

## **Key Considerations in Counterideological Work against Terrorist Ideology**

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*This study attempts to highlight the importance of counterideological work in combating terrorism and the key considerations in implementing it effectively. The study proposes one important approach for counterideology, suggests partners, and highlights pitfalls. It also addresses the link between grievances and counterideology, and the role of non-Muslims in counterideology. The study does not provide a comprehensive perspective on counterideological work but provides the framework within which counterideological work against Muslim terrorist groups may be flushed out.*

### **Why Ideological Response?**

Many scholars and analysts have said that terrorism cannot be defeated either by military or law and order means only. It requires a multipronged and multifaceted approach, which includes strategies to eliminate the roots and causes of terrorism.

One of the root causes of terrorism is the ideology that drives and motivates terrorists. This ideology can be ethno-nationalistic or politico-religious in nature or others.

Terrorism is committed when opportunity, motivation, and capability meet and ideology is one of many important elements that motivates a person to commit terrorism. Muslim terrorists, and Al Qaeda especially, are not excluded. In fact, the role of ideology is especially significant for Al Qaeda and its associates.

Prevention of terrorism requires the elimination of at least one of the three elements mentioned. One is motivation, which may be driven by an ideology.

Although it has been widely accepted that counterideology or ideological response to extremist groups' propaganda is an important part of counterterrorism strategy, up until now there is no one single concrete and coherent doctrine or framework for conducting it. This must be overcome to ensure the success of counterideological work against extremists' ideas. This article does not provide a comprehensive perspective on counterideological work but seeks to contribute in filling in the gap.

Received 27 October 2005; accepted 10 November 2005.

This article was originally written as a dissertation for the Degree of Master of Science (Strategic Studies) of the Nanyang Technological University, Singapore.

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## **Ideological Response: Its Importance, Functions, and Benefits**

### ***Ideology as the “Centre of Gravity” and Tool for Rallying Support***

Dr. Stephen Biddle concluded 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, counterterrorist efforts will inevitably fail. This requires combining a war of military means and war of ideas to prevent their replacement from among the generally politically uncommitted Muslims. He asserted that military means should not be allowed to overpower the ideological means. He is of the view that the center of gravity in the war against terrorism lies in the hearts and minds of politically uncommitted Muslims. Terrorism is not the real enemy as declared in the “War on Terrorism.” It is just a tactic.<sup>1</sup>

Often at its formative period, a terrorist organization will go through “a period of mobilisation of discontent” in which the ideology is formulated to help rally people toward common grievances.<sup>2</sup>

### ***Three Types of Terrorists and the Role of Ideology***

Generally, there are three types of terrorists: the Political Strategist, the Radical Theorist, and the Militant Activist.

- 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 ideologue 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 ends, not the means.
- *Militant activists* are those who are drawn to violence as an end in itself, either as a means of venting anger, or as a source of excitement and adventure. Even without any ideology, they will still be doing what they want to anyway.<sup>3</sup>

Based on these descriptions, 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, 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 drives. The Militant Activist who is purely emotionally inclined toward violence may not have enough discipline to plan and sustain effective terrorist activities, whereas the Political Strategist and the Radical Theorist without violent inclinations are likely to opt for other less dangerous means.<sup>4</sup>

### ***Neutralizing Threat from Freelance Terrorists***

Counterideological work is also important in minimizing the threat of potential freelance terrorists, who may not be members of any group, but drawn into terrorism because they share the ideology or common grievances.<sup>5</sup> Terrorism committed by individuals not affiliated to any group is a known occurrence, which is increasingly becoming a threat

due to the public availability and easy access to advanced and multipurpose technology.<sup>6</sup> Timothy McVeigh, the Oklahoma city bomber,<sup>7</sup> Baruch Goldstein, the attacker of the Cave of the Patriarch in Hebron that killed 29 Muslims during Friday prayer,<sup>8</sup> and Theodore Kaczynski, known as the Unabomber,<sup>9</sup> are good examples.

### ***Ideologically Driven Terrorists***

The profile of Muslim extremists shows that not all of them commit terrorism because of poverty or economic marginalization.

Dr. Ayman Az-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 transferring to another American university, where he obtained an engineering degree. Dr. Azahari Husin, believed to be the Jemaah Islamiyah's bomb expert, was a lecturer at Malaysia Technological University. He holds a doctorate in engineering.<sup>10</sup> At least two of the Jemaah Islamiyah members detained in Singapore are holders of diplomas in engineering.<sup>11</sup> Jason Burke described this type of jihadis as "intellectual activists"; "men who can justify their attraction to radical Islam in relatively sophisticated terms."<sup>12</sup>

The two explanations to this phenomenon could be psychological or ideological difficulties. These educated people could either have psychological problems or were driven by ideologies in which economic considerations were not a main factor.

### ***Ideology and Causes of Terrorism***

One may view the cause for terrorism at three levels. At the most superficial or immediate level, the cause may be seen to be implacable hatred, which drives terrorists to kill others, even by sacrificing their own lives. Proximate causes usually invoke historical and economic roots, such as the Muslim grievance that they are victims of a superpower's unfair policies, the Russian government's and its predecessors' long repression of the Chechen people, and the economic backwardness of the Pattani people in the Southern Thailand. Deeper causes mainly concern worldviews held by the terrorists, such as the bipolar view of good versus evil, the notion of "us" against "them," seeking the pleasure of God, and salvation from hell in the afterlife.<sup>13</sup>

### ***Ideology and Al Qaeda's Propaganda Tool***

It is evident that ideology plays a role in Al Qaeda's propaganda to attract followers and 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 (*hadits*) and opinions of classical Muslim scholars, 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 is the only means to change the current fate of the Muslims, Muslims should be in constant war against non-Muslims until they obtain glory for Islam, Muslims are obligated to re-establish the Caliphate, killing oneself is not suicidal but an act of martyrdom and the ultimate way is to sacrifice for the religion, and that Allah the Great will not neglect one who strives for the glory of His religion. Its ideas are founded on concepts such as submission and allegiance is to Allah alone and the supremacy of Islam above all.<sup>14</sup>

Al Qaeda views that 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 realized.” No compromise or concession will satisfy them ultimately except a “global imposition of their interpretation of the faith.”<sup>15</sup> Therefore, refuting the ideas will help to neutralize the threat of Al Qaeda.

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. Hence, there will always be many others who will continue with the struggle and be ready to replace the losses. Such a claim may be dismissed, but it shows that Al Qaeda strives to base its organization on its ideology, and not on individuals.<sup>16</sup>

What has been said so far clearly shows the importance and role of ideology in its recruitment, indoctrination and gathering of support and sympathy. Jason Burke described Al Qaeda as “less an organization than an ideology.”<sup>17</sup> As such, delegitimizing and dismantling extremist ideology, indeed, is one of the important aspects of combating terrorism by Al Qaeda.<sup>18</sup>

In fact, the real target in the battle against Muslim extremist groups should not be the groups themselves, but their ideology, which should be stopped from spreading beyond their current members.<sup>19</sup>

## **Concept, Objectives, and Target Groups for CounterIdeological Work**

### ***Adopting a Counterinsurgency Approach***

Counterterrorism is not very different from counterinsurgency. It is a battle against an organized group motivated by a cause or ideology seeking to achieve its political aim through protracted campaign. By protracting the campaign, it seeks to win over the support of the people, thus weakening its enemy, which will eventually enable it to launch a final blow. A classic example of a successful insurgency campaign was the North Vietnamese Army and Viet Cong’s struggle against America during the Vietnam War.

