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# Resilience and Resolve

Communities Against Terrorism

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## Chapter 5

# The Centrality of Counter-Ideology in Countering Jihadist Terrorism

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### Introduction

Years of war in Afghanistan and Iraq under the banner of “War on Terror” have not produced the intended result of defeating Al-Qaeda that was responsible for the 9/11 attacks. In fact, they have complicated further the threat of the group.

Many governments have come to realize that Al-Qaeda’s terrorism cannot be defeated by only military or law-and-order means. As such, many governments are gradually incorporating counter-ideology work in their counter-terrorism strategy to delegitimize the ideological underpinnings of Al-Qaeda and other jihadist groups. Its aim is to rehabilitate captured jihadists, deradicalize jihadists who remain free and educate the public as part of a counter-extremism program.

However, what is the intellectual basis for the incorporation of counter-ideology initiatives in counter-terrorism work today?

This chapter is written with the objective of answering the above question and the twin beliefs that a good and sustainable counter-ideology initiative could only emerge from the conviction of

its importance and centrality to counter-terrorism work and that efforts to promote counter-ideology as a counter-terrorism imperative must be rooted in good intellectual grounding.

Although this chapter argues for the centrality of ideology in counter-terrorism, it does not seek to offer a causal nexus between ideology and terrorism. There are other research papers that could complement the arguments put forth here.

Some scholars who study terrorism tend towards a causal explanation. This tendency seeks to identify a single factor that directly causes terrorism.

Others are, however, of the view that there is no single cause to terrorism, at least for now. They also observe that there is no single explanation to the path of radicalization that leads to terrorism. Hence, there is no single explanation for radicalization and terrorism. They both remain as a complex phenomenon that would defy a single causal explanation attempt. It is prudent, therefore, for counter-terrorism work to adopt a multi-dimensional or multi-faceted approach.<sup>1</sup>

This chapter upholds the multi-dimensional character of terrorism. It recognizes that there could be other important factors for terrorism, despite the centrality of ideology. However, the identification of those other factors and their impact on counter-terrorism work are not within the scope of this chapter.

For the purpose of this chapter, ideology is defined as “any system of ideas underlying and informing social and political action.”<sup>2</sup>

## **Jihadists and Ideology**

### ***Jihadists’ Treatment of Ideology***

One way to ascertain the centrality of counter-ideology ideology in countering jihadist terrorism is by assessing the importance of ideology to jihadist themselves through their words and deeds.

Jihadists place a tremendous effort on ideological work such as constructing their ideology, criticizing opposing ideologies, and

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<sup>1</sup>James W. Jones, *Blood That Cries Out From the Earth: The Psychology of Religious Terrorism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2008, pp. 5–9 and 27–28.

<sup>2</sup>See David Jary and Julia Jary (eds.), *Collins Internet-Linked Dictionary of Sociology*, Collins, Glasgow, 2000.

justifying their actions from the lens of their ideology. Their objective is to spread their worldview and ideas. This can be clearly seen from Al-Maqdese's official website,<sup>3</sup> which also functions as the largest repository of jihadist intellectual materials by various jihadist ideologues and groups. These are not mere narratives or stories about the world to win people over. There are hundreds of materials that cover not only all matters of jihad but also the more important jihadist worldview that underlies their actions and *fatwas* on various theological issues.

The importance of this website and its contents was underscored in a study found in the Militant Ideology Atlas by Combating Terrorism Center at the US Military Academy.<sup>4</sup>

The ideological work of the first Bali bombers is another good example. Imam Samudra, the operational leader of the bombing, published a book detailing his worldview and theological justification of the action.<sup>5</sup> Despite being incarcerated, he and his two accomplices, Mukhlas and Amrozi, ensured a constant supply of their ideas through their writings. The trio published a book each to promote their ideology just before their execution.<sup>6</sup>

The thriving of jihadist publications in Indonesia as reported by the International Crisis Group also pointed to the same motive. In its conclusion, the report noted, "As top leaders argue for consolidation and rebuilding, it is clear that recruitment of new members is critical — and publishing, dissemination and discussion of texts on jihad can play an important part in that effort."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>The website is located at <http://www.tawhed.ws> (accessed March 29, 2013).

