

Countering Violent Extremism: Revisiting Rehabilitation and Community Engagement

ROHAN GUNARATNA

The *Mufti-Mustafti* Approach to Religious Rehabilitation

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NUR IRFANI BINTE SARIFI



Terrorist Rehabilitation and Community Engagement

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With the growing threat of terrorism worldwide, and the unprecedented flow of foreign fighters to conflict zones, an increasing number of countries are exploring the development of extremist rehabilitation and deradicalisation programmes. Religious rehabilitation is a fundamental component of this process, and Islamic scholars contribute this month introducing various approaches to successful rehabilitation.

In this issue, **Rohan Gunaratna** discusses how in developing a comprehensive response, governments must recognise that the soft measures of terrorist rehabilitation and community engagement could be game changers, particularly in the context of the threat from groups like the Islamic State of Iraq and Greater Syria (ISIS). Gunaratna recommends governments to shift from a whole-of-government to a whole-of-society approach to manage the threat.

Ahmad Saiful Rijal Bin Hassan discusses the *mufti-mustafti* approach in religious counselling. A mufti is someone qualified to give a legal opinion or fatwa whereas a mustafti is someone seeking a legal opinion (fatwa) from a mufti. The goal of a *mufti-mustafti* approach is to rehabilitate terrorists and extremists into embracing moderate views and to enable them to denounce their radical beliefs.

Muhammad Saiful Alam Shah Bin Sudiman discusses the *da'i-mad'uw* approach to religious rehabilitation, where da'i refers to the Muslim individual that takes upon him or herself to propagate Islam to others. Mad'uw is the individual who is benefitting from this. This approach encompasses dialogue, reflective discussion and analysis of classical religious texts in a context of fellowship between Muslims.

Lastly, **Nur Irfani Binte Saripi** observes the unprecedented rise in the number of young women and girls as young as 15-years-old traveling to Syria to join ISIS. She argues that a rehabilitation programme specifically catering to female jihadists is necessary to ensure that these individuals will not pose a threat to their respective countries upon their return.

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Countering Violent Extremism: Revisiting Rehabilitation and Community Engagement

Rohan Gunaratna

While governments worldwide focus on fighting the Islamic State of Iraq and Greater Syria (ISIS), associated groups and the homegrown threats kinetically, there is a need to build other strategic counter-terrorism capabilities in terrorist rehabilitation and community engagement. The soft measures of terrorist rehabilitation and community engagement, highlighting a shift from a whole-of-government to a whole-of-society approach, can be game-changers in the global fight against terrorism.

Introduction

In the long-term, terrorism cannot be defeated only by the killing of terrorists, capturing their supporters and disrupting their operations. To end terrorism, governments must relentlessly target and dismantle the entire infrastructure which serves to produce and sustain a terrorist group: propaganda, radicalisation, recruitment, training, endowments and income, procurement, safe houses, transportation, travel, communications and other support networks. Success in this fight depends on the ability and willingness of governments to work in partnership with a range of actors, particularly civil society organisations and the private sector, to build a capacity to deliver a full-spectrum counter-terrorism response. At the hard end of the spectrum, the lethal and kinetic responses blunt the operational capabilities of the terrorists. At the soft end, the radicalised combatants are engaged and made to repent, express remorse and re-join the mainstream, and communities vulnerable to

terrorist and extremist ideas are made resilient. Both the hard and the soft approaches are thus necessary to prevent terrorist groups from replenishing their human losses through continued radicalisation and recruitment.

When a terrorist surrenders or is captured, the government has a narrow window of opportunity to transform the individual and his/her beliefs. Otherwise, this individual will continue to be both a source and a carrier of extremism: transmitting, replicating and multiplying the ideological virus. Even when incarcerated for life or held in incommunicado, the individual can influence others, including the prison staff or visitors; and when released, he would have the opportunity to (re-)infect the society with his radical ideas, thus perpetuating the vicious cycle of violence. This makes a strong case for terrorist rehabilitation and community engagement initiatives to be a part of a country's overall strategy in countering violent extremism and terrorism.

The Context

The rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and Greater Syria (ISIS) has now almost eclipsed the Al Qaeda-centric threat. The ISIS threat is more far-reaching and destructive than ever before, with its control over territory, declaration of the establishment of an Islamic State which resonates within the hearts of many Muslims, infiltration of Muslim communities worldwide through its robust propaganda, and the group's financial, material and human resources. It is estimated that the number of Sunni Muslim foreign fighters in Iraq and Syria could be more than 20,000, coming from nearly 100 countries. Thus, while Afghanistan attracted about 10,000 fighters in the ten years of war (1979-1989), Syria has attracted double that number since the conflict began less than five years ago in 2011. In essence, ISIS has now become a palpable global threat. ISIS has politicised, radicalised and mobilised tens of thousands of supporters and hundreds of thousands of sympathisers worldwide, thereby replacing Al Qaeda as the leader of the global terrorist movement.

To mitigate the threat, a global strategy is needed to dismantle ISIS in its core theatre of operation, its overseas spheres of influence, its associated groups elsewhere and its homegrown cells in diverse countries. To complement the efforts of the military, law enforcement and national security agencies in this regard, there should be a strategy of rehabilitation and

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community engagement to dissuade and disengage hundreds of thousands of individuals who have been influenced by the ISIS' violent extremist ideology. Along with non-ISIS fighters, governments should build an enterprise to rehabilitate the four categories of ISIS fighters: (returnee) ISIS fighters, ISIS-associated fighters, pro-ISIS homegrown fighters and ISIS supporters.

Rehabilitation: Then and Now

Even before the 9/11 attacks, a few governments invested in the rehabilitation of terrorist detainees. Working with clerics from Al-Azhar, Egypt was the first country to attempt to rehabilitate Muslim terrorists and extremists. Later, several other governments also built their own terrorist rehabilitation programmes, such as Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Uzbekistan, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Iraq, Somalia and Oman. However, of these, only a few programmes were comprehensive, incorporating the required multiple modes of rehabilitation.

Furthermore, in many countries, such as in Indonesia, rehabilitation programmes have been ad-hoc; while others collapsed without continued state patronage, like the programmes in Egypt and Yemen. A few countries had custodial rehabilitation efforts, but failed to build capabilities in reintegration: the aftercare component was either absent or lacking in these programmes. There was an attempt to build a rehabilitation programme in Afghanistan, but it met with partial success as the United States military leadership did not support the initiative.

There were also similar efforts in the United Kingdom, the Maldives, Morocco and Australia, but these countries failed to build viable programmes to make an impact. Other countries, like the Philippines, Thailand and Bangladesh, have visions for rehabilitation initiatives, but these have been non-starters.

Challenges to Rehabilitation

Terrorists are not born, but are products of circumstances. Therefore, it is necessary for governments to invest in soft countermeasures – delegitimising the radical ideology and addressing roots of grievances – along with the kinetic response. These soft measures include terrorist rehabilitation and reintegration, community engagement and promoting moderation in beliefs (counter-ideology). In other words, to fight terrorism in the long-term, it is necessary to develop programmes to both rehabilitate and reintegrate terrorists and extremists as well as community engagement initiatives to build societal resilience to prevent individuals from joining or supporting terrorist groups.

Rehabilitation programmes are required, as unless a terrorist’s ideological disposition that empowers and motivates him to legitimise and justify violence is countered, will linger and manifest violently when an opportunity arises. Community engagement is also required, since if a beneficiary of rehabilitation comes into contact with terrorists and extremists upon his release, he is likely to relapse.

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A holistic community engagement effort would principally also prevent ordinary members of the community from being radicalised and from engaging in terrorism in the first place. Ultimately, the community also becomes the eyes and the ears of the state. Thus, there should be greater emphasis on upstream intervention, where the greater community is engaged by the government to identify early indicators of radicalisation of members within.