In counterinsurgency, the people are “the center of gravity” because the government and the army not only need their support, but also because the insurgents emerge from the people as well. 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.”<sup>20</sup>

However, this does not mean that winning the hearts and minds of the insurgents themselves are not important, because should the insurgents 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.” General William Slim, commander of the Fourteenth Army in Burma during World War II, defined “morale” as a positive “state of mind” that has three components:

- “spiritual” confidence that the cause is just;
- “intellectual” confidence that the goal can be attained; and
- “material” confidence that the means of attaining the goal are available.<sup>21</sup>

One of the success stories of the battle for hearts and minds was that conducted during Malayan Emergency by the British authority in Malaya, and subsequently the Malaysian

government against local communist insurgents. During the Malayan Emergency, the threat against communist insurgents was countered not only through military means, but also through a comprehensive strategy encompassing ideological, economic, social, and law and order approaches.

On the ideological front, Muslim scholars were engaged effectively to counter communism as being against Islam, the religion of the predominant ethnic group, the Malays. This contained the influence of communism to largely the Chinese only.

As for the general population, especially the Chinese, their hearts and minds were won by attending to their needs.<sup>22</sup> For example, the Chinese were given rights of citizenship, which helped to provide them with social and political security.<sup>23</sup>

The successful counterinsurgency strategy of battling for the hearts and minds of the people holds many lessons for ideological response work against terrorist ideology. Admittedly, some modifications from counterinsurgency ideological propaganda may be required for counterterrorism ideological response, due to the specific characteristics of current threat of terrorism itself.

A comprehensive approach encompassing ideological response is necessary due to the fact that terrorism, like an insurgency, is rooted on various factors. In the case of Al Qaeda, its inclination toward terrorism is not only because of the ideology but also fueled by the context that provides them with the justification of their misinterpretation of Islam. The context also contributes in motivating Muslims to embrace the ideology. In many statements, Al Qaeda clearly strives to position itself as the champion for Muslims grievances, for example, in Kashmir under the rule of the predominantly Hindu India, the long oppression of Muslims in Chechnya by the atheist Russians, the suffering of the Palestinian at the hands of the Jews, the death of civilian Iraqis due to the economic blockade by the international community and the hypocrisy of the United States's foreign policies.

### ***Ascertaining Objectives and Identifying Target Groups***

The next step in counterideology work, after understanding its position within counterterrorism, is to have clear objectives. Important objectives for ideological response work should be to

- immunize general Muslims from extremist ideology,
- persuade less fanatic members of terrorist groups to abandon the ideology,
- create doubt and dissension within terrorist organisation,
- rehabilitate detained terrorist members, and
- to minimize non-Muslims' anxiety and suspicion by presenting alternatives to terrorist ideology.

It is important to note that the primary target group of the ideological response is not the terrorists but the majority of Muslims. The aim is to provide them with a correct understanding of the religion that is relevant to the contemporary context and current priorities, so that they will not be easily influenced by the terrorists' propaganda. The majority of Muslims should be "immunized" against the viral threat of extremist ideologies that are freely disseminated through the Internet.<sup>24</sup>

It might be impossible to persuade any fanatic hardcore members of Muslim terrorist groups to give up their ideology. Having been promised a place in paradise if they persevere in their cause, they will hardly be amenable to other inducements. However, in the battle for hearts and minds, the majority of Muslims can be convinced to desist Al Qaeda's ideology and to defuse any motivation to support it.<sup>25</sup>

Stephen Biddle wrote, “. . . so in this conflict we must look to a synergistic interaction between violence to root out terrorists and persuasion to prevent their replacement from among the great mass of politically uncommitted Muslims.” He is of the view that the real challenge is to keep Al Qaeda’s size fixed because sustained effort will eventually destroy any organization of fixed size, although it may be slow and laborious due to the covert nature of the process. In contrast, if Al Qaeda continues to succeed in recruiting new members through its ideological propaganda, or persuading non-members to conduct terrorist acts through sharing of ideas, then no military effort will be sufficient to prevail over it.<sup>26</sup>

Terrorist groups can only persist through popular support. Conversely, such support also “plays a fundamental role in the group’s decline.” Most terrorist groups disappear after an average of six and a half years of activity, due to the “disintegration of social support due to public backlash against terrorist acts, and in the fact that some of the issues raised by sympathizers were addressed.”<sup>27</sup>

Another important target group, which is usually overlooked in counterideological work, are the non-Muslims at large. The aim is to provide them with alternative perspectives to terrorist ideas that hopefully will reduce their anxiety, concern, and misunderstanding of Islam and Muslims. In a multiracial and multireligious country, this is an important aspect of social harmony, which counterterrorism strategy needs to preserve and protect. Often, terrorism is also aims to destabilize a society or a country. It may be a direct or indirect objective because instability will make counterterrorism operation more complicated and difficult.

The Singapore government’s White Paper on The Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) Arrests and The Threat of Terrorism reported how the Singapore JI cell planned to attack key Singapore installations and to misrepresent them as acts of aggression by the Malaysian government. Their intention was to create distrust and animosity between “Muslim Malaysia” and “Chinese Singapore” and so cause ethnic conflict in both countries. By doing so, Muslims in Malaysia and Singapore would then respond to calls of jihad and turn both countries into Ambon-like crisis.<sup>28</sup>

That is why many country leaders have made appeals to non-Muslim citizens of their country not to blame Islam and Muslims for the tragic attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.<sup>29</sup>

It can be concluded that there are three broad targets audience for counterideological effort. They are members of terrorist organizations and their sympathizers, general Muslims, and non-Muslims at large.

### ***Mapping the Ideas***

The first step is to understand the ideology and main ideas of the extremist groups, especially Al Qaeda and its regional affiliate like Jemaah Islamiyah. Efforts should be made to draw up a key map of important ideas, which make up the belief system of the group.

The aim is to have a comprehensive view of the ideology. This will facilitate in devising appropriate response and establishing tools to monitor ideas on the ground.<sup>30</sup>

Sun Tzu wrote, “know yourself and know your enemy.” Obviously, this is logical because, without proper understanding of the opposing view, no counterideology work will be effective and no correct alternative ideas can be offered. Clear understanding of the ideology also helps to distinguish the group’s features better and so minimize the danger of mistakenly attacking wrong ideas and groups. Needlessly antagonizing others surely will only further complicate the problem.

To facilitate the mapping of the ideas, serious effort should be put into collating and compiling related materials. Specialists in the area should be recruited to analyze and to offer criticism and alternative views.<sup>31</sup>

### ***Important Approach***

Equally important after understanding the idea is to adopt the appropriate approach. In this respect, it should be recognized that the “conventional lens” originating from the West might not necessarily work in understanding the cultural realities behind Muslim extremists; terrorism. They may not be able to prescribe the best approach.

There are various approaches in responding to the ideas of the terrorists but any meaningful approach should take into account the theological nature of terrorists’ ideas, couched in juristic and jurisprudential pronouncements. Muslim terrorists do not believe in Western philosophy and ideals, considering them heretical.