<sup>4</sup>William McCants, "Militant Ideology Atlas", Combating Terrorism Center, New York, November 2006. See main report and executive summary at <http://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/militant-ideology-atlas> (accessed March 29, 2013).

<sup>5</sup>See Imam Samudra, *Aku Melawan Teroris* (I Am Fighting Terrorists), Jazera, Solo, 2004.

<sup>6</sup>See Imam Samudra, *Sekuntum Rosela Pelipur Lara* (A Rosella to Comfort Grief), Ar-Rahmah Media, Jakarta, 2009; Ali Ghufuran (Mukhlas), *Mimpi Suci Di Balik Jeruji Besi* (Blessed Dream behind the Cage), Ar-Rahmah Media, Jakarta, 2009; Amrozi bin Nurhashim, *Senyum Terakhir Sang Mujahid* (A Fighter's Last Smile), Ar-Rahmah Media, Jakarta, 2009.

<sup>7</sup>"Indonesia: Jemaah Islamiyah's Publishing Industry", International Crisis Group, Asia Report No. 147, February 2008, p. 16.

The act of former jihadists who have renounced violence and Al-Qaeda's ideology is also a significant indicator of the centrality of ideology. These are the leaders of Egyptian Jemaah Islamiyah, Sayyid Imam Al-Sharif, a.k.a. Dr. Fadl, an influential leader of Egyptian Jihad and ideologue within the jihadist circle and senior members of the Indonesian Jemaah Islamiyah such as Nasir Abas<sup>8</sup> and Ali Imron.<sup>9</sup> They have published more than 25 volumes to counter Al-Qaeda's ideology and point out the fallacy of their previous views on jihad. Dr. Fadl's ideological refutation to Al-Qaeda has even invited Ayman Al-Zawahiri to respond with a 200-page book, which again testifies to the importance of ideology among jihadists.<sup>10</sup>

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

Thus, taking into consideration that their past experience in jihadism and their rational behaviors, it logically follows that jihadists would not have spent so much of their resources and effort on those ideological materials if they were not important to them, did not serve their cause nor if there were no demand for such materials.

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<sup>8</sup>Nasir Abas, *Membongkar Jamaah Islamiyah: Pengakuan Mantan Anggota JI* (Jamaah Islamiyah Exposed: Admission of a Former JI Member), Grafindo, Jakarta, 2005; Nasir Abas, *Melawan Pemikiran Aksi Bom Imam Samudra & Noordin M. Top* (Countering Imam Samudra and Noordin M. Top's Ideas behind Bombings), Grafindo, Jakarta, 2007.

<sup>9</sup>Ali Imron, *Ali Imron Sang Pengebom: Kesadaran & Ungkapan Penyesalan* (Ali Imron the Bomber: Repentance and Remorse), Republika, Jakarta, 2007.

<sup>10</sup>Omar Ashour, "Ending Jihadism?: The Transformation of Armed Islamist Movements", *Arab Reform Bulletin*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, September 2009, available at <http://carnegieendowment.org/2009/09/09/ending-jihadism-transformation-of-armed-islamist-movements/b20i> (accessed March 29, 2013).

## ***Ideologically Driven Jihadist***

The profile of jihadists shows that not all of them commit terrorism because of poverty or economic marginalization as erroneously perceived by some.

