important in counter-ideological work to avoid generalisations, be it in making assessments, analysis or conclusions. Giovanni Caracci in his article, *Cultural and Contextual Aspects of Terrorism*, wrote that in the study of terrorism "it is easy to over-generalise and engage in reductionism". He then quoted Walter Reich, "Researchers should take special care to identify the individuals and the groups whose behaviour they are studying and limit their explanations to those individuals and groups, define the circumstances under which those explanations are valid, and not to suggest more than they do."<sup>14</sup>

A more appropriate approach is to study accurately different orientations in the Muslim society. One such example is a study made by RAND. It has made a good study of Muslim-thinking orientations and categorised them into the radical fundamentalist, scriptural fundamen-

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10. See Ayman Al-Zawahiri, *Al-Tabriah*, unpublished, available at <http://www.tawhed.ws/a?a=3i806qpo> (4 August 2010). The English translation published by the Nefa Foundation is available at [http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/Zawahiri\\_Exoneration\\_ciaosc.pdf](http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/Zawahiri_Exoneration_ciaosc.pdf) (4 August 2010).
  11. See "English Translation of Ayman al-Zawahiri's letter to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi", *Weekllystandard.com*, 12 October 2005, available at <http://www.weekllystandard.com/Content/Public/Articles/000/000/006/203gpuul.asp> (4 August 2010).
  12. Brynjar Lia, "Destructive Doctrinarians' Abu Mus'ab al-Suri's Critique of the *Salafis* in the Jihadi Current", *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*, edited by Roel Meijer, Columbia University Press, New York, 2009, pp. 281–289 and 294–298.
  13. See Imam Samudra, *Sekuntum Rosela Pelipur Lara*, Ar Rahmah Media, Jakarta, 2009; Imam Samudra, *Satu Jihad Sejuta Vonis: Mengungkap Al Haq, Menghalau Al Batil*, Ar Rahmah Media, Jakarta, 2008.
  14. Giovanni Caracci, "Cultural and Contextual Aspects of Terrorism", *Psychology of Terrorism*, edited by Chris E. Stout, Vol. 3, p. 58.

talist, conservative traditionalist, reformist traditionalist, modernist, mainstream secularist and radical secularist. One may disagree with this categorisation and the proposals made by the study, but such an effort, which departs from a broad-brush approach, is commendable and should be encouraged.<sup>15</sup>

Putting forth Sufism as a counter-force to JI ideology is not a viable strategy because there is a significant number of Muslims who are neither Salafi nor Sufi. Moreover, not all Muslims are attracted to Sufism. Thus, a more diverse and inclusive approach is needed so the message can appeal to a wider Muslim audience. While such a strategy might help in combating extremist ideology, its negative side effect could be a polarisation and division of Muslim society and the revival of the *kaum muda* (young reformist) and *kaum tua* (old traditionalist) debate which has significantly subsided for decades before the 9/11 attacks.

It is also important for the RRG as a community-based initiative to have an inclusive image through the individuals who appear in public so it can also attract volunteers who are not Sufi inclined to join in the effort. More Muslims' involvement in the counter-ideological work could help produce greater impact and more Muslims can be reached, resulting in fewer subjects for the extremist to appeal to. Terrorism is a common enemy to all Muslims who are generally moderate. It should bring them together and the RRG could be a good platform to bringing together Muslims from all orientations against their common enemy. In that respect, the RRG should be guarded from being perceived as partisan to certain segments of the Muslim community only, despite the Sufi sheikhs taking the lead.

An inclusive counter-ideological work which includes Muslim partners of different backgrounds is essential. They include scholars of different orientations i.e. modernist, traditionalist, Sufis and non-violent radicals, Islamist and Salafis; community leaders who could reach out to various segments of the community and disseminate the message; institutions of higher learning and Muslim research institutions for research work and rethinking of traditional jihad ideas. Instead of looking at the moderate-extremist dichotomy, a better consideration is between those

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15. Cheryl Benard, *Civil Democratic Islam: Partners, Resources and Strategies*, RAND Publication, Santa Monica, 2003, pp. 8–13.

who are pro-violence and terrorism and those who are against them, even if the latter involves some radical individuals. The key is to capitalise them for the audience that suits them best.

## **RIGHT OBJECTIVES AND RIGHT TARGETS**

Singapore's counter-ideological efforts have been instructive in identifying the objectives of counter-ideological work, target groups, the importance of collaboration between Muslim scholars and the security agency, and the approaches and pitfalls involved. From these experiences, it can be summarised that some of the important objectives of counter-ideology is (i) to immunise Muslims in general from extremist ideology; (ii) persuade less fanatic members of terrorist groups to abandon the ideology; (iii) rehabilitate detained terrorist members and (iv) to minimise non-Muslims' anxieties and suspicions by presenting alternatives to terrorist ideology.

In terms of targets, three categories could be identified. The first category is the JI members and their immediate circle i.e. family members and committed sympathisers. The second category is the Muslim majority. In fact, it is important for policymakers to note that the primary target group of the ideological response is this category and not the extremists themselves. By providing the majority with a correct understanding of Islam, they will be equipped with the knowledge set that will protect them from being easily influenced by the terrorists' propaganda. Furthermore, it is less difficult to convince the majority of Muslims than to persuade any hardcore members of terrorist groups to give up their ideologies. Terrorist groups can only persist through popular support and depriving them of this will play a fundamental role in the group's decline.

Another important target audience, which is usually overlooked in counter-ideological work, is the non-Muslims. They should be provided with alternative perspectives aside from those coming from more conservative sections of the Muslim community or even from the terrorist organisations themselves. This would contribute to reducing their anxieties, concerns and misunderstandings of Islam and Muslims. In a multi-racial and multi-religious country like Singapore, this is an important aspect of social harmony which counter-terrorism strategy needs to address.

## AVOIDING GENERALISATIONS

Aside from engaging the expertise of Muslim scholars and institutions, there is also the importance of succinct categorisation and the avoidance of generalisations in carrying out counter-ideological work. Policymakers must note that while the broad moderate-radical categorisation is a useful means of essentialising differences of tendencies within Muslims leaders and scholars, one should be aware of the difficulties in distinguishing between “moderate” and “radical” because in reality such neat dichotomy does not exist. Community and political leaders all over the world behave in ways that defy such convenient categorisations. Thus, a more subtle or nuanced approach is needed when characterising Muslim scholars and Islamic groups. A more appropriate approach is to assess a leader or scholar by looking at his views, opinions and works on various issues, rather than judging him solely based on a specific issue.