It is also important to note that Muslims by and large are more comfortable with theological and juristic interpretations of religious questions. The opinion of the *ulama* still carries more weight than that of other scholars.<sup>32</sup> This is an important point to bear in mind, in any effort to get the ideological response to succeed and be widely accepted.<sup>33</sup> This underscores the importance of the theological and juristic approach in the ideological war against terrorism.

What is meant by the theological and juristic approach is the classical *ulama*’s methodology of *ijtihad* or deduction from the Quran and the *hadits*,<sup>34</sup> based primarily on three important sciences popularly known as *Usul Fiqh*,<sup>35</sup> *Usul Tafsir*,<sup>36</sup> and *Usul Hadits*.<sup>37</sup> This approach requires an exhaustive study of the classical *ulama*’s texts to investigate their stand on the pertinent issues. If the ideas propagated by the Muslim terrorists contradicts the opinions of those *ulama*, then it is a potent means to proof the terrorists wrong. This is especially so because Muslim terrorists argue for their ideas using the same approach, within what some call the classical or traditional approach.

Understanding this approach is important in developing “forensic theology” into a valuable intelligence tool. “Forensic theology” is also sometimes known as “ideological surveillance.” France was probably the first nation to use this tool. In 1986, French security services worked with experts on Islam to learn the trademarks of extremist thought, and it have helped them to identify and disrupt militant cells and plots. The tool is used to authenticate terrorist documents, identify perpetrators, and targets for surveillance. Sometimes, it is more effective than conventional intelligence practices.<sup>38</sup>

Stephen Grey cited one example, which happened in France. A group of religious experts listening to sermons in various mosques pinpointed three clerics as probable extremists. Police investigators then found that all three had links to a terrorist group. They were expelled from France.<sup>39</sup>

It is also interesting to consider Dr. Stephen Biddle’s proposal for “a third way,” which is “neither separatist extremism nor imposed Westernism.” The aim is not to approach the counterideological 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 view are now rejected.”<sup>40</sup>

He is of the view that Al Qaeda and mainstream Muslims are now so far apart and 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 alternatives

that help to change the repressive and corrupted political regimes seen by many Muslims as inconsistent with their ideals.<sup>41</sup>

Both the “theological and juristic approach” and the “third way” can 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.

Most important is to note that whatever approach is used, the war on terrorism will fail if it is perceived as a war on Islam. This will give credence to the call for Muslim solidarity in a jihad against America, thus falling into the trap of Al Qaeda.<sup>42</sup>

### ***Important Partners***

The proposed “theological and juristic approach” as the primary approach for the “third way” will not be effective without the involvement of the *ulama*. Scholars who are not trained in this field still have a role to play in counterideological work, but they may not have the know-how and religious legitimacy to respond to the theological and juristic arguments of the extremists.<sup>43</sup>

*Understanding Overlapping Grievances.* Due to the overlapping grievances of general Muslims and the extremists, or the fact that the extremists are trying to manipulate Muslims grievances for their cause, one can often find a voice or view of a Muslim scholar that overlaps with those of the extremists, especially in criticizing the West, and in addressing the Israel–Palestine conflict and the establishment of an Islamic state.<sup>44</sup> One such example is Yusuf Al-Qaradhawi. He is criticized for supporting suicide attacks by Palestinian resistance groups against Israeli civilians.<sup>45</sup>

In this respect, it is important to ensure a holistic approach in assessing such scholars. It is not prudent to deny such scholars’ roles in combating extremism and terrorism in society just because of a few views that one finds disagreeable.

In the case of Yusuf Al-Qaradhawi, despite his strong support for the Palestinian resistance and a hard-line position against Israel and American policies, he has devoted more than a decade in combating extremist ideas among Muslims through his seminal writings and speeches. Contrary to public expectations, he issued various *fatwas* condemning perpetrators of terrorism. He condemned the 9/11 attack and Bali bombing. He also ruled that hostage taking, kidnapping, targeting civilians by militants and killing of prisoners of war are prohibited in Islam.<sup>46</sup>

Amien Rais, former speaker of the People’s Consultative Assembly on Indonesia and former Chairman of Muhammadiyah, is another good case in point. He was known for his role in the reform movement in Indonesia and a strong advocate of political reform and human rights. He embraced interfaith dialogue and denounced terrorism but at other times he showed support for Islamist policies and some of his views can be perceived as anti-Semitic and anti-Chinese.<sup>47</sup>

Although the broad moderate–radical categorization is a useful means of essentializing differences of tendencies among Muslims scholars, one should note that making a clear distinction between the “moderate” and the “radical” is difficult because in reality there is no such neat dichotomy. Community and political leaders all over the world behave in ways that defy such easy categorization. On certain issues, Muslim scholars can be “moderate” and “progressive” but on others they can be Islamist or sectarian. Thus, a more subtle or nuanced approach is needed when characterizing Muslim scholars and Islamic groups.<sup>48</sup> Amien Rais (mentioned earlier) and Gus Dur, former president of Indonesia and leader of Nahdhatul Ulama, the largest Islamic organization in Indonesia, are good examples.



In this respect, Jason Burke wrote that many of those who express their sympathy with bin Laden and take satisfaction at his ability to strike the United States do not genuinely subscribe to his ideology, neither their anti-Western sentiment translate into rejection of Western values. This, he said, is indicated in surveys of public opinion in the Arab world by Zogby International and Pew Research center for the People and the Press that reveal strong support for Western practices such as elected government, personal liberty, and economic choice. Burke also highlighted that although Islamists often shared similar rhetoric such as “Islam is the solution” they disagree over what is the solution and how it might be achieved. Some Islamists, despite their criticism against contemporary political systems, still “want to appropriate the structures of the state, in varying degrees, Islamize them, usually with a view toward promoting greater social justice and outflanking undemocratic and powerful regimes.” They are still useful as interlocutors for the West. “They should not be rejected out of hand as ‘Islamists’; refusing to engage them only allows the extremists to dominate the political discourse.”<sup>49</sup>

A more appropriate approach is to assess a scholar by looking at his views, opinions, and works in various issues, instead of judging him based on a specific issue only. Despite the hard-line position taken by such scholars in several issues, co-opting them into counterideological work provides opportunities for both parties to engage each other. This will facilitate better understanding of each other’s perspective, which will help to build trust and confidence toward each other. Often, such engagement also helps to moderate the scholars’ view.

Tolerating differences in political issues is a primary requirement in attaining the common goal of neutralizing extremist ideas, which are at the root of terrorism.<sup>50</sup> Secular government and Muslim scholars should join hand in the fight against terrorism despite their disagreement in issues like the role of religion in politics or the role of women in society or the limit of civil liberties.

*Classical Scholars.* Prudence is especially needed in dealing with the opinions of the classical Muslim scholars from centuries ago. One cannot definitively ascertain the link between the opinion of classical Muslim scholars with the ideology of Muslim terrorist groups. Ibn Taimiyah’s works, for example, are alleged by some as the source of Muslim terrorist groups’ ideology. But one can also find from his works many opinions that could be used to counter these groups.