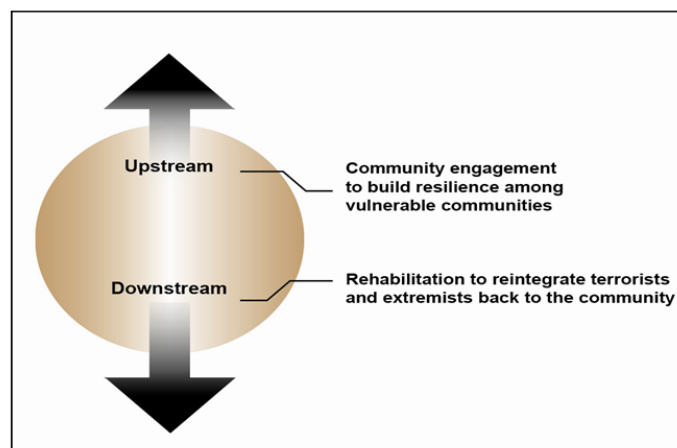


Figure 1: Upstream and Downstream Soft Measures to Counter-terrorism

Understanding Terrorist Rehabilitation Programmes

At present, there are countries with no rehabilitation programmes, countries with ad-hoc rehabilitation programmes and those with rehabilitation programmes but without reintegration or community engagement initiatives. This is mostly due to the lack of understanding and/or lack of capacity in terms of (the mobilisation of) required resources – both material and human.

Therefore, it is necessary for the concerned governments to work in partnership with civil society organisations and the private sector to build effective rehabilitation and community engagement programmes to ensure sufficient funding and resources, as the threat of terrorism affects all sectors and segments of a society.

Why Rehabilitate?

If terrorist detainees are not rehabilitated when they are released from prison, these individuals will re-engage in violence and/or infect others with their radical ideology. On the other hand, if a terrorist undergoes cognitive transformation through successful participation in a rehabilitation programme prior to the individual's release, he or she will be able to re-enter the society as a responsible citizen.

When to Rehabilitate?

An arrested or surrendered terrorist or would-be terrorist must be treated with the intention of reintegrating him back into society, sooner or later. The initial shock of arrest is an opportunity that should be exploited to both investigate and transform him psychologically.

As security is a priority, the focus during the initial phase should be to (i) determine the threat that particular individual poses, as national security is paramount, and (ii) gain intelligence from the individual, as every terrorist in custody is an invaluable source of insight into terrorist networks, ideology and operations. Thereafter, the focus should be on the eventual long-term rehabilitation and reintegration of the terrorist detainee.

Where to Rehabilitate?

As most prisons and detention centres worldwide are overcrowded, the rehabilitation of terrorists

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(beneficiaries) should ideally be conducted in a place with dedicated areas for living and dining, meeting rooms and lecture halls, recreation and creative arts rooms and other required facilities. It is also vital that when a beneficiary is visited by a religious cleric, psychological counsellor, social worker or his family members, there is a room that provides comfort and privacy that is conducive to the psychological transformation of the beneficiary.

Who will Rehabilitate?

Most governments lack the resources to build the facilities for a comprehensive terrorist rehabilitation programme. This entails the participation of the public and private sectors, civil society organisations including non-governmental organisations (NGOs) as well as the general public in investing in the development of rehabilitation programmes and facilities for the detainees. Governments should

enlist the support of these different sectors in building a national terrorist rehabilitation programme. For example, the funding and other contributions received from the private sector can be huge if directed through corporate social responsibility (CSR) programmes, which can take the form of vocational training programmes or economic reintegration programmes for the beneficiaries.

A terrorist rehabilitation programme is an enterprise where experts and specialists from diverse fields come together to form a common platform, to bring members of their society who have fallen victim to terrorist or extremist ideologies, back to the mainstream. It involves psychologists, counsellors, social workers, teachers, vocational instructors, sports instructors, artistes, religious clerics, community leaders and others who are passionate about transforming lives. These individuals can come from government agencies, NGOs, the academia, community organisations, religious bodies, the business community and other segments of society.

However, all those who work on terrorist rehabilitation require to be trained on handling terrorists and extremists, as otherwise, there is a risk that the unrepentant terrorist will deceive or even try to convince a rehabilitator to embrace his radical ideology. It is also vital that the prison guards and other staff coming into contact with detainees are trained on how to treat terrorist detainees with care. For example, if a prison staff member physically assaults or psychologically torments a beneficiary undergoing rehabilitation, the gains made by the rehabilitation staff (i.e. psychologists, clerics and other trained staff) to transform him, will be lost.

How to Rehabilitate?

As rehabilitation is a two-way process, it is ideal if the terrorist detainee voluntarily agrees to be rehabilitated. Separately, there should also be a provision in the legal and administrative framework of terrorist rehabilitation for the early release of those who are observed to cooperate and be genuinely repentant, express remorse and embrace peace, versus those who are uncooperative or unable to reject violence, condemn extremism and embrace the notion of harmonious living.

A terrorist who undergoes a rehabilitation programme should be referred to as a

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beneficiary, and not as a terrorist or an ex-terrorist. It should also be ensured that the beneficiary be presented in civilian attire and emotionally in terms of a 'loss of face' in this respect.

To win the hearts and minds of the beneficiaries, there should be three distinct but interrelated components in a rehabilitation programme: (i) custodial rehabilitation for the beneficiaries, (ii) aftercare services to their families (here the term 'aftercare' denotes care given to the families of detainees after their arrested and taken into custody) and (iii) social and economic reintegration of beneficiaries back to the community.

There are seven primary modes of terrorist rehabilitation: (1) religious and spiritual rehabilitation, (2) psychological rehabilitation, (3) educational rehabilitation, (4) vocational

arts for rehabilitation. It should be noted that each mode of rehabilitation requires a manual of instructions as well as an accompanying guide of administrative instructions for implementation of the programmes.

Without going through a comprehensive rehabilitation programme, complete transformation is unlikely even for terrorists who have surrendered after leaving the group for personal, but not for ideological reasons. To administer the different modes of rehabilitation, there should be a resource panel with dedicated staff that will coordinate and implement the rehabilitation programme.

While all modes of rehabilitation are important, religious rehabilitation has proven to be pivotal in engaging and transforming Islamists/jihadists. The process of deradicalisation here involves one-to-one theological counselling and debate between Islamic religious scholars and the beneficiaries. For extremist and violent Muslim terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda and ISIS, religious concepts such as *jihad* ('struggle'), *hijrah* ('migration') and *al-wala' wal bara'* ('loyalty and disavowal') are used as key doctrines in the deradicalisation process.

According to the Religious Rehabilitation Group (RRG) of Singapore, these concepts are manipulated and their interpretations are being twisted to justify the actions of terrorist and extremist politico-religious movements. Since the detainees had based their actions on misunderstood Islamic concepts, there is a critical need to address these misunderstandings

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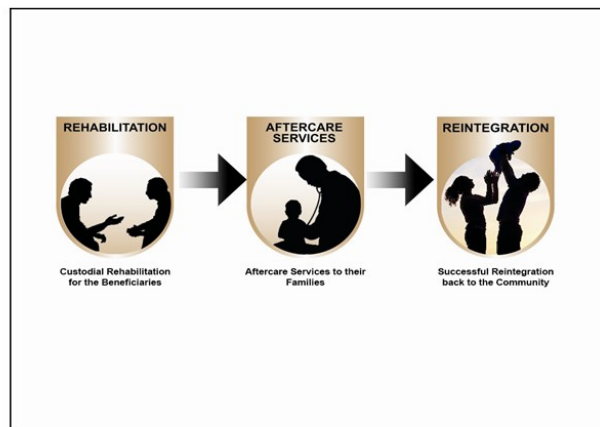


Figure 2: Components of a Rehabilitation Programme

for effective rehabilitation. Ultimately, religious rehabilitation aims to effect change in the mental paradigm, which will open the doors for them to repent, and prevent them from committing violent acts in the future.