Ayman Al-Zawahiri, Al-Qaeda's deputy leader, was 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. Yazid Sufaat, who was detained under the Internal Security Act in Malaysia, was a former Malaysian army captain.<sup>11</sup> Ramzi Yousef attended a college in UK and studied engineering.<sup>12</sup> Azahari Husin, the Jemaah Islamiyah's bomb expert killed in a shoot-out with Indonesian security forces, was a lecturer at the Technological University of Malaysia (UTM). He held a doctorate in engineering. Zulkifli Abdul Hir, a Jemaah Islamiyah fugitive, graduated as an engineer from an American university. Wan Min Wan Mat, a former lecturer, graduated from Manchester University with a master of science (Construction). Zulkepli Marzuki, a fugitive suspected to be a Jemaah Islamiyah member, graduated as an accountant. Noordin Mohd Top, the leader of a violent breakaway faction of Jemaah Islamiyah who was recently killed in a raid, graduated from UTM. Shamsul Bahari Hussin was a lecturer with a master's degree in mechatronics from Dundee University.<sup>13</sup> At least two of the Jemaah Islamiyah members detained in Singapore are holders of diplomas in engineering.<sup>14</sup> Jason Burke described this type

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<sup>11</sup> "Malaysia orders terror suspect held, says he has more to tell about al-Qaeda", *AP*, January 28, 2004; Marc Erikson, "The Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda of Southeast Asia", *Asia Times*, February 6, 2002, available at <http://www.atimes.com/se-asia/DB06Ac01.html> (accessed March 29, 2013).

<sup>12</sup> Simon Reeve, *The New Jackals: Ramzi Yousef, Osama bin Laden and the Future of Terrorism*, Andre Deutsch, London, 1999, pp. 115–121.

<sup>13</sup> "Tangkap Ketua Kumpulan Militan Malaysia Johor & Senarai Ahli KMM Yang Dikehendaki Polis" (Head of Johor Malaysian Militant Group Arrested and List of KMM Members Wanted by the Police), Royal Malaysian Police media release, September 17, 2002.

<sup>14</sup> "Particulars of detainees", Singapore government press statement on ISA arrests, January 11, 2002.

of jihadists as “intellectual activists” and “men who can justify their attraction to radical Islam in relatively sophisticated terms.”<sup>15</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 Muslims in general. Al-Qaeda makes it clear that it is striving for Islam and that its ideas represent the true Islam. In every statement it makes, Al-Qaeda does not fail to cite verses from the Quran, quotes from the Prophet's tradition (*hadiths*) and opinions of classical Muslim scholars, giving the impression that its ideas are founded on Islamic principles. 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 that include viewing an armed jihad as the only way to change the current fate of the Muslims, prescribing Muslims to be in a constant war against non-Muslims until they obtain glory for Islam as well as re-establishing the Caliphate, proposing that killing oneself is not suicidal but an act of martyrdom and the ultimate way to sacrifice for the religion, and finally believing that Allah the Great will not neglect one who strives for the glory of His religion. Its ideas are founded on concepts such as those stating that any form of submission and allegiance is to Allah alone and Islam reigns supreme above other religions.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Jason Burke, *Al-Qaeda: The True Story of Radical Islam*, Penguin Books, London, 2004, p. 281.

<sup>16</sup> “Bin Laden's fatwa”, *Online Newshour*, August 1996, available at [http://www.pbs.org/newshour/terrorism/international/fatwa\\_1996.html](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/terrorism/international/fatwa_1996.html) (accessed March 29, 2013); “Fatwa Urging Jihad Against Americans”, *Al-Quds Al-Arabi*, February 23, 1998, available at <http://www.fas.org/irp/world/para/docs/980223-fatwa.htm> (accessed March 29, 2013); “A New Bin Laden Speech”, The Middle East Media Research Institute, Special Dispatch Series No. 539, July 18, 2003, available at <http://www.memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page=archives&Area=sd&ID=SP53903> (accessed March 29, 2013); “Full transcript of Bin Laden's speech”, *Aljazeera*, November 1, 2004; “Imam Samudra: By Allah, Its Not Over Yet”, *Tempo, Special Commemorative Edition, Bali Bombing: One Year On*, October 14–20, 2003;



Al-Qaeda believes that the existing dominant culture, influenced by the West, corrupts humanity and is destructive to the proper practice of faith and true Islam. Therefore, it believes that one has to reject it totally and commit oneself to fight against it in order to be a true and faithful servant of Allah. The 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”. They will not be satisfied with any form of compromise or concession except with a “global imposition of their interpretation of the faith.”<sup>17</sup> Therefore, refuting the ideas promulgated by Al-Qaeda will help to neutralize its threat.