Muslim extremists call for armed jihad against corrupt contemporary Muslim rulers. But Ibn Taimiyah said:

He [the Prophet] has ordered them to obey and forbade them from removing the people from their positions and he has ordered them to stand for the truth.<sup>51</sup>

The opinion of the *Ahl Sunnah* [Sunni] settled on the view that fighting must be avoided during civil wars due to the authentic *hadiths* confirmed from the Prophet. They [the *Ahl Sunnah*] then began to mention their creeds. They ordered patience in the face of the injustice of the rulers and [they ordered] avoiding fighting against them. [This was their conclusion] although a number of people of knowledge and had fought in civil wars.<sup>52</sup>

The extremist rules that Muslims who hold positions in un-Islamic governments are apostates. Thus, shedding their blood is justified. However, when Ibn Taimiyah was asked whether Muslims should hold positions in an unIslamic government, he issued a *fatwa* saying:

Praise be to Allah, yes [it is permissible] if he tries to implement justice and eliminate oppression according to his ability, and if his taking up the position is better for the Muslims than if the position were to be given to someone else, and if his authority over the area is better than the authority of another. Indeed, it is *mubah* (permissible) for him to remain in his position and there is no sin for him. In fact, it is preferred that he remains in that position rather than leave it.<sup>53</sup>

He cited the case of Negus, a Muslim ruler in a Christian country of Abyssinia,<sup>54</sup> and Prophet Yusuf's (Joseph) position as court treasurer of an Egyptian king who was not a Muslim.<sup>55</sup>

The extremists are taking a liberal approach in *takfir* (ruling others as apostates). Ibn Taimiyah warned against such practices in his work:

Of the people of knowledge of the *Sunnah* (*hadits*), not to declare those who disagreed with them disbelievers, even if that opponent declared him a disbeliever. This is because *takfir* is a *syariah* ruling and it is not permissible to do it simply as a reciprocal act. . . . Similarly, declaring another person a disbeliever is a right of Allah. Hence, one cannot declare a person an unbeliever save for that person whom Allah and His Messenger have declared a disbeliever [by virtue of a clear and unassailable divine text in the Quran and *Sunnah* that such person is a disbeliever].<sup>56</sup>

Ibn Qayyim, Ibn Taimiyah's famous student, who is often quoted by Muslim extremists, also gave a wider definition of *jihad*, similar to his teacher's view, as opposed to the narrow application of *jihad* by the extremists. The general meaning of *jihad* was explained at length by Ibn Qayyim. He wrote that the Prophet was the best example in fulfilling the obligation of *jihad*. The Prophet, in fact, practiced *jihad* of all varieties and forms; with the heart, mind, and body and by the means of *dakwah* (propagation), explanation, and arms. All of his life was dedicated to *jihad* in all forms. Ibn Qayyim also wrote that *jihad* against oneself precedes *jihad* against the enemies outside, and the former is more important. Indeed as long as one does not perform *jihad* on oneself by fulfilling his obligations to Allah, one will not be able to perform *jihad* against the external enemies. Between the two (oneself and the enemy) is the third enemy, namely Satan.<sup>57</sup>

*Role of Madrasah.* *Madrasahs* should also be made an important partner in this effort, rather than be treated generally as a threat.<sup>58</sup> It is this institution that schooled many moderate Muslim scholars and thinkers.

Usually, *madrasahs* occupy a strategic position because they are the main provider for the right foundation to students keen on learning the mainstream Islam 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.

The *madrasah* and the *ulama* are important conveyors of the message of Islam—peace and compassion. But this can only be achieved if their potential and role are recognized by the governments. A healthier relationship between the *madrasahs*, *ulama*, and the government is crucial in the ideological struggle against extreme militancy.<sup>59</sup>

## Important Considerations for Effective Counterideological Work

### *Avoid Generalization*

It is very important in counterideological work to avoid generalizations, be it in making assessments, analysis, and conclusions.

Giovanni Caracci in his article “Cultural and Contextual Aspects of Terrorism” wrote that in the study of terrorism “it is easy to over-generalize and engage in reductionism.”

He then quoted Walter Reich, “Researchers should take special care to identify the individual 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 that they do.”<sup>60</sup>

Caracci suggested that terrorism must be studied in its cultural/contextual perspective to provide more focus to it. One cannot explain fully the motivation of terrorists without putting their act in its cultural and contextual milieu. For example, terrorist acts carried out by West European groups such as the Red Army from Germany differ significantly from others like the Shining Path in Peru in motivation, and cultural and contextual factors. Similar differences are also evident between nationalistic groups such as Basques to Muslim fundamentalists like the Egyptian Islamic Jihad. In reality the cultural matrix of terrorism differs from case to case.<sup>61</sup>

A study of extremist ideologies will show that it is often characterized by simplistic generalization and reductionism such as a Manichean view that see the world divided into two camps only; the “good” versus the “evil,” or “if you are not with us, you are against us.”

Counterterrorism work should not fall into the same mistake. To be successful, counterideology should be specific in its response and not make sweeping statements or generalizations.

### *Generalisation of Salafi–Wahabi*

One example of generalization is the view that *Salafi/Wahabi* thought is a fertile ground that breeds ideology for extremism and terrorism. In the early period after 9/11, many expressed worries over the *Salafi/Wahabi*.

On the close connection of the *Salafi–Wahabi* relationship, Sheikh Hisham Kabbani views the contemporary *Salafi* movement as the modern outgrowth of the heretical teaching of Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab, the founder of *Wahabi*. He wrote, “In essence, Salafism and Wahabism are the same but the latter is identified by the founder while the former takes the name of the salaf and makes it its own. Yet both Salafism and Wahabism depart from the same belief and practice of the Salaf.”<sup>62</sup> He warns against contemporary *Salafi* and *Wahabi* as a source of radicalism.<sup>63</sup>

Similar views on the *Salafi–Wahabi* connection can be found also in the writing of Quinton Wiktorowicz, entitled *The New Global Threat: Transnational Salafis and Jihad*. He highlights the influence of *Salafi* thought on extremist groups such as the Gamaah Islamiyah in Egypt and the Armed Islamic Group in Algeria. He infers the connection by saying “The Saudi state and its religious hierarchy are the major producers and exporters of Salafi publications, missionary operations and humanitarian assistance and the transnational organization of the movement, which incorporates a myriad of nationalities, render it an effective and influential force in the Muslim world.”<sup>64</sup> In his conclusion he alluded that all *Salafis* carry the same view toward jihad as the means for spreading Islam. There is no “disagreement over whether jihad is needed, but rather the timing of any war.”<sup>65</sup>

Jason Burke also categorized *Wahabis* as *Salafi*. He described bin Laden and his fellow extremists as “millinerian, fundamentalist, reformist, revivalist, Wahhabi/Salafi and, at least in their rootedness in modernity if not their programme, Islamist.”<sup>66</sup>

Simon Reeve wrote for the Independent (London):

Since the creation of the state, the House of Saud has partnered with clerics who espouse the strict form of Islam derived from the 250-year-old teachings of a preacher called Muhammad bin Abd al-Wahhab. Mercy and tolerance are hallmarks of Islam, but Wahhabi teaching declares that Muslims who do not adhere to his particular version of Islam are apostates, and thus deserving of death. For decades, strict Wahhabism has taught that Christians and Jews are infidels and heretics. Wahhabi clerics control education in Saudi, and they have raised many youngsters to hate.<sup>67</sup>

Mona Eltahawy, in her article *The Wahhabi Threat to Islam*, also wrote, “It is long past time for Muslims to question the Wahhabi ideology that is pulling the rug out from under Saudi life, for it is that same ideology that has been involved in militant movements throughout the Muslim world for years.”<sup>68</sup>