Despite the hard-line positions taken by some leaders and scholars on several issues, co-opting them into counter-ideological work provides opportunities for engagement which may facilitate understanding of each other’s perspectives and also the views of the moderate scholars. Tolerating differences on political issues is a primary requirement in attaining the common goal of neutralising extremist ideas, which are at the root of terrorism. One can say that by involving Muslim community leaders and scholars, the authorities stand to gain the trust and confidence of the broader Muslim community. Such a relationship will be significant in uprooting extremism from the community, and will encourage others to report to the authority about potential threats. In the long run, it will prevent future generations from falling into the same trap of the Singapore JI members.

In Singapore, the ISD was prudent in avoiding a “broad-brush approach” or generalisations in making assessments and in deciding the best way to deal with each different segment. It differentiated JI members who were involved in the operational unit from those who were involved in missionary work among the detainees and their family members. In many cases, due to the nature of the terrorism threat after 9/11 attacks, many policymakers and security agencies preferred to adopt a “better safe than sorry” approach, which contributed to over-generalisation in assessment. Examples of generalisations are that all Wahabis are extremists, Arabisation is bad, political Islamists are dangerous and that *madrasahs*

are haven or factories for terrorists.

Counter-terrorism work should not fall into the same mental mode of extremists, which is often characterised by simplistic generalisation and reductionism that saw the world divided into two camps; the “good” versus the “evil”, or “if you are not with us, you are against us”. To be successful, counter-ideology should be specific in its response and not make sweeping statements or generalisations. Subsequently, stereotyped perceptions may contribute to the building of psychological barriers between counter-ideological efforts and the potential partners like Muslim scholars, moderate Muslim leaders and *madrasahs*. This will cause difficulty in any collaborative effort. Sweeping statements may also damage relations with the potential partners, or even the majority of the Muslim community.

Generalisations may hamper counter-ideological work as the threat becomes too broadly defined. Counter-ideological workers will have to face a wider “battlefront”, larger target audience or possibly create too many unnecessary “battlefronts” for themselves. The most counterproductive outcome in such a case is that counter-ideological workers will end up creating more enemies for themselves by unnecessarily antagonising others. Instead, counter-terrorism and counter-ideological works need to take into consideration different cultural and contextual realities. A policy that worked for one group or one area may not be successful for other groups or areas. Even within the same group, cultural and contextual differences will need to be addressed. Political, historic and socio-economic considerations are all part of the contextual consideration in formulating policies at the national and international levels. It is thus in the interest of counter-ideology that efforts take into account the heterogeneity of Muslims and Muslim organisations around the world. They should be considered as partners and assets, and not as a malignant community that has to be distrusted.<sup>16</sup>

## THE NEED FOR INTELLECTUAL RIGOUR

The need for sustained intellectual rigour in carrying out counter-ideological programmes is an essential aspect that needs to be ascertained

16. Muhammad Haniff Hassan, *Key Considerations in Counter-Ideological Work against Terrorist Ideology*, p. 25, 36–37.

in producing an effective counter-ideological programme. In order to extend the messages of counter-ideology to the broadest possible audience, it is acceptable that arguments put forth to counter radical ideology are framed in a simplistic manner. For example, in communicating the misappropriation by the JI of the use of the term “*jihad*” to the general public, it is acceptable to simplistically explain that the JI’s definition of *jihad* is wrong because *jihad* in Islam means something beyond mere waging of war or armed struggle and that the religion in fact accords higher priority towards internal struggle to increase self-piety in most circumstances. Such an explanation essentially captures the gist of the message and allows it to be easily understood across the board. However, in counter-ideological work, particularly that which focuses on those deeply affected by radical ideology, it would require greater intellectual depth and hence calls for more intensive intellectual rigour, going beyond simplified explanations.

Thorough study of the extremist ideas is required to make an accurate description of them. Their arguments must be examined rigorously and put forth together with its counter-arguments so that the target audience, both Muslims and non-Muslims, can make an informed judgement as to why the extremist ideas are wrong, invalid or unrealistic and the counter-arguments are truly founded on the scriptures and rational, not mere allegation, dismissive argument or rhetoric.<sup>17</sup> For example, it is not accurate to deduce that JI members had fallen into extremist ideology because, unlike most ordinary Singaporeans who are followers of Shafi’ii *mazhab* (school of jurisprudence), they do not follow any *mazhab*. This subsequently implies that their extremist orientation is a direct consequence of their Salafi tendency that seeks to deduce all their religious understanding and practices directly from the Quran and *hadiths* without affiliation to any single *mazhab*. This inaccurate proposition that was suggested had been rightly refuted by a member of the public through a letter to *Berita Harian* (a local Malay language newspaper), who argued that adherence to a particular *mazhab* may not deter a person from the misapplication of jihad in today’s context. This is because if the person reads *Al-Umm*, Shafi’ii’s book, which lists out all verses on jihad in the Quran without explanation, he may not be able to understand them cor-

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17. Ibid, pp. 14–15.

rectly and thus may misapply them in today's context. The letter's writer then highlighted that a popular book studied by the Malay Muslims based on Shafi'i *mazhab* entitled *Matla'ul Bahrain*, may cause misunderstandings and misapplications of jihad nonetheless because the book rules that waging jihad against infidels is obligatory. This ruling in fact refers to a specific context, which, without in-depth knowledge, adequately informed interpretation and contextualisation, can be wrongly applied. Thus, this case highlights that the key to preventing extremism is not by adhering to a particular *mazhab* only but more importantly by contextualising jihad understanding to the Singapore context. Accordingly, blind following of a *mazhab* or a book in a particular *mazhab*, without recognising the different context between the period of which the book was written and Singapore today, can be a similar problem of JI.<sup>18</sup> Such a deduction would not have been possible without the intellectual rigour duly called for.

The need for intellectual rigour in counter-ideological work is also due to the fact that a study on JI's and Al Qaeda's followers or sympathisers shows that a significant number of them are highly educated. They are not simple-minded or ignorant folks who are oblivious to world events or their religion, albeit their lack of formal Islamic education in most cases.<sup>19</sup> JI and its ideology are not founded on an irrational or mystical thinking characteristic of certain sects in society that can simply be dismissed or will go away with a simple one-page *fatwa*.

Furthermore, a critical understanding of JI's deviant ideology based on sound intellectual counter-argument with some inductive approach would have greater impact for counter-ideological work because it empowers people with knowledge and provides a non-paternalistic dimension for counter-ideological work. They, thus, would not need to be continuously spoon-fed to identify extremist groups that could emerge in a different form or name in the future. Without intellectual rigour, discussions would lead to the loss of credibility of the discussants. This would paradoxically strengthen the rhetoric of the extremists.