Each time an Al-Qaeda leader gets killed or captured, the group will announce that its struggle will not die because it is founded not on individuals, but on ideas that its followers believe. Hence, they believe they can count on many others who will step up as replacements and continue with their struggle. We may dismiss such a claim, but it shows that Al-Qaeda strives to base its organization on its ideology, and not on individuals.<sup>18</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>19</sup> As such, delegitimizing and

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Christopher M. Blanchard, “Al-Qaeda: Statements and Evolving Ideology”, CRS Report for Congress, November 16, 2004, available at <http://www.fas.org/irp/crs/RS21973.pdf> (accessed March 29, 2013); Christopher Henzel, *The Origins of Al-Qaeda Ideology: Implications for US Strategy*, April 20, 2004, available at <http://www.carlisle.army.mil/USAWC/parameters/Articles/05spring/henzel.pdf> (accessed March 29, 2013); A. Maftuh Abegebriel, “Al-Qa’idah: Arabists or Islamists?”, in A. Maftuh Abegebriel, A. Yanti Abeveiro, SR-Ins Team (eds.), *Negara Tuhan: The Thematic Encyclopaedia*, SR-Ins Publishing, Jogjakarta, 2004, pp. 574–576, 583–593, 607–629; Jason Burke, *Al-Qaeda: The True Story of Radical Islam*, pp. 34–37.

<sup>17</sup>Stephen Biddle, “War Aims and War Termination”, in John R. Martin (ed.), *Defeating Terrorism: Strategic Issue Analyses*, Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, January 2002, p. 9.

<sup>18</sup>Jason Burke, “Think Again: Al-Qaeda”, *Foreign Policy*, May/June 2004, pp. 18–19; Jason Burke, *Al-Qaeda*, pp. xxv–xxvi.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*

dismantling its extremist ideology is, indeed, an important aspect of combating terrorism by Al-Qaeda.<sup>20</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>21</sup>

## **Terrorism and Ideology**

Research and opinions of scholars from various fields could also be used to underscore the importance and centrality of ideology in counter-terrorism. The following sections flesh out some of them.

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

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, counter-terrorist efforts will inevitably fail. This requires combining a war of military means and a 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>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>See Llewellyn D. Howell, “Is the New Terrorism a Clash of Civilizations? Evaluating Terrorism’s Multiple Sources”, in Charles W. Kegley, Jr. (ed.), *The New Global Terrorism: Characteristics, Causes, Controls*, Prentice Hall, New Jersey, 2003, pp. 179–184. See Paul K. Davis and Brian Michael Jenkins, *Deterrence and Influence in Counterterrorism: A Component in the War on al Qaeda*, RAND, Pittsburgh, 2002, pp. 46–47.

<sup>21</sup>Stephen Biddle, “War Aims and War Termination”, p. 10.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 7–8.