Warren Fernandez, senior journalist at the *Straits Times*, wrote, “For some time, thoughtful commentators have been saying that the war on terror would not be won unless and until something was done to root out the source of the cancer in Saudi Arabia.” He then refers the cancer to Wahhabism, “the obscurantist, severe and extreme form of Islam that Saudi Arabia has been supporting and exporting, including to this part of the world.”<sup>69</sup>

However, the International Crisis Group (ICG) pointed out:

One result of the “war on terror” in Indonesia has been increased attention to the country’s links with religious institutions in the Middle East and the puritanical form of Islam known as salafism. Particularly, outside observers but some Indonesians as well, tend to assume that salafism is alien to Indonesian Islam, is growing by leaps and bounds, and is dangerous because it promotes violence. All three notions are misleading.<sup>70</sup>

### ***Various Colours of Salafi***

*Salafi* is wider than Wahabism. *Salafi* thought has existed in the Muslim community for hundreds of years and has spread worldwide. Like many other school of thought, *Salafi* is not homogenous. It consists of various sub-cultures and orientations, from moderate to extreme.<sup>71</sup>

A good case in point is the Muhammadiyah, the second largest Islamic organization in Indonesia, with millions of followers. It has been recognized and has proved itself as a moderate organization. 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 practice *Salafi–Wahabi* methodology in matters pertaining to rituals and its interpretation. Yet it remains moderate by adopting civil society approach in affecting changes or reform. Instead of condemning the authority, Muhammadiyah constructively offers alternative solution by establishing schools, hospitals, and social programs for the society.<sup>72</sup>

Although it is true that *Wahabi* is *Salafi*, it is but one of *Salafi*’s many orientations. *Salafi* and *Wahabi* are not two sides of the same coin.<sup>73</sup> There are *Salafis* who are not

*Wahabis*. There are *Wahabis* who are not Saudis. There are also Saudis who are neither *Wahabis* nor *Salafis*.

A careful study of the early *Wahabis* will show that they were not politically inclined. That is why Sheikh Muhammad b Abdul Wahab did not object to the political power of the Saud family,<sup>74</sup> as long as he was guaranteed freedom to do his reformation work of local Muslims who were mixing Islam with heretical practices.

The close relationship established between the Saud family as the political authority and the *Wahabi ulama* as the religious authority, has until recently contributed to the *Wahabi* stand of non-interference in politics. That is why they issued *fatwa* that reject the formation of political parties and disallowed revolt against the government.

The real problem actually lies with the Neo-*Wahabis*; that is, those who combine the tough character of the *Wahabi* with both a narrow interpretation of jihad and an obsession with political objectives. This is a recent development as a result of the prolonged problems of Palestine, economic backwardness, local political and global injustices, globalization and other factors, which color the ongoing Islamic revivalism. Today the extreme form of the Neo-*Wahabis* can be found in the ideology of Salafi–Jihadi movements and figures like Al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden.<sup>75</sup> It is not prudent to lump *Wahabi* and *Salafi* in one basket in the effort against extremism and terrorism.

One should also note that there are several sources of influence that have shaped Islamic revivalism in the Muslim world. The nature of these sources varies from spiritual introspection to comprehensive social action, from the Sanusi movement to the Ikhwan Muslimoon (the Muslim Brotherhood).

Due to its comprehensive approach to religious education, social activism, and political reform for justice and public good, Ikhwan's influence and ideas are pervasive throughout the Islamic world, Southeast Asia as well as the U.K., U.S., and Europe.

In Malaysia and Indonesia, manifestations of Ikhwan influence upon social and political reform thought may be seen in organizations such as PAS (Islamic Party of Malaysia), ABIM (Muslim Youth Movement), JIM (Jemaah Islah Malaysia), and Partai Keadilan Sejahtera, Indonesia (Justice Prosperous Party).

Ikhwan is *Salafi*. The organization openly declares this in many of the writings of its leaders, in particular those of Hasan Al-Banna.<sup>76</sup> However, the *Wahabis* do not accept Ikhwan as being *Salafi*.

Ikhwan's *Salafi* orientation in methodology of understanding Islam differs from the *Wahabi* understanding of *Salafi*. Hence, it is far from the truth to say that all *Salafis* are *Wahabis*.

Ikhwan is well known and acknowledged for its inclusivism. Ikhwan trains its followers to be tolerant to differences in opinion and approaches. Although Ikhwan strictly requires its followers to adopt the *Salafi* perspective in theology, it allows them to follow any of the four major schools of jurisprudence in matters of Islamic practices or juristic opinions (*fiqh*). Their slogan is "We cooperate in matters that we agree upon, and tolerate each other in matters that we disagree." Thus they are more inclined to "agree to disagree" and to be pragmatic.<sup>77</sup>

As such, one can find members of Ikhwan participating in political alliances and power-sharing with other parties, even secular or non-Muslim, to achieve the common good or interest. In 1976, members of the Ikhwan participate in Egypt's General Election under the ticket of Arab socialist party and as independent candidates and gained 15 seats. They collaborated with the New Wafd Party in 1984 in the General Election and won 8 seats. In 1987, they formed Labour Islamic Alliance with the Socialist Labour Party and the Liberal Socialist Party. The alliance won 60 seats, of which 37 were won by members

of Ikhwan.<sup>78</sup> Ikhwan also “is willing to support a Christian candidate provided that he has good qualities, such as a nationalist position, honesty, straightforwardness and a clear position on Muslims and their legal rights.”<sup>79</sup> Despite being critical toward the Egyptian government, Ikhwan does not close any opportunity for dialogue with the government’s National Democratic Party.<sup>80</sup>

Because of their social activism and political reformism, many social analysts and political observers group them under the label of “Fundamentalist” and “Political Islamist” but the differences between both groups are marked enough to prove that not all *Salafis* are *Wahabis*, and that Ikhwan and the *Wahabis* are two different and distinct movements.

One may disagree with their religious–political aspirations, however, it is unwise to treat them in the same manner or classify them under one category.

### ***Not All Saudis Are Wahabis***

Shirite Muslims make up 10–15 percent of Saudi Arabia’s citizens<sup>81</sup> and they are clearly not *Wahabis*.

Just by looking at how some Saudis, either male or female, behave when they are abroad will help to understand the issue. The Saudi women who give up their veils and *abayas* the moment they leave their country and the Saudi men who seek entertainment in Bangkok will never be accepted nor accept themselves as *Wahabis*.

Many of the Bedouin Saudis are not *Wahabis*. The *Wahabis* are always harsh against them because they infuse Bedouin traditions in their practice of Islam.

Admittedly, a non-Muslim may find it difficult to differentiate the *Wahabis* among Saudis or even the Arabs due to the following:

- a. Cultural homogeneity among Saudis.
- b. The *Wahabi* school of thought is supported by the Saudi government. Thus they have free rein to voice and enforce their views in society and also to silence the others.
- c. Lack of knowledge.

Although many non-*Wahabi* Saudis have a negative view of *Wahabis*, one must not underestimate the spirit of nationalism that binds the Saudis.

In Saudi society, as in many Arab countries, there remains entrenched the tribal ethos, which demands and honors loyalty and allegiance to one’s social and national affiliations, especially in the face of foreigners, in spite of differences within the community.

Thus painting all Saudis with one brush is another imprudent move and may be counterproductive in the fight against terrorism in that region.