However, this does not suggest that the current counter-ideological

18. Haji Abdul Rashid Haji Ramli, "Forum Jihad: Usaha dipuji, tetapi isu *mazhab* tidak perlu dikaitkan", *Berita Harian*, 10 December 2005.

19. Ministry of Home Affairs, *White Paper: The Jemaah Islamiyah Arrests and the Threat of Terrorism*, pp. 15, 43–50.

work in Singapore is totally void of intellectual rigour. In September 2003, the Singapore Association of Muslim Scholars and Teachers (Pergas) whose President is one of two principal consultants in the RRG, organised the Convention of Ulama 2003, which contributed to the publication of *Moderation in Islam in the Context of Muslim Community in Singapore*. The book highlights key extremist ideology and misinterpretations of Islam and offers rebuttal to it using the same approach adopted by Al Qaeda and JI, using the Quran, the *hadiths* and the opinions of the Muslim scholars; and offers a Charter of Moderation to the Muslim community in Singapore.<sup>20</sup> Khadijah Mosque, a key institution affiliated to the RRG, has published its quarterly *Inabah* magazines on peace, terrorism and national security, Islam and pluralism, Islam and nationalism, jihad and other related materials.<sup>21</sup> A few short articles in local newspapers, the Straits Times and *Berita Harian*, have also been published by individuals with demonstration of substantial intellectual consideration.

Nevertheless, there is more to be done for the benefit of the counter-ideological programmes and initiatives worldwide because there are still many issues that require thorough examinations and explanations such as justification of suicide bombing, incompatibility of the concept of civilian and non-combatant in contemporary international law of conflict with traditional *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) of jihad, the inevitable clash of civilisations and the Jews-Christians' conspiracy against Islam which are pervasive in JI and Al Qaeda's thinking.

## LEVERAGING THE TRADITIONAL “THEOLOGICAL AND JURISTIC” APPROACH AND THE “THIRD WAY”

It is also imperative to complement suitable intellectual rigour and prudence against generalisations with the selection of a suitable angle to approach radical ideology. As groups such as Al Qaeda and JI do not believe in Western philosophy and ideals, it must be recognised that the “conventional lens” originating from the West would not be able to

20. See Pergas, *Moderation in Islam in the Context of Muslim Community in Singapore*, Pergas, Singapore, 2004.

21. See *Inabah*, Vol. 11, December 2001; Vol. 13, May 2002; Vol. 15, March 2003; Vol. 17, December 2003; Vol. 18, March 2004; Vol. 19, August 2004; Vol. 20, March 2005; Vol. 21, September 2005; Vol. 22, January 2006.



prescribe the best refutation to their theological and juristic arguments. Any meaningful approach must take into account the nature of their ideas, couched in juristic and jurisprudential pronouncements. In other words, not only is it important to understand the actual jihad ideas of the violent extremists but also the approach i.e. the epistemology from which the ideas were constructed. Understanding epistemology is equally important to understanding the intricacies of its ideas for effective counter-arguments. It is thus proposed here that counter-ideological work adopts the theological and juristic approach in the ideological war against terrorism.<sup>22</sup> These theological and juristic approaches use the classical Muslim scholars' methodology of *ijtihad* or deduction from the Quran and the *hadiths* (Prophet's tradition). This approach has been elucidated upon in Pergas' book.<sup>23</sup> Such approaches to theological and juristic interpretations of religious questions are respected by all Muslims, as the opinions of Muslim scholars still carry more weight than that of other scholars.

To complement the "theological and juristic" approach, it is also necessary to consider "a third way" which is "neither separatist extremism nor imposed Westernism". The aim is not to approach the counter-ideological campaign as a war to convert Muslims to "our" [American/Western] way of life but to prevent mainstream Muslims "from being hijacked by a splinter group [Al Qaeda] whose views are now rejected". Al Qaeda is currently viewed as being so far removed from the mainstream Muslims. But it is now realised that there are many opportunities for "enabling the legitimate religious yearnings of everyday Muslims to see political expression without creating a dualistic struggle with Western ideals". Such alternatives should be identified and promoted especially those that can change the repressive and corrupted political regimes seen by many Muslims as inconsistent with their ideals.<sup>24</sup>

Both the "theological and juristic approach" and the "third way" can

22. Muhammad Haniff Hassan, *Key Considerations in Counter-Ideological Work against Terrorist Ideology*, p. 14.

23. *Ibid*, pp. 15–16.

24. Stephen Biddle, "War Aims and War Termination", *Defeating Terrorism: Strategic Issue Analyses*, p. 11; See also Sami G. Hajjar, "Avoiding Holy War: Ensuring that the War on Terrorism is not perceived as a war on Islam", *Defeating Terrorism: Strategic Issue Analyses*, pp. 17–19.

be combined together in that the “theological and juristic approach” is used as a key mechanism in offering alternatives that the Muslim community considers neither extremism nor Westernism. The proposed “theological and juristic approach” as the primary approach for the “third way” will not be effective without the involvement of the Muslim scholars. Scholars who are not trained in this field still have a role to play in counter-ideological work, but they may not have the know-how and religious legitimacy to respond to the theological and juristic arguments of the extremists.<sup>25</sup>

### INTERACTIVE, NOT PASSIVE, ENGAGEMENT

Reaching out to the public is an important aspect of counter-ideological work because one of the primary target groups of the work is not the terrorists but the majority of Muslims. The aim is to provide them with a correct understanding of the religion so that they will not be easily influenced by the terrorists’ propaganda. The majority of Muslims should be “immunised” against the viral threat of extremist ideologies that are freely disseminated through the Internet. This can be achieved through dialogue and active engagement between members of the counter-ideological group and the public. Opportunities for members of the public to raise questions should be provided during public forums and talks. This not only will make the sessions interesting and engaging but they will not be perceived as propagandistic or brainwashing. In this respect, interactive platforms like Internet forums, chats, mail groups and blogs become more critical and important for a more engaging counter-ideological work.

The print and digital media, which include the Internet, are two platforms that ought to be capitalised by counter-ideological bodies in order to maximise outreach to the general public. The media facilitates the dissemination of ideas as well as helps in the preservation of information for posterity as a form of archiving. In terms of print media, counter-ideological agencies should take the lead of the many great Muslim scholars who have produced a great treasury of documented works for the reference of others. Undoubtedly, present counter-ideological

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25. Muhammad Haniff Hassan, *Key Considerations in Counter-Ideological Work against Terrorist Ideology*, p. 17.

work has benefitted greatly from the deeds of these scholars and hence the relevant agencies must also strive to emulate them. An important dimension to consider in terms of print media is the news industry. Its frequent publications and wide distribution allows speedy and regular dissemination of ideas to the community, thus bringing much benefit to the relevant counter-ideological agencies should they choose to leverage on it. Counter-ideological agencies should actively seek out opportunities to share their experiences or works, where relevant and appropriate, to the general public via the platform of print media. The community will be much enlightened by the insights from the counter-ideological agencies, particularly those who have the privilege of engaging with the detainees directly. This would contribute to raising the awareness and appreciation of the importance and benefits of counter-ideological work and subsequently rally more support for the cause.