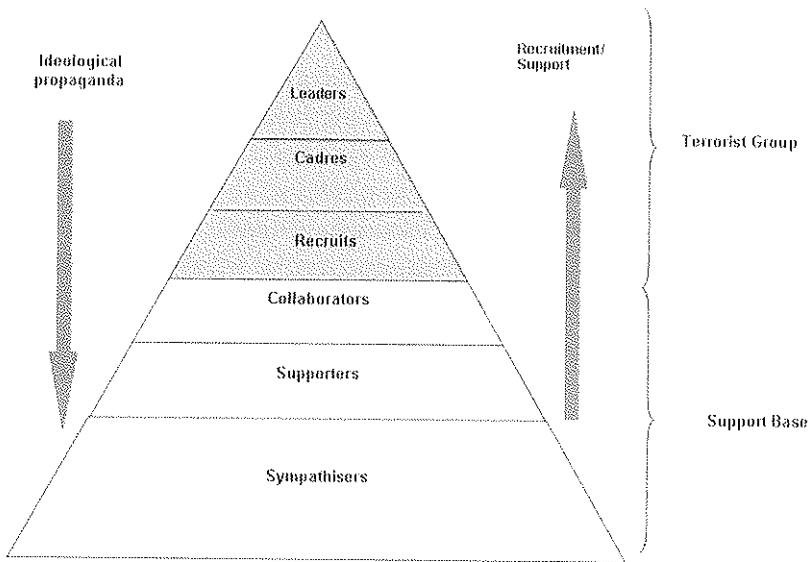


Figure 1. Pyramid of terrorist membership and organization.

The role of ideology can also be explained from the pyramid (see Figure 1) representing terrorists' organization structure.<sup>23</sup>

In this pyramid structure, ideology formulation is the function of leadership and it is used to recruit fresh members and generate support to replace the members who are either killed or captured. Ideology and belief systems are also used, and these play an important role of advancing terrorist aims and objectives.<sup>24</sup>

Often at its formative period, terrorist organizations will go through "a period of mobilization of discontent" in which the ideology is formulated to help rally people towards common grievances.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup>Rohan Gunaratna and Peter Chalk, *Jane's Counter Terrorism*, Jane's Information Group, United Kingdom, 2002, pp. 8-9.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 8, 11.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 11-13; Ted G. Groetzel, "Terrorist Beliefs and Terrorist Lives", in Chris E. Stout (ed.), *Psychology of Terrorism*, Praeger, London, 2002, vol. 1, p. 109.

### ***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 that he can impose his will on society. This type is politically driven.
- The Radical Theorist is interested more in the ideas that he believes in, than in any political goal including striving for power. He will not compromise his beliefs for the sake of power. The Radical Theorist may not be involved directly in terrorist acts, but acts as ideologues for the terrorist organizations. He develops and refines their belief systems, and defends them from criticism. They are skilled in offering rational and religious justifications for the terrorists. To them, 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 their anger, or as a source of excitement and adventure. Even without any ideology, they will still be doing what they want to do anyway.<sup>26</sup>

Based on the above, the ideology is particularly important for the Political Strategist and Radical Theorist. The Political Strategist uses ideology to justify the imposition of his will and reduce resentment from the society, 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 solely driven by emotions towards violence may not have enough discipline to plan and sustain effective terrorist activities. The Political Strategist and the Radical Theorist are however likely to continue the struggle through other means when violence is not possible.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Ted G. Groetzel, "Terrorist Beliefs and Terrorist Lives", *Psychology of Terrorism*, vol. 1, pp. 99-100.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 109.

## **Neutralizing Threat from Freelance Terrorists**

Counter-ideological work is also important in minimizing the threat from potential freelance terrorists, who may not belong to any group, but are drawn to terrorism because they share the ideology or common grievances of terror organization like Al-Qaeda.<sup>28</sup> Terrorism committed by individuals not affiliated with any group is a known occurrence, which is increasingly becoming a threat due to the public availability and easy access to advanced and multi-purpose technology.<sup>29</sup> Timothy McVeigh, the Oklahoma City bomber,<sup>30</sup> Baruch Goldstein, the attacker of the Cave of the Patriarch in Hebron, which killed 29 Muslims during Friday prayer,<sup>31</sup> and Theodore Kaczynski, known as Unabomber,<sup>32</sup> are good examples.

The two explanations to this phenomenon could either 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 Three-Level Causes of Terrorism**

One may view the cause of terrorism on three levels. On the most superficial or immediate level, the cause may be seen as an implacable

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<sup>28</sup>M.E. Bowman, "Some-Time, Part-Time and One-Time Terrorism", *Intelligence: Journal of US Intelligence Studies*, Winter/Spring, 2003, vol. 13, no. 2, pp. 16-18.