Similar generalizations can also be made about the Indonesians, or any of the other Muslim communities. The increase of Islamic revivalism among Muslims in this region had caused some commentators to classify all of them as *Wahabis*. Such generalizations only serve to galvanize what may otherwise be disparate elements within the community, in a mutual resistance against the unwarranted label and the accuser.

ICG 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>82</sup>

RAND has made a good study of Muslim thinking orientations and categorized them into the radical fundamentalist, scriptural fundamentalist, conservative traditionalist, reformist traditionalist, modernist, mainstream secularist, and radical secularist. One may disagree with this categorization 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>83</sup>

### ***Generalization of Madrasah***

Another example is *madrasah/pesantren* as a terrorist “production factory.” The discovery of the Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) connection with Pondok Al-Mukmin in Solo, Madrasah Lukmanul Hakim in Ulu Tiram Johor, and other Indonesian *pesantrens*, and several Pakistani religious schools’ support of the Taliban has fuelled anxiety and suspicion<sup>84</sup> among the general public and political leaders that *madrasahs* are extremist and terrorist producing factories.

For example, Karvin Von Hippel wrote:

The more hard-line Muslim theological schools are known as Deobandi *madrasa[h]s*, named after the original *madrasa[h]* established in 1867 in Deoband, an Indian town near Delhi. . . . Thus, while the links between poverty and terrorism may not be so clear, what can be determined is that children who attend *madrasa[h]s* and other Qur’anic schools not only learn to despise “corrupting Western influences” from an early age, but also gain few practical skills.<sup>85</sup>

Similarly, Wayne A. Downing commented:

Currently, a vast amount of hatred and distrust is being spawned in an insidious pan-Islamic education system. In the past 24 years, the radical Wahhabi sect from Saudi Arabia has sponsored religious schools and *madrasahs* [ *madrasahs* ] throughout the Islamic world. The Indonesians have seminaries called *pesantren* [ *pesantren* ]. Most of these schools spread a message of hatred and intolerance, radicalizing young Muslims and encouraging them to join the Holy War or Jihad.<sup>86</sup>

### ***Various Forms and Types of Madrasah***

Such a generalization does not take into consideration the various forms of Islamic religious schools, for example, *pesantren*, *pondok*, *madrasah*.

Each of these forms carries different meanings depending on the context or country where they are operated. For example, *madrasahs* in Singapore are very different in many aspects than *madrasahs* in Pakistan. Even in Singapore, the word *madrasah* is used for two very different Islamic religious education platforms; full time and part time *madrasah*,<sup>87</sup> all privately run. In Indonesia, however, *madrasah* usually refers to government-run religious schools.<sup>88</sup>

The *pondok* system practiced in Indonesia is different from what is practiced in Malaysia. In Indonesia, there are *pondoks*, which are known as *Pondok Modern* (Modern Pondok), which essentially operates just like mainstream schools. The only difference is that they offer religious subjects in addition to normal subjects.

In Indonesia, the bulk of the *pesantrens* (Islamic boarding schools), are run by Nahdhatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah. These are the two largest Islamic organizations in

Indonesia, both well-known and internationally accepted as moderates. Jemaah Islamiyah and its like run only a small percentage of *pesantren*.<sup>89</sup>

In the case of Malaysia, only one religious school was linked to Jemaah Islamiyah, which was Sekolah Agama Tarbiyatul Islamiyah Lukmanul Hakim at Ulu Tiram, Johor.

Adil Mahdi pointed out that unlike the case of certain *madrasah* in Pakistan, no single *madrasah* in India has been involved in “terrorist” activities. He also spoke about the Deobandi’s link with the Taliban, stressing that although the two shared a common vision, they differed in matters of strategy. Taliban’s rise to power owed more to support given by Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the United States than to Deobandi ideology.<sup>90</sup>

Dietrich Reetz of the ZMO mentioned that Deobandi *madrasah* has undergone a reform in 1982, in that English and computer applications were introduced. Yoginder Sikand highlighted that efforts were being made by the *ulama* and Muslim activists in India to introduce conventional subjects and teaching methods into *madrasahs*.<sup>91</sup>

As for *madrasahs* in China, some of these are part-time schools that cater for students who study full-time at regular schools and colleges. Except in the province of Sinkiang, *madrasah* in China are not a platform for antigovernment propaganda.<sup>92</sup>

The ISIM Workshop concluded that “there seemed to be a near unanimity among the participants about the fallacy of labeling all or even most of *madrasahs* as “dens of terror,” although they pointed out that some *madrasahs* in certain countries can be said militant or even terrorist. There has been a long history of intellectual and financial links between *madrasahs* and external parties but then, most with transnational connections have had nothing to do with terrorism. The report emphasized the importance of empirically grounded studies of *madrasahs* and the need to counter misleading stereotypes.<sup>93</sup>

In Singapore, there are only six full-time *madrasah*. They accommodate about 5,000 Muslim students from Primary 1 to Pre-University 2.<sup>94</sup> They make up 5 percent of the total number of overall Muslim students population. It is important to note that none of Jemaah Islamiyah detainees in Singapore were graduates of these *madrasahs*.

Contrary to common misperceptions, *madrasahs* in Singapore do not confine themselves to only religious subjects. Nor do they employ outdated modes of teaching and learning. The local *madrasahs* have been teaching non-religious subjects such as English, Science, and Mathematics for many years before the implementation of Compulsory Education, which requires such secular subjects to be taught in schools. Thus, local *madrasah* students have already been exposed to a mix of religious and secular education, albeit in varying degrees. Over the years, several graduates of local *madrasahs* have even been able to enroll in the National University of Singapore, with some emerging with honors.

Though the numbers are small, the significance of this is both symbolic and substantive—that local *madrasahs* can adapt and succeed.<sup>95</sup>

Even though local *madrasahs* are given some level of autonomy, the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore, which oversees Islamic education in Singapore, supervises and governs these schools.<sup>96</sup> This is unlike *madrasahs* in Pakistan and some *pesantrens* in Indonesia, which operate independently without supervision.<sup>97</sup>

### ***Negative Effect of Generalisation***

Stereotyped perceptions toward *madrasahs* will build psychological barriers between counterideology efforts and the community of the *madrasah*, which includes their staff, past and present pupils, and their families. This will cause difficulty in any collaborative effort.



Sweeping statements may also damage relations with the religious teachers and scholars, or even the majority of the Muslim community. It may be seen as an attack on a key Muslim institution, leading to a loss of potential partners and resources required for successful counterideology work.

Generalizations hamper counterideology work because it defines the threat too widely. Counterideology workers will have to face a wider “battlefront,” larger target audience, or possibly creating too many unnecessary “battlefronts” for themselves. Most destructively, counterideology workers will end up creating more enemies for themselves by unnecessarily antagonizing others, for example, antagonizing the whole Saudi population by painting all of them as *Wahabis*.

It is in the interest of counterideology that governments take into account the heterogeneity of Muslims and Muslim organizations around the world, consider them as partners and assets, and not lump them as one malignant community to be distrusted.

### *Importance of Understanding Specifics*

Counterterrorism measures, which involve counterideology, 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 socioeconomic considerations are all part of the contextual consideration in formulating policies at the national and international level.<sup>98</sup>

### *Optimism*

Counterideological battle against Muslim extremism is a long-run effort, much like a marathon. To succeed, one requires strong stamina, which is facilitated by a sense of optimism that the effort is worth it and will produce positive results.