As mentioned earlier, extremist elements are highly active in exploiting the Internet in order to disseminate and communicate their ideology. Unfortunately, counter-ideological agencies are presently still lagging many steps behind in matching the enthusiasm of the extremists in fully benefitting from the advantages of a cyber platform and its vast audience. Counter-ideological groups should thus draft feasible and concrete plans to extend their fight and venture into the virtual world. For example, a dedicated website can be set up on a national or regional basis, to consolidate all written materials that have been produced by the different organisations engaged in counter-ideological work. Forums, talks and even sermons should be recorded in digital format so that they can be shared online, after being uploaded to the relevant websites and domains for listening, viewing or even downloading. Also, acknowledging the importance of targeting key sections of society, particularly the youths, another tool that can be launched to reach out to them would be via the production of digital products, such as videos, screensavers or simple games that would entice them to counter-ideological materials. This would inadvertently reinforce the message of counter-ideology as the mode of reaching out to them has to be carefully thought over and formulated to suit their taste.

Finally, in order to maximise the benefits that both print and digital media have to offer, counter-ideological agencies must also seek to establish strong and good relations with the relevant parties

working in the media industry. One of the authors of this monograph has had the opportunity to interview seven journalists in Singapore<sup>26</sup> to gain their insights on this matter and they highlighted several areas that need more focus. Firstly, all interviewees agreed that there is a big room for improvement in terms of mutual confidence, trust, approachability and information sharing, the lack of which can present a major impediment in communicating the objectives and successes (or failures) of counter-ideological work. There also needs to be a consensus built on the appropriate representatives selected from the Muslim community to speak on the matter in order to avoid any unnecessary contradictions and confusion. Counter-ideological groups also need to be more proactive in engaging the media, not on one-off occasions but in a continuous manner, to inject a sense of consistency in the information disseminated to the public. Furthermore, sharing information with the public should not just be limited to the sharing of success stories but also on failures, presented in a factual and responsible manner. In this way, members of the public may also offer their contributions to the cause, in the form of advice or ideas and the project of counter-ideology may be understood in a more complete way. Ultimately, the building of sustained good relations between the counter-ideological bodies and the media enables both sides to understand the strengths and weaknesses of the other and result in a more effective outreach to the community in counter-ideological work.<sup>27</sup>

## **GOOD DTATE-MUSLIM COMMUNITY/*ULAMA*/ INSTITUTION PARTNERSHIP**

The construction of a counter-ideological programme that serves the public effectively lies on a good solid foundation that is made of positive and functioning relationships between the various critical agencies in society. With regards to the good state-community partnership as

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26. Interview with Azahar Mohamed, M. Noor, Chairul Fahmy, Syed Zakir Hussain, Zackaria Abdul Rahim, Ahmad Dhafeer and Mazlena Mazlan, all from Singapore Press Holdings and MediaCorp, Singapore, November 2009.

27. Muhammad Haniff Hassan & Nur Azlin Mohamed Yasin, "Counter-Ideology: The Role of Media", RSIS Commentaries, 114/2009, 18 November 2009.

illustrated in this paper, two critical factors contribute to the effect: (i) the role of Muslims within the government and its agencies, (ii) the long history of state-community cooperative relationship.

The close collaboration that had been formed between the ISD and Muslim scholars is indeed a commendable development for policymakers to emulate. This collaboration becomes more significant when viewed in the light of relationship between Pergas and the government on various issues related to Islam and the local Muslim community. Both parties were able to put aside previous differences to overcome a shared problem; religious extremism that misrepresents the religion from Pergas' point of view; the religion and extremism that cause security threat from the ISD's point of view.<sup>28</sup> The importance of Muslim scholars' roles underscores the importance of Islamic educational institutions like *madrasahs* and Islamic universities because they provide the correct foundation for students keen on learning mainstream Islamic traditions and theology, which are important ballasts in combating extremist ideology. They also have the potential to function as the bastion for the preservation of mainstream Islam, which is the moderate and pragmatic strain, observed by Muslims in general.

A healthy relationship between the *madrasahs*, Muslim scholars and the government is also crucial in the ideological struggle against extreme militancy.<sup>29</sup> This is particularly significant in the context of Singapore in which none of the JI detainees were graduates from local *madrasahs*. There were also no reports of religious teachers in local *madrasahs* being involved in JI. Hence *madrasahs*, in this context, should also be made an important partner in this effort, rather than be treated generally as a threat.

Lastly, with respect to essential and useful collaboration across society in the effort to carry out counter-ideological work, it must be constantly kept in mind that since the main responsibility of combating extreme ideology is on the shoulders of the Muslim community, it is important to ensure good and solid relationships and collaborations with the moderate Muslim leaders with constant communication and an effective feedback system. However, governments must not only call on

28. Muhammad Haniff Hassan, *Key Considerations in Counter-Ideological Work against Terrorist Ideology*, pp. 15–17, 18–21.

29. *Ibid.*, pp. 23–24.

moderate Muslims to voice out against extremism, highlighting that the primary responsibility of fighting against extremism falls on the shoulder of the Muslim community, but they must also ensure that such initiatives take off and succeed. At a strategic level, policymakers must have a clear vision of how they can contribute in combating terrorism—counter-ideology. Facilitation can take the form of direct action or the provision of financial support and expertise.

Other than close cooperation with Muslim scholars and leaders who help the Singapore government to implement a nuanced approach in handling JI issue, Singapore has the benefit of the presence of Malay and Muslim officers within the ISD and the Singapore Police Force, which many Western countries do not have. With the increasing number of Muslims in Western countries, this shortcoming needs to be overcome as part of the long-term solution, not only in counter-terrorism but also in law enforcement.

Also, there is the need to channel resources to sustain effective and cooperative relationships across all levels. The trust and confidence between the Muslim community and the government is not a product of post-JI arrests initiatives. Instead, it has been developed since Singapore's independence from the British. The ruling party has always shown political goodwill to Malay/Muslim Singaporeans by allocating seats among its parliamentarian candidates for the community, providing financial grants for Muslim organisations to improve Malay/Muslim educational, social and economic achievement, through the enactment of the Administration of Muslim Law Act which facilitates the establishment of important Muslim institutions like the Islamic Religious Council, the Shariah Court, mosques and *madrassahs*. The community has reciprocated through continuous support for the government despite the presence of a Malay opposition political party. Continuous efforts to develop good relationship with the minorities, particularly in times of crisis and beyond, are an important asset that policymakers must recognise. The sense of discrimination that is not addressed during non-crisis times will affect relationship with the community during a crisis.