<sup>29</sup>See Walter Laqueur, *The New Terrorism: Fanaticism and the Arms of Mass Destruction*, Phoenix Press, London, 1999, pp. 265-269.

<sup>30</sup>"Timothy McVeigh profile: From decorated veterans to mass murder", CNN.com, available at <http://www.cnn.com/CNN/Programs/people/shows/mcveigh/profile.html> (accessed October 17, 2009).

<sup>31</sup>"Excerpts from the report of the Commission of the Inquiry into the Massacre at the Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron", *Report on measures taken to guarantee the safety and protection of the Palestinian civilians in the occupied Palestinian territory: Israel 03/05/95 CERD/C/282*, available at <http://www.unhcr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/0/d6631f0eaea188fe8025675a005570fa?Opendocument> (accessed March 29, 2013).

<sup>32</sup>William Glaberson, "The Unabomber Case: The Overview Kaczynski Avoids a Death Sentence with Guilty Plea", *The New York Times*, January 23, 1998, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/1998/01/23/us/unabomber-case-overview-kaczynski-avoids-death-sentence-with-guilty-plea.html> (accessed March 29, 2013).

hatred, which drives terrorists to kill others, even by sacrificing their own lives. Proximate causes usually invoke historical and economic roots, such as the Muslims' grievance that they are victims of a superpower's unfair policies, examples including the Russian government's and its predecessors' long repression of the Chechen people, and the economic backwardness of the Pattani people in southern Thailand. Deeper-rooted 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>33</sup>

### Counter-Ideology Contested

The importance of ideology in jihadist terrorism and the centrality of counter-ideology in counter-terrorism are not uncontested. It is important for proponents of counter-ideology to also have a basic understanding of counter-ideology critiques, especially those who subscribe to the multi-faceted nature of jihadist terrorism that requires a multi-faceted perspective and approach to counter it.

Three contesting ideas could be found in the literature with regards to the causes of jihadist terrorism, namely, social bonding, narrative, and identity.

One of the stronger critiques of counter-ideology is Marc Sageman. He rejected the centrality of ideology in Muslim radicalization and counter-terrorism. Based on a terrorist database that he compiled for his study, he concluded that "terrorist(s) in Western Europe and North America were not intellectuals or ideologues, much less religious scholars". What turns them into radicals is not "about how they think, but how they feel". He cautioned against "over-intellectualizing" counter-terrorism work. While he admitted the importance of winning the hearts and minds of potential terrorists, it is, however, not an intellectual debate about a legitimate interpretation of religion.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>John E. Mack, "Looking Beyond Terrorism: Transcending the Mind of Enmity", *Psychology of Terrorism*, vol. 1, pp. 175–176.

<sup>34</sup>Marc Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad*, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, 2008, pp. 156–157.

Sageman observed that the lack of religious education was the most striking feature of “global Islamist terrorists”. They lacked proper religious education and “do not even know the Quran”.<sup>35</sup> He further elaborated, “The entire effort to dissuade wannabes from joining the ranks of Al-Qaeda social movement by debating them with religious arguments and selective quotes from the Quran and hadiths is misguided.” In most instances, he observes that “the defendants in terrorism trials around the world would not have been swayed by an exegesis of the Quran. They would simply have been bored and would not have listened” and their main source of appeal for terrorism involvement is not radical ideology. As for the youths who frequented radical websites, he concluded that they held no interest towards overt religious content due to their disinterest in religious disquisitions. A few autodidactic scholars may have shown an interest in theological debates but it occurred among the scholars themselves and “hold little for appeal the real terrorist rank and file, who join for others reasons.”<sup>36</sup>

Sageman even viewed counter-ideology work by Western countries as dangerous because it may provide an opportunity for the terrorists to “control the debate by framing the context of this war to their advantage.”<sup>37</sup>