It is also necessary that rehabilitation staff assess each beneficiary throughout the rehabilitation programme. Together with case officers, specialists and experts should meticulously plan and prepare a series of interventions for the assessment of progress vis-a-vis each detainee. The assessments made by the case officers, psychologists, counsellors, clerics and other prison/rehabilitation centre staff should be the basis to determine the release of or the need for continued rehabilitation for the beneficiary.

Primacy of Reintegration

A successful rehabilitation programme also includes a reintegration initiative to prevent a relapse. Otherwise, upon release, terrorists and their families may go back to their old ways participating, supporting or advocating for violence. As the government leads the rehabilitation programme for detainees who are in custody, the society should lead the reintegration aspect, particularly its social dimension. Terrorist rehabilitation starts from the point of capture but does not end with the point of release. During the reintegration phase, the beneficiary should be constantly engaged at the work place, with the family and among the community. A case officer should facilitate, support and guide the beneficiary to overcome

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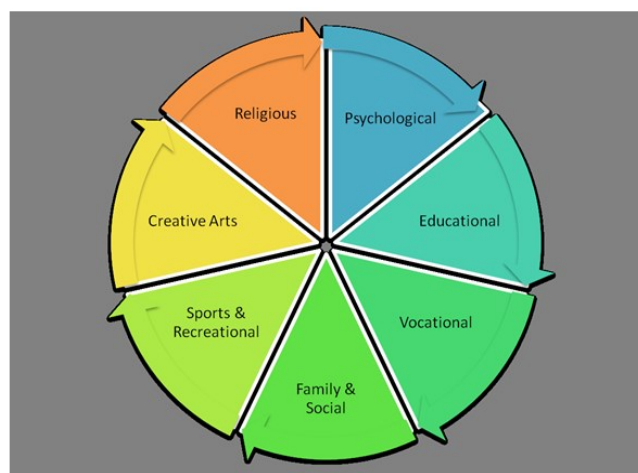


Figure 3: The Seven Modes of Rehabilitation

any obstacles the latter may face in social or economic reintegration back to society. There should be periodic visits by the case officer especially to monitor the beneficiary and ensure that he is not harassed and does not come into contact with terrorists or extremists. Similarly, the case officer should remain in contact with the family, notably the spouse and children, to ensure that the beneficiary adapts to the work, the family and the community. In this sense, post-release monitoring and aftercare determines the long-term success of custodial rehabilitation.

Community Engagement: Countering Online Radicalisation

As terrorist groups like Al Qaeda and ISIS gain influence over communities and conduct recruitment through the internet, governments should work with the community and other partners to counter the online threat. Terrorist groups worldwide now use Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and other online platforms to spread their ideologies as well as identify potential recruits. ISIS' mastery of social media has upgraded the terrorist threat to an unprecedented dimension. Thus, governments working with their community partners should create effective counter-ideology platforms to counter radical narratives, which include online rehabilitation programmes to engage the radicalised online community with the aim of dissuading individuals who support or advocate for terrorist groups.

Conclusion

Kinetic operations are not the most efficient means to defeat terrorist ideology, which serves to replenish the support for a terrorist group. To defeat terrorism in the long term, the success in the fight against terrorism depends on the integration of hard power and soft power. Kinetic operations are not the most efficient means to defeat terrorist ideology, which serves to replenish the support for a terrorist group.

To defeat terrorism in the long-term, governments should work in partnership with other stakeholders such as the civil society and the private sector to introduce soft counter-terrorism measures in the form of terrorist rehabilitation and community engagement programmes, which include the development of counter-ideology measures. While hard power is essential to dismantle the terrorist infrastructure and execute leaders and operatives, soft power is essential to engage communities vulnerable to radicalisation as well as deradicalise captured and surrendered terrorists. At the same time, legitimate grievances of those in the fight should be addressed in both the national and international domains to ensure an enduring counter to the threat of terrorism today.

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The *Mufti-Mustafti* Approach to Religious Rehabilitation

Ahmad Saiful Rijal Bin Hassan

The mufti-mustafti approach to religious counselling is used in some Islamic religious rehabilitation programmes to provide religious guidance and counselling to terrorist detainees. A mufti is someone qualified to give a fatwa (legal opinion), whereas a mustafti is someone seeking a fatwa from a mufti. The goal of a mufti-mustafti approach is to rehabilitate terrorists and extremists so that they embrace moderate views and are able to denounce their radical beliefs.

Introduction

Religious counselling is one of the most important components of religious rehabilitation programmes as practiced across the world today. The primary aim of religious counselling is to counter the radical extremist mindsets of terrorist detainees benevolently, i.e. through religious and ideological training.

In Singapore's context, religious counselling forms one of the key components in the deradicalisation process as well as in the post-deradicalisation phase. Religious rehabilitation was envisioned in 2003 as a crucial counter-ideological initiative to correct the ideological drift towards extremism and violence embraced by the Al Qaeda-linked Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) members who had been arrested. Once religious counselling has been completed, case officers, psychologists and religious counsellors assess an individual detainee to determine whether he has been suitably deradicalised before granting his release into society. Following his release, the case officers, psychologists and religious counsellors continue to follow up by engaging with the detainee to ensure that he is reintegrating well into society. The religious rehabilitation of terrorist and extremist detainees is spearheaded by the Religious Rehabilitation Group (RRG).

In the context of Yemen, religious rehabilitation is conducted by the Religious Dialogue Committee. Founded in September 2002, the Committee is seen as the pioneer among religious rehabilitation programmes in the post 9/11 landscape, due to its unique emphasis on a form of religious counselling deeply rooted in religious dialogue. These religious dialogues between Muslim clerics and detainees are aimed at correcting the ‘detainees’ misconstrued beliefs and at moderating their radical, militant understanding of Islam. The dialogue sessions between the clerics and detainees are usually held two or three times a week, and approximately 400 detainees have taken part in the programme. The effectiveness of these intensive religious dialogue sessions have been reflected in how many of these detainees within the programme have subsequently renounced violence and successfully reintegrated into society. Most of them also had their sentence reduced and were granted amnesty for their good conduct while in prison.

Most religious rehabilitation programmes implemented in prison systems across the world specifically involve religious clerics engaging with the detainees. In most cases, a religious cleric works to engage the terrorist detainee on a one-to-one basis through counselling sessions over the period of detention. A manifestation of the one-to-one counselling has been what is known as the *mufti-mustafti* approach, which involves a religious counsellor taking up the role of the *mufti* and a detainee as the *mustafti*, with the *mufti*/counsellor providing religious guidance and counselling to the *mustafti*/counselee. During the counselling session, the *mustafti*/counselee is persuaded to seek clarifications on matters pertaining to the legality, lawfulness, validity and the acceptability of committing specific acts in the name of Islam. The *mufti* then provides religious guidance and counselling to the *mustafti* as this will serve to clarify the *mustafti*'s misconceptions. The objective of the *mufti-mustafti* approach is to ensure that the *mustafti* or terrorist detainee recants his misconstrued understanding about Islam and develop the capacity to resist re-radicalisation by the time they are released into society.

Within Islamic legal schools, an individual who is a *mufti* is regarded as a rightful and legitimate authority on Islamic discourse and an expert in Sharia (Islamic Law). In the case of the *mufti-mustafti* counselling session, the *mufti*/counsellor should be someone certified as a scholar, being

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qualified to interpret and expound on Sharia (Nanji 2015), and therefore qualified to give authoritative Islamic legal opinions known as *fatwas*, which are Islamic rulings or edicts. Thus, the *fatwa* carries much more weight than the opinion of a random, unqualified Muslim on the street on a religious matter, as the *mufti* is expected to give his *fatwa* based on religious evidences, keeping in mind the reality of the times and prevailing conditions in fulfilling the objectives of the Sharia. Hence, in Islam, the issuance of a *fatwa* is not to be taken lightly; it is only to be issued by one who is recognised to be in possession of a proper knowledge and understanding of Islam.