## THE ROLE OF FORMER DETAINEES

In Singapore, although some of the detainees and the supervisees have been released from detention and supervisory order, up till now, only two

have been put forward in public to speak against JI ideology—one each for the print<sup>30</sup> and broadcast media through an interview. On 6 October 2007, a local newspaper published special reports featuring an interview with one former JI detainee who was remorseful and regretted his involvement in the group.<sup>31</sup> This was the first time a former detainee was allowed to speak about his experience in the open media. In July 2009, *Suria* channel broadcast two-episode interviews of an ex-JI member.<sup>32</sup> Since all former detainees are restricted by the authority from making public statements like delivering talks, sermons and lectures, it could be assumed that this development indicates a change of policy and the authority is ready to allow former detainees to be part of the counter-ideological work.

However, by and large, their role is limited in helping the RRG and the authority behind the scene. Since all of them are restricted by the authority from making public statements like delivering talks, sermons and lectures, it could be assumed that the key to their involvement publicly in counter-ideological work ultimately lies in the hands of the authority. This is a major setback for counter-ideology as the power to convince the public about the danger of JI ideology is greater if it comes from the former JI members. Their appearance and denouncement would greatly enhance the credibility of the RRG's substantive argument. This has put Singapore a step behind from the Indonesian authority, which has actively used former JI and Darul Islam elements in the fight against terrorism. One such figure is Nasir Abas. He is a Malaysian and a former JI member who led one of its *mantiqi* (territorial command) and had trained JI members in combat skills in Afghanistan and Mindanao. He was arrested by the Indonesian authority and jailed for immigration offences. Upon release, he was not sent back to Malaysia. Instead, he was retained in Indonesia and active in explaining to the public and JI members in jail about the deviant teachings of JI. One of his works is the

30. Puad Ibrahim, "Saya kesal, saya minta maaf terlibat dalam JI", *Berita Harian*, 6 October 2007; Saat Abdul Rahman and Puad Ibrahim, "Pengongsian pengalaman hitam bekas anggota JI S'pura", *Berita Harian*, 6 October 2007; Saat Abdul Rahman, "Pengakuan anggota JI bukti ancaman boleh jadi nyata", *Berita Harian*, 6 October 2007.

31. Saat Abdul Rahman and Puad Ibrahim, "Temuramah dengan bekas anggota JI Singapura", *Berita Harian*, 6 October 2007.

32. "Bicara JI Eksklusif" *Suria Channel*, Episodes 1–2, 16 & 23 July 2009.

publication of his book, which exposes JI and refutes Imam Samudra's book that justifies Bali bombing I.<sup>33</sup>

Here again, a lesson from deradicalisation efforts in Egypt can be learnt. A study made on this matter highlights the impact of former extremists in persuading large segments of extremists to mend their ways. The ideological review made since 1997 by the leadership of the Egyptian Al-Jemaah Al-Islamiyah—the largest militant group before the revision, has influenced not only its members but also larger segments of the Egyptian Tanzim Al-Jihad, Algerian militants and the whole Libyan Islamic Fighting Group to renounce their previous violent ideologies. Views of them put forth in public, then, could be capitalised to immunise moderate Muslims.

The reasons behind the restrictions or non-involvement of former JI members publicly in counter-ideological work by the authority in Singapore are unknown but the sooner this restriction is lifted the better it will be for counter-ideological work. It is, thus, hoped that more former detainees will be allowed to speak publicly in the future.

## PROACTIVE ADDRESSING OF GRIEVANCES

Lastly, at a global scene, counter-ideology must be supported with efforts to address the root causes of global Muslim grievances such as the inequitable foreign policies of major powers in the Middle East, especially vis-à-vis Israel and Palestine, the presence of foreign military forces in Muslim countries and the continued support for undemocratic regimes in Muslim countries. Acts of terrorism cannot be stopped by simply defeating the terrorist forces. Neither can the problem be overcome just by attacking the underlying values of the act, the obsession for revenge and its ideological motivations. Hence, it is necessary to be aware that the problem lies in both the misinterpretation of the sacred text as well as the opportunity and context that provide for the text to be misinterpreted in that manner.<sup>34</sup>

Studies of radicalisation processes have highlighted the significance

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33. Nasir Abas, *Membongkar Jamaah Islamiyah; Pengakuan Mantan Anggota JI*, Grafindo, Jakarta, 2005, pp. 36–37, 47–68, 81–88, 91–92, 148–166, 183–270, 319–320.

34. Muhammad Haniff Hassan, *Key Considerations In Counter-Ideological Work Against Terrorist Ideology*, pp. 40–42.



of the war in Iraq and, to a lesser extent, Afghanistan, in radicalising Muslim youths to join jihad and plot attacks against foreign military powers in both countries. Farhad Khosrokhavar in his book *Inside Jihadism* also derives the same conclusion after analysing the spread of jihadism among Muslims in the West<sup>35</sup> while Marc Sageman, in his book *Leaderless Jihad*, suggests that the removal of the American forces in Iraq, among many others, is “absolutely essential if the United States wants to counter al Qaeda propaganda” and to extinguish “the sense of moral outrage” among Muslims.<sup>36</sup> The same suggestion is also found in the National Intelligence Estimate “Trends in Global Terrorism: Implications for the United States.”<sup>37</sup>

In 2006, the Pew Global Attitudes project surveyed Muslims’ perception to and attitudes towards the image of the United States and its policies, since its first survey in 2002. It reported:

- Since the inception, “our surveys have documented the rise of anti-Americanism around the world, and especially in predominantly [sic.] Muslim countries”. Seven out of eight people surveyed viewed the United States unfavourably.
- “Anti Americanism is largely driven by aversion to U.S. policies such as *the war in Iraq*, the war on terrorism and the U.S. support for Israel.” (emphasis is ours)
- “Anti-Americanism worsened in the Mideast *in response to the war in Iraq*—but it soared among Muslims in other parts of the world that previously did not view the United States poorly—notably in Indonesia and Nigeria.”<sup>38</sup> (emphasis is ours)

Similarly, the January 2009 Gallup reported that Muslims in the Middle East and North Africa said that the U.S. withdrawal from Iraq

35. Farhad Khosrokhavar, *Inside Jihadism: Understanding Jihadi Movements Worldwide*, Paradigm Publishers, London, 2009, pp. 220, 223, 230 and 284.