The critical element for joining jihadist groups, according to Sageman, is social bonds. He summarized this postulate:

“In this chapter, I have described the process of joining the jihad, rejecting common notions of recruitment and brainwashing to account for the process. Instead, I argue for a three-prong process: social affiliation with the jihad accomplished through friendship, kinship and discipleship; progressive intensification of beliefs and faith leading to acceptance of the global Salafi jihad ideology; and formal acceptance to the jihad through the encounter of a link to the jihad. Relative deprivation, religious predisposition, and

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<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 157.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

members do not articulate before or after having been caught a political or an ideological stand (most of A[|]-Q[aeda] suspects keep silent or deny any involvement at their trial, which is a very unusual attitude for political militants, who traditionally transform their trial into a political tribune).”

While he acknowledged “the fact that some quarters in Al-Qaeda are writing or thinking in terms of ideology, he viewed that “this does not seem to be the main motivation for joining Al-Qaeda.”<sup>44</sup>

Although Roy did not provide a clear definition of a narrative, he alluded to it when he wrote:

“Al-Qaeda gives a meaning to the flow of information that comes from the media, describing a world of violence, explosions, blood and wars. Al-Qaeda presents its action as some sort of a video game, where youngsters can easily identify themselves as actors. Al-Qaeda also makes use of the dominant discourse on the clash of civilization by inverting the values. It fits with the division of the world into two competing principles, good and evil. A[|]-Q[aeda] plays on the mirror effect: we are what you say we are, that is your worst enemy, and the proof is not what we do, but what you say.”<sup>45</sup>

Roy, however, illustrated the four parts that made Al-Qaeda’s powerful narrative. The first part focused on the suffering of the Muslims. It depicted all crimes committed against Muslims in any part of the world as one singular uncontextualized story. The second part is the depiction of individuals who engaged in violence and terrorism to avenge the sufferings of the community as heroes. The third part is “the religious ‘qotbist’ dimension” which depicts jihad of avenging Muslims as a personal obligation, the need of the *ummah* for a few outstanding heroes as its vanguard and sacrifice and death as the means for salvation. The fourth part seeks to mobilize Muslims against the global order and presents Al-Qaeda

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<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 21.



as the only organization that is capable and effective to confront the evil West.<sup>46</sup>

Roy then suggested that, in addition to traditional intelligence and legal techniques to trace and neutralize cells and networks, the employment of counter-narrative works, to delegitimize Al-Qaeda's narrative, instead of counter-ideology.<sup>47</sup>

Based on his research on Muslims in the West, Gabriele Marranci posited that the root to Muslim radicalization lied in the notion of identity. Unlike sociological and anthropological theories of identity, Marranci suggested that "identity is a homeostatic process controlled by emotions which enable human beings to understand their self and express it in relation to their environment (seen as natural, social and cultural categories)."<sup>48</sup>

Thus, identity is not a cognitive ideational or social construct but centers on emotion — "an emotional commitment through which people experience their autobiographical selves. This could explain why those who do not practice, or even respect the basic rules of Islam (such as drinking alcohol) still define themselves as Muslim." Identity, in Marranci's view, is what a person feels he is, i.e., "it is what I feel I am that determines my identity for me."<sup>49</sup>

Marranci concluded that Muslims who fall into violence radicalism felt some form of crisis arising from what he called "the circle of panic". Borrowed from Bateson's schismogenesis processes, Marranci defined "the circle of panic" as the tendency for individuals to move apart through systematic and divergent interaction produced by negative feedback". Examples of these feedbacks are "pangs of guilt about the status of Muslim and Islam, rejection from host societies; shocking images and particularly TV reportage of Muslim tragedies; challenges of identity and loyalty; emotional dynamics of gender relationships; and fear of Westernization."<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>46</sup>Ibid., pp. 19–21.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>48</sup>Gabriele Marranci, *Jihad Beyond Islam*, Berg, Oxford, 2006, p. 12.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., pp. 7, 10, and 51.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., pp. 10–11, 158.