Although it is acknowledged that some of the hard-core extremists may not be persuaded by alternative arguments, it is wrong to conclude that such effort is futile or fruitless. Experience has shown that there were terrorists and extremists who left the group or abandoned their ideology.

Khaled Al-Harbi, known to be Osama’s guest in a video shot in late 2001 in which he was shown speaking to Osama about the 9/11 attack, surrendered to the Saudi government during the one month period of amnesty that was offered to members of terrorist groups in Saudi Arabia. He was believed to be hiding on the Iran–Afghanistan border after the attack on Afghanistan by U.S. forces. After surrendering himself, he made a public statement, “I came because I abide by the word of God and that of the caretaker of the holy sites. This initiative from the caretaker of the holy sites and the king is an opportunity. And our country is the country of Islam. Undoubtedly, it is an opportunity any logical man would thank God—every logical man should take advantage of this opportunity.”<sup>99</sup> Others who have also surrendered themselves are Mansoor Mohammad Ahmad Faqeh, Abdullah bin Atiyeh Al-Salami, Saa’aban bin Mohammed bin Abdullah Al-Shihari, Osman Hadji Al-Maqboul Al-Omary, and Ali Abdulrahman Sa’id Al-Faqsi Al-Ghamdi.<sup>100</sup>

Three ulama, Ali Fahd Al-Khudhair, Ahmed Hamoud Mufred Al-Khaledi, and Nasir Ahmed Al-Fuhaid, were arrested on May 2003 for issuing a statement of support for terrorist attacks in Riyadh. After going through a rehabilitation program, Al-Khudhair and Al-Fuhaid withdrew their opinion in November. Al-Fuhaid described his view as a “grave mistake.” On December 2003, Al-Hamoud became the third ulama to denounce his previous statement.<sup>101</sup>

On 15 September 2004, Singapore's Ministry of Home Affairs announced that two detainees who were both members of the Jemaah Islamiyah *shura* (consultative council), were released on Restrictive Order as "their preventive detention is assessed to be no longer necessary." Two others' Restrictive Orders were not extended.<sup>102</sup> They all had gone through religious counseling and responded positively. Mr. Wong Kan Seng reportedly said:

Their release represents one of many steps forward in the long term resolution of the JI episode. Our approach in dealing with the JI and the MILF threat goes beyond preventive detention. It also involves the counselling of the detainees so that they understand where they have erred and their eventual release and re-integration back into society.<sup>103</sup>

### **Winning Over the Trust and Addressing Grievances**

In the article "The Singapore Perspective—A War for Hearts and Minds in Southeast Asia," Mushahid Ali wrote:

It is necessary for us, in general, and the West in particular, to understand that this is not just a security threat that can be crushed by military power but more of an ideological and political war for the hearts and minds of the Muslims. . .<sup>104</sup>

Winning "hearts and minds" will be an uphill task as long as some of the root causes of global Muslim grievances are not addressed. Three years after 9/11, one sore issue still is the uneven foreign policy of the United States in the Middle East, especially vis-à-vis Israel and Palestine, the occupation of Iraq, and the continued American "support" for undemocratic regimes in the region. Muslims all over the world share a deep sense of frustration with the injustices experienced across Muslim societies. As long as these issues are not resolved, the hearts and minds of Muslims may not be easily won.<sup>105</sup>

John E. Mack wrote that terrorism could not be checked, much less eradicated, if the affliction of millions of people in the Middle East who perceive themselves as victims of the policies of a superpower and its allies are not addressed: "This will require at the very least a reexamination of the U.S government policies that one-sidedly favor Israel in relation to the Palestinians."<sup>106</sup>

America must put an end to its practice of creating, nurturing, and supporting criminals, dictators, and terrorists, for example its previous support to Saddam Hussein, and currently its collaboration with the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan, which is infamous for its war-related crimes.<sup>107</sup>

Authoritarian governments, such as Egypt, Jordan, and Pakistan received support from Western countries in the form of credit and military assistance.<sup>108</sup>

Clark McCauley wrote: "It is important to recognize that it is not only Arab and Muslim countries in which U.S policies are seen as responsible for terrorist attacks against the United States." He then mentioned an IHT/Pew poll of 275 "opinion makers" in 24 countries on the issue of whether U.S. policies and actions in the world were a major cause of the 11 September attack. In 23 countries, an average of 58 percent of the respondent answered "yes." Seventy-six percent from Islamic countries and 36 percent from Western European countries said so.<sup>109</sup>

### ***Importance of Understanding the Causes and Contexts***

Indeed, understanding the cause helps to understand terrorism's roots. In the case of the Chechen people for example, they are of the view that they are in a state of all-out-war against

an enemy that is continuing its oppression, wanting nothing less than total domination, and possibly extinction of the Chechens. Such a view is not baseless if one looks at the long history of oppression by the Czarist Empire, Soviet Union communist regime, and the current Russian government against the Chechen.

So long as there is a precedent for the use of terror and attacking of non-combatants by the powers that be, the militants will reciprocate with the same, not to revenge, but to level the playing field. Thus also providing justification to invoke the “*Quranic* injunction” of an eye for an eye. If the international community continues to be ineffective in addressing these grievances, people will empower themselves.

Acts of terrorism cannot be stopped by defeating the terrorist forces only. Neither can the problem be overcome just by attacking the underlying values of the act, the obsession for revenge and its ideological motivations.<sup>110</sup> The ideas behind extremism and terrorism must be understood in its cultural and contextual milieu.

People who join terrorist organizations may adopt its ideology and belief system for a variety of reasons. Some do it only after careful study and analysis, whereas a few adopt it as a powerful tool for organizing and manipulating other people. “But some are filled with so much anger and frustration that they jump on the first bandwagon that comes along.”<sup>111</sup>

In this regard, the problem lies in both the misinterpretation of the text and the opportunity and context that provide for the text to be misinterpreted in that manner. The answer therefore requires the political will of powers that be to address the root causes of the grievances that terrorist groups seize on and exploit in the name of avenging Islam.<sup>112</sup>

Terrorist leaders may be so committed to their ideas that nothing can change their minds. But they will not succeed unless there is a group of people who are susceptible to their recruitment and propaganda. Even hardcore terrorists are likely to become discouraged when support from the larger population withers away.<sup>113</sup>

### ***The Role of Moderate Non-Muslims Against the Radicals Among them***

Non-Muslims and Western governments must also make the effort not to allow the extremists among them to dictate the agenda of Muslim and non-Muslims relations by continuously casting doubts on general Muslims, or anticipating an inevitable clash between them.