36. Marc Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad*, pp. 154–155.

37. See Declassified Key Judgements of the National Intelligence Estimate “Trends in Global Terrorism Implications for the United States”, Office of the Director of National Intelligence, April 2006, available at [http://www.dni.gov/press\\_releases/Declassified\\_NIE\\_Key\\_Judgments.pdf](http://www.dni.gov/press_releases/Declassified_NIE_Key_Judgments.pdf) (14 April 2010).

38. Pew Global Attitudes Project, *Islam and the West: Searching for Common Ground*, Pew Research Centre, 18 July 2006, available at <http://pewglobal.org/commentary/display.php?AnalysisID=1009> (accessed 14 April 2010).

would improve Muslims' perception and addressed their grievances towards the United States.<sup>39</sup>

In this regard, it is quite apparent that the wars have created grievances, similar to that of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, as well as the opportunity for jihad mobilisation and the creation of a decentralised jihad operation which could be carried out outside the two conflict zones. When Muslim grievances meet with jihadist worldviews and frames, radicalisation and opportunity for jihad mobilisation is facilitated again.<sup>40</sup> Khosrokhavar writes, "It is clear from a review of extremist materials and interviews that militants are seeking to appeal to young American and European Muslims by playing on their anger over the war in Iraq and the image of Islam under attack."<sup>41</sup> Based on the study, he argues that the withdrawal of foreign military forces from the countries will have direct impact in mitigating the current threat of jihadists. A quick resolution to the wars, while ensuring the stability of both countries, is imperative to avoid problems to security at local, regional and international levels.

Secondly, governments must not only call their non-Muslim citizens not to discriminate Muslims for acts that were committed by a minority among them, and emphasise that Islam is a peaceful religion, but they must also make the effort not to allow the extremists from other communities to dictate the nature of Muslim and non-Muslim's relationship by continuously casting doubts on Islam and Muslims by suggesting that Islam is inherently problematic, incompatible with democracy

39. *Opinion Briefing: U.S. Image in Middle East/North Africa*, Gallup, 27 January 2009, available at <http://www.gallup.com/poll/114007/Opinion-Briefing-Image-Middle-East-North-Africa.aspx> (accessed 14 January 2010).

40. David Gartensein-Ross and Laura Grossman, *Homegrown Terrorists in the U.S. and U.K.*, Center for Terrorism Research, Foundation for Defense and Democracies, Washington, April, 2009, p. 53; Darcy M. E. Norick, "The Root Causes of Terrorism", *Social Science for Counter-terrorism: Putting the Pieces Together*, edited by Paul K. Davis and Kim Cragin, RAND, Santa Monica, 2009, pp. 34–36; Todd C. Halmus, "Why and how some people become terrorists?", *Social Science for Counter-terrorism: Putting the Pieces Together*, edited by Paul K. Davis and Kim Cragin, pp. 89–90; Angel M. Rabasa et al., *The Muslim World after 9/11*, Rand, Santa Monica, 2004, pp. 128–139, 171–172, 282–286, 317–318 and 405–408; Jamie Bartlett, Jonathan Birdwell and Michael King, *The Edge of Violence: A Radical Approach to Extremism*, Demos, London, 2010, pp. 25–26, 29–30 and 34.

41. Farhad Khosrokhavar, *Inside Jihadism: Understanding Jihadi Movements Worldwide*, p. 286.

and modernity, or anticipating an inevitable clash between Islam and the West. Those who view Islam as a threat have gone to the extent of advising major powers to unequivocally support regimes threatened by Islamists. They urge major democratic countries not to insist that those states implement political liberalisation because it will allow the participation of Islamists. These states were viewed as a lesser evil than Islamists ones. The proponents of this view even derided the notion of “Islamic moderates”. They accused those who view Islam as being capable of reforms compatible with democracy and the West, as “apologists” or “relativists”.

Ultimately, it takes two hands to clap. Thus, the war against terrorism cannot be won by countering extreme ideology in the Muslim community without countering prevailing prejudiced views among non-Muslims or Westerners that cast doubts on Muslims, antagonise them and do not promote optimism for peaceful coexistence between the West and Muslims.<sup>42</sup>

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42. Muhammad Haniff Hassan, *Key Considerations in Counter-Ideological Work against Terrorist Ideology*, pp. 42–46.

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## CONCLUSION

Counter-terrorism is no different from counter-insurgency. It is a battle against an organised group motivated by a cause or ideology seeking to achieve its political aim. Through protracted campaigns, it seeks to win over the support of the people, thus weakening its enemy, which will eventually enable it to launch a final blow. In counter-insurgency, the people are “the centre of gravity” because the government and the army need their support, while the insurgents emerge from these people. By winning over the people, the flow of recruits and support would be cut off. This approach is popularly known as the “battle for the hearts and minds”.

However, this does not mean that winning the hearts and minds of the militants themselves is not important, because should the militants be persuaded to lay down arms, the insurgency would end immediately. Such a campaign may be launched to defeat the insurgents’ “psychic forces” or “morale”.

The contents of this monograph has been a humble attempt in documenting all the efforts to fight extremist ideology in Singapore for the past decade with the intention of extracting learning points from the experience and to share insights and policy recommendations at improving present efforts or to build new initiatives. Yet it is necessary to note that the assessment made is far from ideal, given the fact that there is still no proper set of indicators to analyse the effectiveness of a particular counter-ideological programme and its contribution to deradicalisation and the mitigation of the threat of terrorism. The absence of a standardised set of indicators to assess counter-ideological effectiveness is also linked to three related key issues: (i) How does radicalisation actually take place? (ii) What are the factors that interact with ideology to result in

radicalisation? (iii) Who are the ones more susceptible to radicalisation?

Without the answers to the above questions, it will be difficult to formulate a matrix to measure radicalisation, to accurately identify vulnerable groups and to measure the process of deradicalisation and hence rehabilitation. On that note, and as a conclusion to this monograph, we propose that more research be devoted to addressing the critical questions and shortcomings addressed here. This would require the cooperation and sharing of resources, knowledge and information particularly between the government and the academia, through means such as study grants and sharing sessions in order to pave the way towards improving the capacity for counter-ideological work and in intensifying the efforts aimed at eliminating the threat of terrorism.