Violent radical Muslims are affected by these processes through changes in the relationship between the autobiographic self and identity “to the degree that they feel an act of identity to be required in order to maintain a stable experience of their self”. The rhetoric and practice of jihad found among those radicals is just a preferred symbolic expression of the said act.<sup>51</sup>

In conclusion, Marranci viewed Muslims’ rage and acts of violence as triggered more by their emotion, than by the ideas that they have on Islam and by being Muslims. This, thus, fits with the fact that of most radicals are individuals who have shallow knowledge on Islam.

Marranci did not provide any insight on how his views could contribute to deradicalization, counter-extremism, and counter-terrorism work. However, since the emotion was central in his diagnosis of the problem, it could then be implied that the battle is not at cognitive ideational and intellectual domain.

## **Concluding Remarks**

One important point that must be highlighted about the three studies above that contest the importance of counter-ideology is that they are based on studies of radicalization in the West.

It has been noted that Marranci did not offer any suggestion from his study for counter-terrorism. As of Sageman, it is very clear that all of his suggestions were made for and in the context of Western countries. Thus, one could fairly deduce that non-Western countries are not his main target audience and counter-terrorism outside those countries is not his primary concern.

While Roy’s suggestions in his study were also targeted at Western countries, his view on the cause of terrorism may have a bearing on the global counter-terrorism work because he viewed the West as the center of radicalization and the main target of Al-Qaeda’s messages. This is because its strategy and ideology are embodied in the idea of far- and near-enemy theory.<sup>52</sup> Since potential terrorists

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<sup>51</sup>Ibid., pp. 10–11, 47 and 158.

<sup>52</sup>Olivier Roy, *Al-Qaeda in the West*, p. 11

are not limited to citizens or residents of countries in the West, it is imperative for governments of Western countries to extend their counter-terrorism work beyond their homeland by promoting the centrality of counter-narrative instead of counter-ideology.

In general, nevertheless, the applicability of the three studies above outside of Europe and North America is not conclusive and must be treated with caution. Nevertheless, one can say confidently that they remain as alternative viewpoints to the centrality of ideology in deradicalization, counter-extremism, and counter-terrorism work in the West.

It has been mentioned in this paper's introduction that many scholars have acknowledged the complexity of the current wave of terrorism, which defies a single causal explanation. In addition to multi-faceted and multi-dimensional counter-terrorism strategy, many of them have also warned against a "one-size-fits-all" strategy. They stressed upon a contextual approach to counter-terrorism. This would mean that any strategy formulated must incorporate the particularities of respective countries and regions and not be adopted lock, stock, and barrel from other countries and regions.<sup>53</sup>

Indeed, a deeper look at the problem of terrorism in different countries and regions would highlight significant differences. For example, while the economy may not be the cause of terrorism in the West, it is also not the case in countries like Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Indonesia. Most terrorists in the West may not have received proper religious education, unlike the case of the Taliban in Afghanistan and the Jemaah Islamiyah in Indonesia whose leaders and a significant number of their members were schooled in *madrasah/pesantren* (religious schools). The study on Al-Maqdisi's website and the thriving of radical publications highlight the interest on ideological materials among Arab and Indonesian audiences respectively.

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<sup>53</sup>Paul K. Davis and Kim Cragin (eds.), *Social Science for Counterterrorism: Putting Together Pieces*, Rand Corp., Santa Monica, 2009, pp. xxviii, 142, and 380-383.

This chapter thus concludes that there is a need for a multi-pronged approach to counter-terrorism work due to the complexity of the terrorism problem. The importance placed by jihadist on ideology and the role that ideology could play in radicalizing individuals dictate that it is prudent to incorporate counter-ideology as a central component to counter-terrorism and to treat a single causal explanation with prudence.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup>James W. Jones, *Blood That Cries Out From the Earth*, pp. 5–9 and 162–170.