Issuing of the *Fatwa*: Four Essential Stages

The unique feature about the *mufti-mustafti* approach is that prior to the *mufti*'s pronouncement of a specific *fatwa*, a system of ideas is generated. In the *mufti-mustafti* approach, there are four essential stages prior to the *mufti*'s issuance of a *fatwa*, as explained below.

During the first stage, the *mufti/counsellor* is responsible for carrying out *taswir* or ‘accurate conceptualisation’. At this stage, he is mainly concerned with the proper understanding of an issue corresponding to the circumstances affecting the detainee and other realities on the ground. This is the first and most essential condition in issuing the right *fatwa*. The absence of this condition – in other words, improper conceptualisation of the issue – will lead to the issuance of a *fatwa* with no meaningful relevance

to the *mustafti*/counsellor. As the *mustafti*/detainee poses his questions, the *mufti* should explore the issue with respect to the *mustafti*'s/detainee's circumstances, including the potential repercussions of his actions in the past, as well as his upbringing and the different experiences he has undergone during the course of his life. The success of a *fatwa* – both in fulfilling the objectives of religious rehabilitation, and in re-directing the *mustafti*'s/counsellor's mind from being drawn into extremist narratives – depends upon the skillfulness of the *mufti*/counsellor in conceptualising the *mustafti*'s/counsellor's question. For example, if the *mustafti*/detainee asks the *mufti*/counsellor whether it is permissible to establish an 'Islamic state' through violent means, the *mufti*/counsellor would need to address the *mustafti*'s/counsellor's way of reasoning by prompting the *mustafti*/counsellor's to articulate the possible means by which such a state would be achieved. As under no legitimate conditions should an individual be allowed to use force to achieve political objectives, i.e., to establish an Islamic state, the *mufti*'s response would be to state that in Islam the killing of innocents and violence is not condoned. Furthermore, it is against the law to take part in any terrorist or religious extremist group advocating violence.

During the second stage, the *mufti*/counsellor classifies the issue/question under consideration according to the relevant categories under Islamic jurisprudence, in a process known as *takyif* or 'classification'.

For example, a question may either be designated under *jihad* (an Islamic term which can mean both the armed struggle against an enemy for the sake of a just cause and the internal struggle within oneself or in one's society) (Allam 2014), or under 'acts of worship'. It could also fall under categories of *jihad* not mentioned in Islamic jurisprudence – such as the act of carrying out a suicide bombing, which is illegitimate. This stage paves the way for the legal ruling of the matter in question. The duty of *takyif* ('classification') falls upon the *mufti* as it requires meticulous study of Islamic jurisprudence, and a mistake may result in the production of an erroneous *fatwa*.

During the third stage, the *mufti*/counsellor is obliged to perform *sharh* or 'explanation' in order to support his *fatwa*. At this stage, it must be made sure that the *fatwa* or legal ruling is (i) derived from the primary sources of Islamic jurisprudence, i.e., the Quran and Sunnah (practices of the Prophet Muhammad), (ii) that they are supported by consensus within the Islamic scholarly community and (iii) elucidated through *qiyas* ('analogy') and *istidlal* ('inference'). The ruling by the *mufti*/counsellor should not contravene existing statements found in the primary sources of Islamic jurisprudence. For example, carrying out suicide attacks is clearly forbidden and is understood as reprehensible. This is evident throughout the Quran, which forbids suicide; for example it is stated: "...And do not kill yourselves" (Quran 4:29). Thus, a *fatwa* can never be issued in support of suicide attacks.

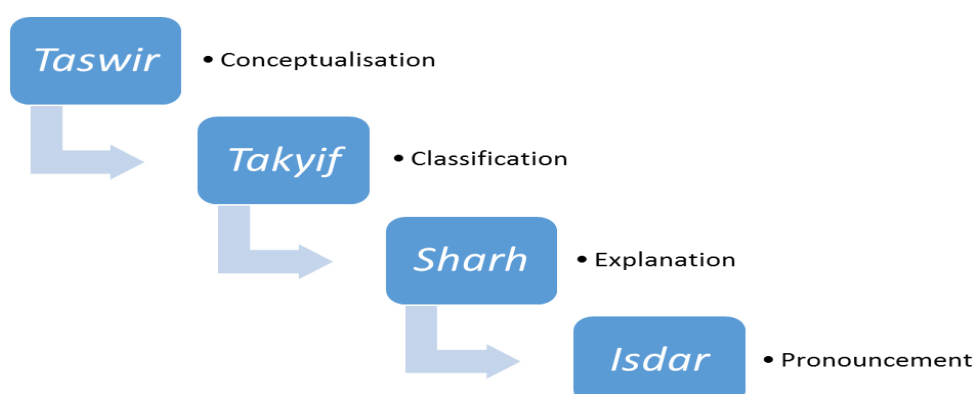


Figure 1: Four Stages of Issuing a Fatwa

During the four stages of issuing a fatwa, a *mufti*/counsellor will conceptualise the current realities and context of an issue given ('*taswir*'), before classifying it under the existing Islamic legal theory ('*takyif*'). Finally, he will explain the evidence ('*sharh*') and pronounce the fatwa to the *mustafti*/detainee ('*isdar*').

The fourth and final stage is *isdar* or 'pronouncement'. At this stage, the *mufti*/counsellor, would have already established the ground that his *fatwa*: (i) does not violate the objectives of Islamic jurisprudence, (ii) does not contradict a *dalil qat'i* or a 'definitive text' in the Islamic legal tradition and (iii) is backed by either the *ijma' ulama'* (unanimous consensus among Islamic scholars) or *qawa'id fiqhiyyah* (Islamic legal maxims). In this way, the *mufti*/counsellor would arrive at a *fatwa* (ruling) and pronounce it, taking into account the circumstances facing a detainee. The *mufti*'s legal ruling is considered to be the exposition of rulings prescribed by God. The great legal Islamic theoretician of the thirteenth century, Al Qarafi, had once referred to the *mufti* as an interpreter of God's purport ('*Dar Al-ifta Al-Missriyyah*').

Guiding Principles of the *Mufti-Mustafti* Approach

As explained earlier, a *fatwa* is very important in Islamic jurisprudence. Given the importance of issuing *fatwas*, it is necessary to establish a fixed set of principles governing the *mufti-mustafti* counselling sessions to facilitate the rehabilitation process. In addition, there is also a system of etiquette that the *mufti*/counsellor and the *mustafti*/counseelee must observe in order to facilitate the smooth running of the question and answer sessions.

For the *mufti*/counsellor, not only is it essential for him to specialise in Islamic Studies, he must also be an upright and pious cleric. He must possess the ability to arrive at the correct ruling as well as derive rulings from the Quran and Sunnah. He must also possess the ability to appropriately conceptualise issues in question, particularly when dealing with issues such as Muslims living in territories where Islam does not prevail, otherwise deemed *dar al-harb* or 'territory of war'. In contrast to *dar al-Islam*, which denotes the territory of Islam, *dar al-harb* refers to a territory that does not have a treaty of non-aggression or peace with Muslims. It is almost impossible to issue a general *fatwa* due to the variations in Islamic practices across the world, including in countries where Islam prevails. In other words, there is a possibility that the *mustafti*/counseelee's may be able to practice Islam more freely in a non-Muslim country than in a Muslim country. These paradoxes require the prescription of a specific *fatwa* specifically tailored to the circumstances or the situation. Thus, apart from possessing knowledge on

“ ... the Quran, which forbids suicide; for example it is stated: “... And do not kill yourselves” (Quran 4:29). Thus, a *fatwa* can never be issued in support of suicide attacks. ”

Islamic jurisprudence, there is a need for the *mufti* to be aware of the contextual environment and the specific social, economic, cultural and religious circumstances affecting the *mustafti*/counseelee. The *mufti*/counsellor would also need to understand the implications of the *mustafti*'s wider family and social setting and details on his upbringing before providing him with an answer.