## APPENDIXES

### APPENDIX A

#### *List of Arrests, Detentions and Releases Incidents*

No.	Date/period of action	Details	Source	Other details
1.	Between 9 and 24 December 2001	15 persons were arrested by the Internal Security Department (ISD) for involvement in terrorism-related activities. 13 were members of JI.	Singapore Government Press Statement on Arrests under the Internal Security Act (ISA), 5 January 2002.	This is the first major arrest.
2.	6 January 2002	13 of the 15 persons arrested by the ISD in December 2001 were served with Orders of Detention (OD) for two years; the 2 other persons arrested were released on Restriction Orders (RO).	Singapore Government Press Statement on ISA Arrests, 11 January 2002.	
3.	16 August 2002	21 persons were arrested in August 2002 by the ISD for involvement in terrorism-related activities. All 21 are Singaporeans: 19 JI members and 2 MILF affiliated.	Singapore Government Statement on Further Arrests Under the Internal Security Act, 16 September 2002.	This is the second major arrest.

No.	Date/period of action	Details	Source	Other details
4.	14 September 2002	19 of the 21 persons arrested on 16 August 2002 were established to be members of JI. 18 of the 21 arrested were served with DOs for 2 years; 3 of the 21 were released and served with RO.	Singapore Government Press Statement on Further Arrests under the Internal Security Act, 19 September 2002.	
5.	23 and 25 October 2003  9 November 2003	2 Singaporean members of a JI cell in Karachi (“Al-Ghuraba”) were arrested by the ISD on 23 and 25 October 2003 for terrorism-related activities. Orders of Detention were issued against them on 9 November 2003.	Singapore Government Press Statement on the Detention of 2 Singaporean Members of the Jemaah Islamiyah Karachi Cell, 18 December 2003.	This is the first major arrest involving an overseas cell of the Singapore JI.
6.	14 January 2004	12 persons were issued ROs under the Internal Security Act (ISA) on 10 January 2004. 10 were JI members; 2 were MILF members. ODs against the first group of 13 JI members arrested in December 2001 were extended by the Government for another 2-year term.	Government Press Statement – Update on Counter-Terrorism Investigations in Singapore, 14 September 2004.	Information was released on 2 MILF members and one JI member: one was arrested and detained in November 2003; one was arrested and detained in October 2002; one was arrested and detained by the ISD in February 2003 and was subsequently released in October 2003 when his OD was suspended and placed under restriction conditions.

No.	Date/period of action	Details	Source	Other details
7.	15 September 2004	<p>Out of 22 arrested under ISA between August to September 2002, 18 were served with DOs (17 for 2 years from September 2002 and one for 2 years from October 2002) while 3 were not detained and served with ROs (2 years from September 2002).</p> <p>The DOs for 17 out of 19 detained were extended by 2 years while 2 ODs were not extended and ROs were served.</p> <p>Of the 3 ROs, 2 were not extended when the period lapsed on 14 September 2004 while one RO was extended (2 years from 15 September 2004).</p>	Government Press Statement: Extension of 17 Detention Orders and one Restriction Order and Release of 2 Detainees and Lapse of 2 Restriction Orders.	First two detained JI members were released after two years detention and issued with RO.



No.	Date/period of action	Details	Source	Other details
8.	13 January 2005	<p>A JI member who was arrested in December 2001 and issued with an OD (in January 2002 for a period of two years and extended for another two years in January 2004) was released on 12 January 2005. He was released on a Suspended Direction (SD) under which he was subject to conditions governing his activities and movement.</p> <p>Another individual who was issued with OD for involvement with JI in January 2003 had his OD extended for two years with effect from 12 January 2005.</p>	Release/ Detention of Persons Involved with JI and MILF, 13 January 2005.	<p>Information was released on the arrest and detention of a Singaporean for involvement in JI. He was detained for 2 years on 9 February 2004.</p> <p>Information was also released on another individual who was arrested under the ISA for involvement with the MILF in December 2001, subsequently released in January 2002 on RO, which was extended for 2 years in January 2004. He was detained under the ISA on 6 January 2005, for repeated violations of his RO by continuing to associate with MILF members and sympathisers.</p> <p>This is the first reported recidivism case.</p> <p>However, the person was released on SD 5 January 2008</p>

No.	Date/period of action	Details	Source	Other details
9.	April 2005	<p>A JI member who was issued with an OD in September 2002 was released on SD on 15 April 2005.</p> <p>Another former detainee who was placed on a SD since October 2003 was issued with an RO after the SD expired on 7 February 2005.</p> <p>A third person, also a JI member, was detained for two years on 21 April 2005.</p>	Government Press Statement – Update on Counter-Terrorism Investigations in Singapore, 22 April 2005.	
10.	November 2005	<p>One member of JI who was detained under the ISA in January 2002 was released on SD on 24 October 2005.</p> <p>Another member of the JI was detained under the ISA for two years with effect from 5 August 2005.</p>	Government Press Statement – Update on Counter-Terrorism Investigations in Singapore, 11 November 2005.	

No.	Date/period of action	Details	Source	Other details
11.	6 February 2006	The Singaporean leader of the local JI network who was detained by the Indonesian authorities in February 2003 on charges related to possessing falsified identification documents was deported to Singapore on 3 February 2006. He was subsequently placed under ISA arrest.	Response to Queries on Mas Selamat.	
12.	30 June 2006	5 persons who were detained under OD under the ISA for involvement in the JI terrorist organisation were released on 30 June 2006.	Singapore Government Press Statement on Release of 5 JI Detainees and Detention of 5 JI Members, 30 June 2006.	Information was released on the arrest of 5 JI members served with ODs under the ISA as part of the ISD on-going security operation against the local JI network.
13.	15 September 2006	2 members of the JI who had been detained on OD under the ISD since September 2002 were released and placed under 2-year ROs, which took effect on 15 September 2006.	Release of 2 JI Detainees on Restriction Orders.	

No.	Date/period of action	Details	Source	Other details
14.	February 2007	One person was detained under the ISA for planning militant activities after being influenced by radical ideas online.	“Self-Radicalised’ law grad, 4 JI militants held”, <i>The Straits Times</i> , June 9 2007.	This was the first case of arrest and detention due to self-radicalisation linked to the Internet.
15.	9 November 2007	2 members of the JI’s Al-Ghuraba cell who had been detained on RO under the ISD since November 2003 were released and placed on RO for 2 years under the ISA.	Release of 2 JI Detainees on Restriction Orders, 9 November 2007.	
16.	December 2007 to January 2008	5 JI detainees were released from detention upon expiry of their DOs. one was released on 20 December 2007 and 4 others on 5 January 2008.	Further Releases, Issuance of Restriction Orders and Detentions Under the Internal Security Act, 24 January 2008; Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) and Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) Detention and Restriction Order cases.	
			2 persons were detained under the ISA and one other issued with RO for involvement in activities that posed a potential threat on 5 December 2007.	This was the second case of arrest due to self-radicalisation linked to the Internet.