In *The Clash of Civilisations*, Samuel Huntington wrote that, after the Cold War, the world will be divided into few major civilizations, namely the West, Latin American, African, Islamic, Sinic (Chinese), Hindu, Orthodox, Buddhist, and Japanese.<sup>114</sup> He claims that future world conflicts cannot be viewed through the old ideological struggle lens, that is, liberal democracy versus communism. Instead the source of conflict will be from various emerging antagonistic civilizations and so the “clash” will be between civilizations. But his main focus was on the imminent and inevitable clash between Asian, in particular Chinese/Confucianism, Islam, and Western civilization.<sup>115</sup>

Many Muslim and non-Muslim scholars have criticized and rejected the idea as failing to understand accurately the internal dynamics of the current Islamic world and its visible and heterogeneous communities, which defy simplistic generalizations and static characterizations. Unfortunately, the 9/11 incident has given the idea a new lease on life and probably thrust it as the most definitive thesis on Islam versus the West.<sup>116</sup>

Huntington rejects the argument that the West’s problems are not with Islam but only with violent Islamist extremists. He writes that so long as Islam remains Islam, and the West remains the West, the fundamental conflict between the two will continue to define their relations in the future, as it has defined them for the past fourteen centuries.<sup>117</sup> He does not believe that multiculturalism will work in America<sup>118</sup> and Europe. In his new book

*Who Are We?* he argues that multiculturalism is, in essence, “anti-European civilisation” because “it is basically an anti-Western ideology.”<sup>119</sup>

The late Edward Said commented on Huntington’s view: “‘The Clash of Civilizations’ thesis is a gimmick like ‘The War of the Worlds,’ better for reinforcing defensive self-pride than for critical understanding of the bewildering interdependence of our time.”<sup>120</sup>

Another argument that does not help in promoting goodwill between the West and Muslims, and hence, in the war against extremism and terrorism, is Francis Fukuyama’s opinion that only Western or probably American capitalism and democracy will and should prevail, after the collapse of communism, thus the end of history. In his book *The End of History and The Last Man*, he declared that capitalist democracy has succeeded in discrediting all forces such as fascism, socialism, monarchic rule, Islam, and other authoritarian varieties.<sup>121</sup>

Fukuyama may not agree with Huntington’s idea of a clash of civilizations, but he applied the same broad-brush and generalizing approach in his view on Islam. He viewed Islam, or at least its fundamentalist branch, as not accepting modernity.<sup>122</sup> Islam, in his view, has defeated liberal democracy in many parts of the Islamic world and poses a grave threat to it in many other countries. He mentioned Iraq as challenger to the West after the Cold War, in which Islam arguably was a factor. On the limitless striving for conquest, he claims it sprang up among the Egyptians “after the conversion of Arabs to Islam, because of the emergence of an aristocratic order whose moral basis was oriented to war.”<sup>123</sup> Therefore “it is not an accident that modern liberal democracy emerged first in the Christian West, since universalism of democratic rights can be seen in many ways as a secular form of Christian universalism.”<sup>124</sup>

In a speech addressed to Europeans, he urged Europe to stop being intimidated in defending its own humanist culture. He was quoted as saying, “There is a European culture. It’s subscribing to a broader culture of tolerance. It’s not unreasonable for European to say ‘You have to accept this’. The Europeans have to end their political correctness and take seriously what’s going on.”<sup>125</sup>

He also wrote that Islam virtually has no appeal outside its traditional geographical areas. It has no resonance for young people in Berlin, Tokyo, or Moscow. It will not be able to challenge liberal democracy on its own territory on the level of ideas and would be vulnerable to liberal ideas.<sup>126</sup> If so, one wonders the reason behind his “alarmist” position and also, the fact that Islam is the fastest growing religion in Europe.<sup>127</sup>

Those who view Islam as a threat go to the extent of advising the United States government to unequivocally support regimes threatened by Islamists, even those such as Algeria and Egypt. They urge that the United States should not insist that those states implement political liberalization, because it will allow the participation of Islamists. These states are viewed as a lesser evil than Islam. If necessary, the United States may have to side with leftists against Islamists. For them, defending a global network of authoritarian political and social arrangements remains the most expedient way to maintain United States hegemony.<sup>128</sup>

American scholars and policymakers who view Islam as the “new Communism” and a grave threat to the West, draw on “neo-Orientalist” discourses that stress the inherently antimodern and antidemocratic nature of Islam. The proponents of this view even deride the notion of “Islamic moderates.” They accuse those who view Islam as capable of reforms compatible with democracy and the West as “apologists” or “relativists.”

Steve Niva offered that the “view is vigorously promoted by an alliance of frustrated Cold Warriors looking for a new threat to justify national security state and the pro-Israeli establishment led by AIPAC.”<sup>129</sup>

In an interview with the *Straits Times*' journalist from Singapore, John Esposito warned about the presence of the militant Christian right who are like the right-wing nationalists in Europe in terms of their attitude toward foreigners, in particular Islamics. He also regretted that views by scholars like Bernard Lewis and Fukuyama have contributed to the post-9/11 hysteria about Muslims.<sup>130</sup>

He said:

This argument is coming from people who are right-wing, who are not just anti-foreign, but in many ways anti-Muslim. It's Islamophobia. If—this is an important point—you were to write about the Jewish, for example, and substitute the word Judaism for Islam and Jews for Muslims, and you were to write the same kinds of pieces that these people write, use all the rest of the words, you would be accused of anti-Semitism. You couldn't do it. So why is it okay to write about Muslims that way?<sup>131</sup>

He said it is an irony that the American and European authorities want to hear the moderate Muslims, but they also fear the moderate Muslim voice, referring to the ban of Professor Tariq Ramadan and Yusuf Islam from entering the United States. He warned America and Europe of the danger that they play right into the hands of radicals because this will not only sideline the moderates among Muslims, but raise questions among them: Are there any Muslims who are acceptable? He described such people as anti-Islam because to them, it does not matter if Muslims are moderates or not, and the war is not against global terrorism, but it's a war against Islam and the Muslim world.<sup>132</sup>

The same message was raised by Sharif Abdullah in his article "The Soul of a Terrorist: Reflections on Our War With the 'Other.'" He wrote that Americans, in particular, should not forget that there are "homegrown versions of the Taliban" in their own country. "They are known as the Christian Identity movement."<sup>133</sup>

It takes two hands to clap. Thus, the war against terrorism is not only won by countering extreme ideology in the Muslim community, but also by countering prevailing prejudiced views among non-Muslims or Westerners that cast doubt on Muslims, antagonize them, and do not promote optimism for peaceful coexistence between the West and Muslims.

It is then important for the moderates among non-Muslims to reject such views and assure Muslims that the majority of them do not subscribe to them.

## Conclusion

This study has argued the importance of counterideology in combating terrorism. It proposes a "theological and juristic approach" as one of the key approaches. This, then, requires co-opting the *ulama* and *madrasah* as strategic partners.

This study proposes that counterideology should not only be drawn up for the Muslims but also for non-Muslims, so as to reduce anxiety and create more understanding that will promote racial harmony in society. As a preventive measure, general Muslims should be the main audience for counterideology, to inoculate them from the influence of extremist's ideas. But this is not to suggest that a counterideology work targeting terrorist is futile and not worthwhile.

As counterideology is a long battle, maintaining optimism is essential.

The study highlights one of the pitfalls in counterideology: generalization. The broad-brush approach must be avoided.

The important role played by counterideology work must include the need to address grievances held by Muslims.

It is true that the Muslim community has a major role to play in combating the ideology propounded by Muslim extremists and terrorists. Nevertheless, this does not discount the role of governments or policymakers because governments still remain the pivotal institution responsible for the social fabric.

Therefore, at least at the strategic level, governments must develop a comprehensive strategy against terrorism, that incorporates counterideology elements.

With the resource that governments have, their involvement will definitely enhance and multiply the effect of work done by the Muslim community. In fact, this study asserts that non-Muslims should also be incorporated in the work, although with a lesser role. Although Muslims are the best people to counter Muslim extremists and terrorists, non-Muslims are the best people to counter views that will antagonize Muslims at large as such feelings will only hamper counterideological work.

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