Another important factor the *mufti*/counsellor must note is the need to be discerning, cautious and alert to the implications of the questions posed by the *mustafti*/counseelee. Sometimes, although the apparent meaning of a *mustafti*'s/counseelee's question or word may seem clear, it could contain a hidden or implied meaning. Moreover, many issues that appear straightforward on the surface in fact require due consideration and reflection. Since this is the case, the *mufti*/counsellor must seek to clarify the question posed by the *mustafti*/counseelee first, before providing an answer to the question. The *mufti*/counsellor in this regard, must remain fully aware of the subtleties of an issue and be cognisant to how his replies will be received by the *mustafti*/counseelee. This follows from the basic idea that religious counsellors must understand both the ideology and psychology of detainees they are engaged with. The counsellors involved in the religious rehabilitation process engage with the detainees not only in their capacity as Islamic scholars but also as psychologists. In most cases, there is a need for the *mufti*/counsellor to disengage the terrorist detainee's use of religion in support of feelings of hatred and resentment.

Most often, this applies to cases where detainees correlate the perceived injustice and oppression experienced by fellow Muslims to the actions committed by the United States and other Western countries, and justify their need to engage in war against the West on these grounds.

The *mufti*/counsellor must take into consideration the *mustafti*'s/counsellor's psychological circumstances during the course of the counselling session, particularly if he is unable to explain his problems and articulate questions in the presence of the *mufti*/counsellor. In these cases, the *mufti* should be gentle and understanding with the *mustafti*/counsellor. He must be patient both when the *mustafti*/counsellor is formulating his question as well as to carefully process his own thoughts when listening to the questions posed by the *mustafti*/counsellor. The *mufti* must also be patient when explaining his answers. If necessary, the *mufti*/counsellor must clarify the related legal matters to the *mustafti*/counsellor by way of advice and guidance, even if they were not directly part of the question.

Throughout the counselling session, the *mufti*/counsellor must give advice in a clear, concise and non-contradictory manner – even when citing direct evidences from the Quran or Sunnah – to avoid misunderstandings on the part of the *mustafti*/counsellor. An answer presented with logical, credible and well thought-out evidence is more likely to be embraced by the *mustafti*/counsellor. It also allows the *mustafti*/counsellor to understand the basis of the *mufti*'s/counsellor's answer.

Finally, for the *mustafti*/counsellor, he is to approach the *mufti*/counsellor with good conduct and respect. It is necessary for him to avoid asking too many questions at a time because each additional question would require additional time during the counselling session. The *mustafti*/counsellor may ask for evidence or proof upon which the *mufti*/counsellor has based his ruling. The *mustafti*/counsellor should refrain from inquiring about a ruling that is hypothetical, except if it concerns an anticipated matter that is likely to occur. This is so that the *mustafti*/counsellor avoids asking questions that are not related to religious matters or his well-being.

These various conceptual and theological challenges also constitute the challenges of the *mufti-mustafti* approach, hence the need for the

“ The meticulous and customised guidance provided for by the Islamic scholar in his role as a *mufti*/ counsellor is intended to leave a lasting impact on the mind of the *mustafti*/ counsellor. ”

mufti and the *mustafti* to closely adhere to the guiding principles of the *mufti-mustafti* approach.

Effectiveness of the *Mufti-Mustafti* Approach

The immediate aim of the *mufti-mustafti* approach is to correct the misunderstood concepts of Islam within the mind of a terrorist detainee. The approach also carries the long-term effects of preventing detainees from being influenced by extremist narratives after being released from detention, due to their corrected patterns of thinking. Specifically, this approach is intended to persuade the *mustafti*/counsellor on a personal level to identify with the religious rulings given by the *mufti*/counsellor and become open to new knowledge and new dimensions in his thinking process. The meticulous and customised guidance provided for by the Islamic scholar in his role as a *mufti*/counsellor is intended to leave a lasting impact on the mind of the *mustafti*/counsellor.

Thus, as much as this approach works to deradicalise the terrorist detainee, it also aims to prevent recidivism in the long-term. Upon his release, the terrorist detainee would have realised that the process of issuing a *fatwa* or legal ruling is arduous and not as easy as reading the Quran and Hadith (sayings of the Prophet Muhammad) and cherry-picking any verses or quotes to suit one's needs. A *mufti*'s cogent and thoughtful arguments are based on careful deductions of the Quran, Hadith and

Sunnah, and bring much credibility to the legal ruling. This legal ruling carries more weight than the unsubstantiated opinions of unqualified individuals on the streets or on online forums.

The *mufti-mustafti* approach serves to rehabilitate terrorist detainees who are primarily radicalised by extremist religious ideologies as propagated by terrorist groups or by otherwise incorrect or extremist Islamist views. The process of answering detainees' inquiries on religion is structured in systemic stages to ensure that the detainee can understand the process of how a religious ruling is made. This also serves to prevent instances where the *mufti*/counsellor may be inclined to perform 'fatwa shopping', i.e. arrive at a religious ruling without carefully considering its consequences on the mind and life of a *mustafti*/counseelee.

In conclusion, successful religious counselling programmes can place the detainee on the right track, and serve to inculcate in him the correct understanding of religion. The effectiveness of the *mufti-mustafti* approach depends on the skills of the *mufti*/counsellor, who must take pains to ensure that the detainee understands the intricacies of interpreting religious texts. In doing so, the *mufti* will facilitate the *mustafti*'s/counseelee's understanding and appreciation for the *fatwa* issuing process, and at the same time develop trust towards the *mufti*/counsellor. Thus, the *mufti-mustafti* approach to religious counseling facilitates the process of deradicalisation, and contributes to achieving the desired objectives of a terrorist rehabilitation programme.

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The *Da'i-Mad'uw* Approach to Religious Rehabilitation

Muhammad Saiful Alam Shah Bin Sudiman

In religious rehabilitation, engagement with violent extremist offenders, or VEOs, encompasses dialogue, reflective discussion and analysis of classical religious texts, among other practices. Generally, in the art of promulgating Islam, there is the core element commonly known as the 'da'i and mad'uw relationship'. Da'i refers to the Muslim individual that takes upon him or herself to propagate Islam to others. Mad'uw is the individual who is benefitting from this, regardless of her or his faith affiliation. While there is more than just one model of engagement, the 'da'i-mad'uw' approach can be applied in the rehabilitation of VEOs.

Introduction

At present, a number of governments are running active terrorist rehabilitation programmes. Among them are Saudi Arabia, Singapore and Sri Lanka. The programmes are comprehensive and comprise several modes of rehabilitation, including psychological, religious, educational, vocational, creative arts, sports and recreation as well as family and social rehabilitation. The rehabilitation programmes in Saudi Arabia and Singapore acknowledge that religious engagement is fundamental to the rehabilitation process, and include discussion on Islamic texts and literature into their programmes. In the Sri Lankan rehabilitation programme, (targeting persons of several different faiths) meditation was identified as a key component in the cognitive transformation of rehabilitees (Dharmawardhane 2013). Thus, religious rehabilitation plays a wider role than the academic work of refuting violent ideology.

In the context of Islamic religious rehabilitation, clerics - from this point onward referred to as counsellors - are those who are involved in religious engagement with violent extremist offenders (VEOs) - from this point onward referred to as counselees. In this relationship, counsellors do not look at the individual as a VEO, but rather as a fellow Muslim who deserves to be guided in learning and understanding the authentic teachings of Islam. This requires an engagement that surpasses the traditional counsellor-counselee boundary and can take the form of a *da'i* and *mad'uw* relationship, which is one of several approaches identified by Muslim scholars in propagating Islam effectively.

Who are *Da'i* and *Mad'uw*?

A *da'i* is a Muslim who not only recognises his/her responsibility towards the Creator, he/she strives to internalise every religious obligation and understands them as beyond ritual practices. For a *da'i*, the obligatory daily prayer is more than just another religious routine - it is a mechanism that helps maintain one's harmonious relationship with God at all times. At the same time, it doubles as a mechanism that evokes an appreciation of the value of time. The *da'i* avoids the passing of time without making any positive contribution that benefits him or others, and once this competency is mastered, he then assists others to acquire the same. This is performed in the name of promoting the true teachings of Islam and in the spirit of desiring the best for fellow brothers in Islam and/or in humanity. In the context of the Muslim community, *mad'uw* is an individual who receives this guidance from a *da'i*. More often than not, *mad'uw* is an individual whose knowledge of Islam requires refinement and reinforcement.