No.	Date/period of action	Details	Source	Other details
17.	20 March 2008	One member of the JI was detained under the ISA after being arrested in February 2008. The OD was issued against him on 20 March 2008.	Further Detention, and Release and Issuance of Restriction Order Under the Internal Security Act, 23 March 2008.	Announcement of the release of one JI member on RO which took effect on 10 February 2008, when his OD expired.
18.	28 March 2008  14 September 2008	5 Singaporean members of JI were released on RO upon expiry of their ODs issued under the ISA: 3 were released on RO on 28 March 2008.  2 Singaporean JI detainees who were detained under the ISA in September 2002 were released on RO on 14 September 2008.	Further Releases and Issuance of Restriction Orders under the Internal Security Act, 15 September 2008.	
19.	5 January 2009	2 JI members who were arrested in December 2001 and detained under the ISA in January 2002 were released on SD on 5 January 2009.	Further Releases and Lapse of Restriction Order under the Internal Security Act, 12 March 2009.	Information was released on the lapse of RO of one JI member on 8 February 2009 but was not renewed.

No.	Date/period of action	Details	Source	Other details
	September 2009	3 Singaporeans detained under the ISA for the involvement in the JI and MILF. One was released on RO on 5 August 2009 while the other 2 were released on SD on 15 September 2009.	Release of 3 Detainees Held Under the Internal Security Act, 16 September 2009.	
20.	November 2009 to January 2010	One member of the JI and MILF was detained under the ISA. He was arrested in November 2009 and issued with OD with effect from 15 December 2009. Two Singaporean JI members were released on RO under the ISA on 6 January 2010 when their ODs expired. The ROs of 3 JI/ MILF members expired on 9 January 2010 but were not renewed.	Further Detention and Releases Under the ISA, 13 January 2010.	
21.	21 February 2010	A Singaporean detained under the ISA for planning and preparing to engage in militant activities was released on SD on 21 February 2010.	Release of Detainee Held Under the Internal Security Act, 24 February 2010.	

No.	Date/period of action	Details	Source	Other details
22.	April to June 2010	Three Singaporeans with no affiliations to Ji and extremist organisations were arrested under the ISA. One, a fulltime National Serviceman in the army, was detained on 4 April 2010. He was assessed to be radicalised by the lectures of radical preachers and went online in search of information on bomb-making, and produced and posted a video glorifying martyrdom and justifying suicide bombing. Two were issued ROs from 23 June 2010 for two years. One was an unaccredited religious teacher who was found distributing materials of Anwar Al-Awlaki. The other was his student.	Detention, Imposition Of Restriction Orders and Release Under The Internal Security Act, 6 July 2010.	This is the arrest involving self-radicalised individuals.

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### Notes

1. The information in the table is based on the Singapore Ministry of Home Affairs' press releases available in the news archive at its official website [www.mha.gov.sg](http://www.mha.gov.sg). The date of press statement is usually later than the actual date of detention/release/issuance of order

2. Total number of cases: 79 (61 JI members, one JI/MILF member, 8 MILF members, 8 self-radicalised individuals, one Al Qaeda sympathiser)
3. Number of detainee released with restriction: 42
4. Number of detainee released and Restriction Order allowed to lapse: 1
5. Number of cases issued with Restriction Order only (undetained): 21 (10 of these cases have been released from Restriction Orders when they were allowed to lapse)
6. Number of cases still under detention: 14
7. Number of cases still under Restriction Order/Suspension Direction: 53
8. One recorded recidivism case
9. One recorded escape case
10. JI members incarcerated in other countries:
  - H. Ismail, arrested in Indonesia with his wife and two sons and reportedly imprisoned in Indonesia since June 2009.
  - S. Subari, arrested together with H. Ismail and his family and imprisoned in Indonesia since June 2009.
  - M. H. Saynudin, serving 18 years imprisonment in Indonesia for killing a Christian teacher and plotting attacks against westerners in Palembang, a leader of a group known as Jemaah Palembang.

**Suspended Direction (SD):** A Suspension Direction (SD) is a Ministerial direction to suspend the operation of an existing Order of Detention (OD). The Minister of Home Affairs may revoke the SD and the individual will be re-detained, if he does not comply with any of the conditions stipulated in the SD. Among the conditions are that he is prohibited from associating with any militant or terrorist groups or individuals, and he is not allowed to leave the country without the prior written approval of the Director, ISD.

**Restriction Orders:** Under Section 8(1)(b), for all or any of the following purposes:

- (i) For imposing upon that person such restrictions as may be specified in the order in respect of his activities and the places of his residence and employment;
- (ii) For prohibiting him from being out of doors between such hours as may be specified in the order, except under the authority of a written permit granted by such authority or person as may be so specified;
- (iii) For requiring him to notify his movements in such manner at such times and to such authority or person as may be specified in the order;
- (iv) For prohibiting him from addressing public meetings or from holding office in, or taking part in the activities of or acting as adviser to any organisation or association, or from taking part in any political activities;



- (v) For prohibiting him from travelling beyond the limits of Singapore or any part thereof specified in the order except in accordance with permission given to him by such authority or person as may be specified in such order, and any order made under paragraph (b) shall be for such period, not exceeding two years, as may be specified therein, and may by such order be required to be supported by a bond.

## ***APPENDIX B***

### **Plots with elaborate planning**

1. Truck bombs against U.S.-related targets
2. Yishun MRT
3. U.S. Naval Vessels and Personnel
4. U.S. Assets/Personnel at Paya Lebar airbase
5. U.S. School (Singapore American School) and U.S./Israeli companies
6. Against local installations
7. Changi Airport

### **Plots at reconnaissance stage**

1. Water works and water pipelines (including those at the Causeway)
  - Hindhede Road
  - PUB Woodlands Water Booster Station
  - Bukit Panjang Service Reservoir at Fajar Road
  - Bukit Timah Water Works
2. Radar station at Biggin Hill
3. Ministry of Education building at North Buona Vista Drive
4. Sabotage of MRT system including the Operations Control Centre
5. Jurong Island
6. Ministry of Defence at Bukit Gombak
7. Straits of Malacca warning against terrorist attack (2010)
8. Orchard MRT plot (2010)

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Counter-ideology is increasingly being studied as a feature of a rising number of counter-terrorism and terrorist rehabilitation programs around the world. At the same time, it is necessary to also consider the public's role in counter-ideology. The community needs to be inoculated against extremist interpretations of religion that promote intolerance, reject conventional political frameworks, and threaten peace and stability. This monograph provides insight into Singapore's decade-long experience in confronting the threat of Islamist terrorism in the country, since the local cell of the regional Jemaah Islamiyah was uncovered in 2001.



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