The *da'i-mad'uw* approach is primarily used to introduce Islam to others and subsequently as a guide to become a better Muslim, as the counsellor projects every engagement as more than just a process of debunking extreme narratives. When properly employed, a counselee would embrace the *da'i-mad'uw* relationship as an effort that would lead him to the right path, instead of viewing this merely as a component of the rehabilitation process. The engagement is then turned into a true 'brethren' relationship, with the counsellor in the role of an individual on a mission to impart true knowledge to the counselee and help the counselee to understand his past mistakes. This interaction cements a trust that eventually strengthens the

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bond between them. In this way, the *da'i* and *mad'uw* approach facilitates positive development in terrorist rehabilitation.

Translating Techniques into Action

There are two techniques in employing the *da'i* and *mad'uw* approach to rehabilitation. The first technique resembles a 'carrot-and-stick' approach to influence behaviour. It requires the counsellor to motivate the counselee to perform good deeds, by explaining the consequent rewards that would benefit him in this life and the hereafter. This is known as *targheeb* and it has to be complemented with *tarheeb*. *Tarheeb* is an attempt to warn the counselee against committing sins by always reminding him of the consequences that may befall him in this life and on the Day of Judgment - a day which according to Islam one's deeds, good and bad, are presented to him and he will be held accountable for them. It is important to note that this technique does not aim to completely stop the counselee from committing sins, but rather is an effort to minimise wrongdoings.

Since this form of rehabilitation is meant for religiously motivated individuals who had engaged in or were planning to engage in violence as well as those who condone violent acts in the name of Islam although not necessarily involved in terrorism, the review of religious texts that promote peace and righteous behaviour with the counselee is beneficial. The recitation of analytical discourse on religious texts that promote universal values such as compassion is also important. At the same time, the counselee needs also to be exposed to a fair amount of Islamic scripture prohibiting unethical

war conduct such as indiscriminate killing. In the instance of *targheeb* and encouraging gentleness, the Messenger of Allah said to his wife, "O 'Aishah, Allah is Gentle and loves gentleness, and He rewards for gentleness what He does not reward for harshness or for anything else" (Muslim 2007, 456). For the case of *tarheeb* which aims to prevent the counsellee from engaging in indiscriminate killing by emphasising adverse consequences, one Quranic verse to be noted is: "Because of that, We decreed upon the Children of Israel that whoever kills a soul unless for a soul or for corruption [done] in the land - it is as if he had slain humankind entirely. And whoever saves one - it is as if he had saved humankind entirely" (Quran 5:24).

The *targheeb* and *tarheeb* technique encourages the concerned individual to reassess his beliefs with regard to the killing of non-combatants during war, that is based on the notion of fighting the 'infidel' or non-believer. The counsellee will be guided to examine whether or not a person is indeed an enemy, and whether killing him is the best option. This process encourages the counsellee to ponder upon the action of choosing to kill, over spreading the word of compassion and peace. This idea is embedded in a saying by the Prophet Muhammad: "...the world is sweet and green, and Allah has given you authority over it, so look at what you do" (Muslim 2007, 112). Hence, war, cruelty and committing atrocities are not complementary to the message of this Hadith.

The second technique that can be used in the *d'ai-mad'uw* approach involves the three-step process of 'learn, unlearn and relearn'. In 'learning', the counsellor aids the counsellee in guided learning on Islamic matters that he has no prior knowledge. 'Unlearning' is an attempt to unsubscribe the counsellee from radical narratives which he has learned erroneously. Once these two phases are completed, the counsellee can look forward to the final process which introduces good values to replace the bad ones. Similar to the first technique, this 're-learning' process encourages the counsellee to revisit and re-evaluate his understanding on Islamic matters, especially understanding of subjects which clearly distinguish between a radical interpretation of Islam and the mainstream. By definition, a mainstream Muslim is not only one who practises Islam according to its authentic

" ...the Messenger of Allah said to his wife, "O 'Aishah, Allah is Gentle and loves gentleness, and He rewards for gentleness what He does not reward for harshness or for anything else. "

teachings, but also one who promotes peaceful coexistence and does not impose his values upon others.

Counsellees possess different levels of knowledge in the Islamic education spectrum. The author's own personal engagement with detained Singaporean members of Jemaah Islamiyah (a Southeast Asian affiliate of Al Qaeda) revealed that counsellees can be categorised generally into two groups in terms of Islamic knowledge. Those belonging to the first group are individuals who have had no access to formal or informal Islamic education, and have only been introduced to it with their membership to the terrorist group - an education which is naturally deviant from mainstream Islam. The second group are those individuals who had received some form of mainstream religious education between the beginner and intermediate levels, and have then acquired 'assumed real Islamic teachings' which are violent in nature as they progressed in the terrorist group. The 'learn-unlearn-relearn' technique has proved to be a suitable response to both these categories of individuals.

In the 'learn' phase, the counsellor discusses with the counsellee, among other issues, religious topics that go beyond ritual practices.

For example, there are several Hadith that encourage Muslims to have as many children as possible, and the counsellee could have formed a literal understanding of them. Then the counsellor is able to guide the counsellee to revisit his understanding of them to explain the nuanced conception of quantity as mentioned in the Hadith. Although Prophet Muhammad would be proud of a large quantity of his people during the Day of Resurrection, he would not be proud of a huge number of Muslims if they are largely represented by the illiterate, corrupt and the oppressive. Hence the appropriate response to the Hadith related to procreation is to think of ways of how to build a generation of Muslims who possesses relevant knowledge to serve not only Islam, but also humankind. This is one example of how counsellees can be encouraged to examine issues of relevance to their religious journey.

In the case of 'unlearn', counsellors could be faced with beliefs or thoughts that occur subconsciously or unconsciously - a result of sustained exposure to an idea and its subsequent reinforcement over time. Perhaps, the study of the caliphate and its position in Islamic jurisprudence could serve as an example which is easy to relate. For supporters of the Islamic State of Iraq and Greater Syria (ISIS) terrorist group, the caliphate system is deemed as the only legitimate system of governance in Islam. It is appealing in nature due to its presence in Islamic history. However, when the concept of the caliphate is repeatedly ruminated and viewed solely from a single historical lens, the tendency to arrive at a misconstrued conclusion is high.

Hence, there is a distorted notion among Muslims in general that the establishment of a caliphate is a religious obligation. In this instance, counsellors are duty-bound to present the fact of the matter by presenting works by traditional and modern Muslim scholars on this issue. A *fatwa* or religious edict on the caliphate issued by the former Mufti of Egypt, Sheikh Jad al Haq Aly Jad al Haq on 3 January 1982 (Fatawa al Azhar 1982) is one good source of reference in this regard. When asked the reason why no Muslim community tried to establish an 'Islamic state' which is headed by a caliph, the late Mufti of Egypt stressed that jurists coined the term 'caliph' to refer to the leader who is appointed to manage the political state and the implementation of law, and that the term 'caliph' ceased with the passing of the first caliph, Abu

“ ...there is a distorted notion among Muslims in general that the establishment of a caliphate is a religious obligation. ”

Bakr As-Siddiq, and no one was ever given the title *khalifat ar Rasul* or the 'successor of the Messenger'. Instead, they were referred to as '*amir al mu'minin*' or the 'leader of the believers'. He also affirmed that the term was neither part of religious terminology nor religious law.

Thus, it is crucial to assist counsellees to unsubscribe from false perceptions by providing credible evidence to support arguments against them. This method of learning is beneficial to the counsellee in the long-run as well, as he would be more critical when looking at religious issues and would be encouraged to undertake thorough research and analysis before accepting new ideas. It can be noted that the 'unlearn' phase has a double-edged function because it contributes to the progression of both 'unlearning' and 're-learning' simultaneously. Taking the example cited in the paragraph above, a counsellee is not only guided to identify his mistake in understanding the notion of a caliphate (a process of 'unlearning'), he is also exposed to the bigger picture of the caliphate discourse among scholars, and he ultimately acquires a new set of knowledge that convinces him to abandon the old.

Conclusion

The *da'i-mad'uw* approach reflects a brethren relationship between *da'i*, the guidance provider (counsellor) and *mad'uw*, the receiver (counsellee or violent extremist offender: VEO), which can take the two techniques of '*targheeb* and '*tarheeb*' and 'learn-unlearn-relearn' in terrorist rehabilitation. The *da'i-mad'uw* approach is also the way Islam was propagated throughout history: the learned one aspires to share his/her knowledge with his/her brothers and sisters in order to elevate them to a better standing as a

Muslim. It starts with encouraging the other to seek God's pleasure by performing what was commanded. The receiving party is given the assurance that all good deeds will be rewarded by God (*targheeb*). At the same time, he will also be reminded not to transgress the boundaries set by Islam, and that failing to adhere will result in God's wrath (*tarheeb*).

The ethic in the propagation of Islam dictates that a *da'i* (counsellor) must not disparage his target audience, who is the *mad'uw* (counselee/VEO). The counsellor is to put across his message in a very subtle and diplomatic manner, so as not to offend the counselee, or create an antagonistic relationship. The *mad'uw* has the right to be taught what he ought to know from credible sources (the stage which is identified as 'learning' in rehabilitation). The *mad'uw* deserves to be corrected so that he can disassociate himself from false beliefs ('unlearn') and adopt good values to replace bad ones ('re-learn').

By undergoing these phases, the *mad'uw* acquires a new knowledge set as well as familiarity with an analytical process that helps him to replace dubious or deviated understanding with a sound and legitimate one. The reception level is also high when a *mad'uw* feels that he is being treated as a brother instead of as a detained VEO. Thus, a forthcoming attitude towards reform by the counselee can be achieved through the *da'i-mad'uw* approach to rehabilitation, once the counselee is convinced that he is being approached by a brother who is only concerned about his religious and psychological well-being. The soft *da'i-mad'uw* approach has been found to be effective even within the four walls of a detention facility.

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The Holy Quran.

Female Members of ISIS: A Greater Need for Rehabilitation

Nur Irfani Binte Saripi

There is a need for a rehabilitation programme specifically catering to female jihadists and would-be jihadists, given how young women and girls as young as 15-years-old have reportedly travelled to Syria to join the Islamic State of Iraq and Greater Syria (ISIS). These include the wives of fighters as well as those who are directly radicalised and recruited by the group, primarily through social media. Rehabilitation and deradicalisation are necessary to ensure that these individuals will not pose a threat to their respective home countries upon their return.

Introduction

With the rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and Greater Syria (ISIS), reports of recruitment and radicalisation of women and girls to join ISIS in various capacities in support of the group's illegitimate state-building efforts has been increasing. In January 2015, an Institute for Strategic Dialogue report revealed that 550 females from Western countries have travelled to join various militant groups in Syria and Iraq (Hoyle et al. 2015).

In the past, ISIS discouraged women from engaging in battle. For example, on 9 April 2014, an ISIS female migrant from northern Britain (known by her pseudonym, 'Umm Layth') quoting Omar Al Shishani, a Chechen military commander for ISIS, wrote that ISIS does not require women fighters as the male fighters are sufficient for the group. This is in line with ISIS' claim which holds that women should be taking care of children and providing logistical support to their mujahidin husbands as well as other fighters.

However, contrary to this claim, ISIS has created two all-women female brigades: Al Khansaa and Umm Al Rayan. Formed in Raqqa, Syria in February 2014, the females in both of these brigades are engaged in policing operations often involving violence: meting out punishment for females committing acts perceived as ‘un-Islamic’. Specifically, these female police punish by arresting or beating women not covered up to the extent dictated by ISIS and those seen in public without a male chaperone. They also conduct screening at ISIS’ checkpoints to expose male activists hiding in women’s clothing to avoid being detected. At present, 25 European women are suspected to have joined Al Khansaa (Al Fares 2015). The Al Khansaa female brigade is likely named after an Arab Muslim female poet whose four sons died in the Battle of Qadisiyyah, a decisive battle between Muslims and Romans during the first period of Muslim expansion. The battle led to the Islamic conquest of Persia, now known as Iran. The name Umm Al Rayan was chosen due to the significance of the term ‘umm’, which means mother in Arabic, while Muslims believe that Al Rayan is the name of one of the gates to Paradise.

ISIS female members play important roles as propagandists and recruiters, including on social media. They share pictures of their life in Iraq or Syria over social media websites such as Twitter, Facebook and Tumblr, and provide tips on how to travel there. Often, these female propagandists and recruiters lace their discourse with misinterpreted religious narratives, hashtags and youngster slang (making them relatable to the youth). There has been evidence of a few ISIS female members who use their Tumblr social media accounts to radicalise and recruit individuals.

Three such ISIS female members are known by their user names, ‘Umm Layth’, ‘Umm Ubaydah’ and ‘Shams’, who have been using their Tumblr social media accounts to interact with their followers and answer various queries from potential recruits. Often, their followers express an interest in making *hijrah* (‘migration’) to the ISIS Islamic State, and pose questions on matters ranging from the safest route to travel to Syria, to the qualities a mujahidin fighter would look for in a prospective wife. On their social media accounts, Umm Ubaydah and Shams have also shared their personal experience of learning Arabic in Syria, and provided assurance to their concerned potential recruits that language will not be an issue for them. Details on

“ ISIS female members play important roles as propagandists and recruiters, including on social media. ”

their accounts reveal that Umm Ubaydah and Umm Layth are also using KiK and Surespot mobile messaging applications, and have also shared their user names with those who have expressed interest in travelling to Syria and Iraq. KiK and Surespot are mobile messaging applications that are said to be relatively more secure than mainstream mobile messaging applications, particularly due to the fact that users may share information discreetly by initiating a conversation through their user names without having to disclose their mobile numbers (Carolyn et al. 2015).

ISIS Ideology

ISIS places high regard for jihad and justifies indiscriminate violence for the same. ISIS also places emphasis on the Islamic concept of *al-wala’ wal baraa’* (‘loyalty and disavowal’ – which, in the context of ISIS, means placing one’s loyalty to the leader and group, and disavowing all others who do not subscribe to ISIS ideology). Furthermore, ISIS also believes in the need for *bai’ah* (pledging of one’s allegiance towards the leader), as well as in both martyrdom and Sharia (Islamic Law). However, ISIS ideology is based on a violent, unsubstantiated and incorrect interpretation of these concepts.

To radicalise and recruit individuals, ISIS intensely exploits three Islamic concepts. First, ISIS holds that it is an individual’s obligation to perform *hijrah* (‘migration’) to the so-called ISIS caliphate. This has mobilised thousands of young Muslims, both male and female, around the world to travel to Syria and Iraq without seeking their parents’ or spouse’s permission. In this, ISIS members generally align themselves with the opinion of the Palestinian Sunni scholar and founding member of Al Qaeda, Abdullah Yusuf Al Azzam, who wrote: “If the enemy attacks a Muslim border or enter any Islamic land, then jihad becomes *fard ayn* [a mandatory obligation

for Muslims across the country and those in surrounding countries]. In such a situation, permission [to retaliate] is not required.”

Secondly, ISIS has exploited the Hadith (sayings of the Prophet Muhammad), including the call to unite under the ‘army of the black flag’. ISIS, like many other terrorist groups, has made use of the powerful symbolism inherent in the display of the black battle flag, which contains the words of the *shahadah* (proclamation of Islamic faith) (Hassan and Bahari 2014). Thirdly, ISIS has taught its female members to believe that a woman married to a mujahidin will receive a share of her husband’s divine rewards, aside from the rewards that God gives them for maintaining homes, bearing children and nurturing their children into the next generation of mujahidin. ISIS ideology also holds that when their husbands die as martyrs in the battlefield, they will also bring their wives to Paradise. Thus, female recruits to ISIS are strongly encouraged to get married to mujahidin. In blogs written by Malaysian and a few Western *muhajiraats* (female migrants) based in Syria and Iraq, the women also tie the need to marry a mujahidin with a practical reason: they claim that their movements are restricted under ISIS as women are generally not allowed to be seen in public without a male chaperone.

Threat of ISIS’ Female Recruits

Across Europe alone, there is an estimated 600 returnees from Syria, and this is a growing concern in their respective home countries (Greenwood 2014). In April 2015, Turkish officials claimed that Turkey had deported over 6,000 jihadists who tried to cross its borders (Pasha, Sherlock and Walton 2015). Many are also arrested before they even manage to leave their home countries, such as the 14-year-old Malaysian girl who was detained recently at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport en-route to joining ISIS (*Straits Times* 2015).

In March 2015, 16 Indonesians were seized in Turkey while trying to cross the borders to Syria. Eleven of them were children, four were women and one was a male adult (Quiano 2015). In February 2015, it was reported that three teenage girls from Britain had fled to Syria after boarding a flight from Gatwick to Istanbul, Turkey and then crossing over into Syria. These British girls are an example of the over 550 female migrants from Western countries who have successfully crossed borders into Syria.

“ ...ISIS has taught its female members to believe that a woman married to a mujahidin will receive a share of her husband’s divine rewards... ”

While there is little indication so far to show that these three will be returning to their homes anytime soon, the possibility that they would decide to return at a later date should remain a pertinent concern for the government. In the same month, a young British woman of 21 years was arrested by Turkish officials in Ankara while attempting to cross over from Turkey into Syria, and the authorities uncovered messages and images on her mobile phone indicating that she had made plans to join ISIS (Greenwood 2015).

The fact that some women have either successfully made their way to Syria and Iraq, or have been arrested while attempting to travel to Syria and Iraq is of notable concern. Having been exposed to ISIS ideology and practice, the eventual return of these individuals to their home countries – along of course with male returnees – poses a serious threat that cannot be discounted.

Disillusionment with ISIS has been identified as a reason for females to return from Syria. For instance, in October 2014, two Austrian teenage girls aged 15 and 17 years, who had married fighters in Syria and gotten pregnant, expressed their desire to return home after being disillusioned by the life in Syria (Charlton 2014). In March 2015, a young Belgian woman was detained at the Charleroi Airport by Turkish authorities while attempting to return from Syria after eight months with her partner and 4-year-old son.

Mother and son were sent back to Belgium, while the mother's partner was taken into custody in Turkey, and authorities are presently still investigating the reasons for their return (*The News* 2015).

For the women and their children, losing their husbands in battle could serve as a motivation to return, especially if they do not wish to remarry. Having been exposed to life under ISIS, many of these individuals need to undergo rehabilitation programmes to ensure that they are able to reintegrate into society, and will not pose a threat to their home countries.

Rehabilitation of Women Involved in Terrorism

Although women have been directly involved in terrorism activities related to Al Qaeda or its affiliates, there has not been much focus on rehabilitation efforts targeting these entities. However, the rehabilitation of female jihadists, focusing on countering the sources of their violent ideologies and the specific narratives used for their recruitment and radicalisation and successfully reintegrating them back into society, is as important as the rehabilitation of their male counterparts. Furthermore, like male returnees, female returnees who have returned from the ravages of war and from witnessing the atrocities carried out by ISIS may also need to be treated for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

There are three aspects which need to be taken into consideration at the start of the rehabilitation process. The first is an assessment of the extent to which these women are indoctrinated. This includes women who were seized before they could travel to Syria or Iraq who are ideologically driven, and those female returnees from Syria who could pose an imminent threat to society, given their experience and ideological indoctrination living under ISIS. In certain cases, based on the severity of threat they pose, women may need to be put in detention until fully rehabilitated. However, most significantly, in the rehabilitation process detainees must be treated as members of the country and society with the objective to reintegrate them.

The second aspect is understanding their motivations for travelling to Syria and Iraq. Some examples of possible motivations for travelling to Syria and Iraq include: ideological belief such as 'sisterhood' (related to the perceived unity of the *ummah*, or the Muslim nation, under ISIS),

“ ...the rehabilitation of female jihadists, focusing on countering the sources of their violent ideologies and specific narratives used for their recruitment and radicalisation and reintegrating them back into society is important... ”

practical reasons such as the need to accompany their husbands and search for identity or meaning in life. The psychologist John Horgan stated that what motivates these individuals to travel to Syria and Iraq is an innate need for a sense of belonging to something special (Banco 2015).

The specific motivations driving these females to travel to Syria and Iraq need to be studied further. Are these women primarily drawn to the call for the creation of the ISIS caliphate? Are these women active in the virtual domain as recruiters and propagandists, and how influential are they online? Are they paid? Were they former members of the Al Khansaa or Umm Al Rayan brigades? An accurate understanding of what motivates these women as a group as well as individuals is required to develop effective rehabilitation programmes for them along with tailored counter-narratives. The third aspect is developing an understanding of the motivations of those returning, as presently 'disillusionment with life under ISIS' in general terms is the most commonly cited reason for female returnees. Understanding their specific experiences will help create an impactful rehabilitation programme.

A social and aftercare component would be crucial in a rehabilitation programme for ISIS women or female returnees. Especially so as

it is important for them to pick-up where they have left off in their education. Their other needs and those of their families also have to be addressed, especially if they return with children. One such example of a social and aftercare facility is Singapore's Inter Agency After-Care Group (ACG) set up in 2002, which focuses on both the welfare of detainee's families and educating the youth against radicalisation.

Also, it can be noted that a rehabilitation programme for women can be supported by counter-ideological messages by prominent religious figures, specifically in relation to condemning terrorist groups like ISIS, including the 120 Muslim scholars from around the globe who came together to condemn ISIS and the Mufti of Singapore who did the same.

Conclusion

The targeted rehabilitation of women jihadists is critical since, even as they may not be on the frontline in the battlefield, they propagate ISIS ideology, are among the militants' strongest supporters and they are the ones who nurture children who could potentially become the next generation of jihadists. While the number of women travelling to Syria to join ISIS has increased, so have the number of returnees. ISIS returnees pose potential security threats unless effectively rehabilitated.

To be sure, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to rehabilitation to address the threat posed by female jihadists. Although ISIS is a global threat, rehabilitation needs to be tailored to a local context, and in the rehabilitation of women, further tailored to address female experiences under ISIS. It must be understood however in general that rehabilitation cannot be a stand-alone programme vis-à-vis soft measures to counter-terrorism. On the religious front, Muslims' voice for moderation and counter-ideology needs to be widely circulated and promoted both online and in society to counter extremist narratives. This should also be complemented with community engagement programmes that aim to mobilise the whole of society. Effective community engagement programmes can serve to prevent radicalism from escalating into violent extremism within some segments of the community, and can also serve as a proactive approach to safeguard vulnerable members of the community from the threat of radicalisation.

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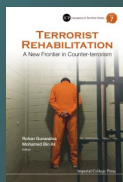
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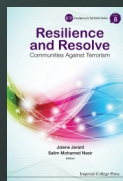


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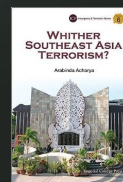
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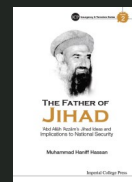
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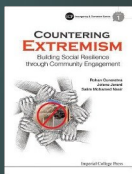
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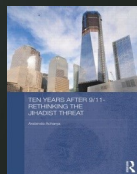
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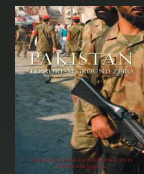
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