

## **THE BATTLEFIELD OF THE MIND: REHABILITATING MUSLIM TERRORISTS**

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### **Introduction:**

Today, the most significant terrorist threat emanates from a global movement, underpinned by a violent politico-religious ideology. Political incompetence drives it, religious misinterpretation legitimizes it. Members of this movement seek to overturn regimes they considered to be apostate through violent and undemocratic means. The local and international grievances of the Muslim masses are exploited to help construct a picture of a hostile modern world towards Islam and Muslims. The threat driven by a volatile ideology can never be adequately addressed by military and law enforcement actions. A paradigm shift must occur.

A terrorist suffers from exposure to terrorist propaganda and indoctrination. A vicious by-product of society, perhaps he was more susceptible and vulnerable to the terrorist message than other members of the society. By skilfully approaching and interviewing, it is possible to map the detainees' ideological, theological, and intellectual makeup, orientations and inclinations. After discerning the terrorist narrative that affected him to cross the line, the factors that radicalized him to hate, conceive, plan, prepare, and attack can be identified. To strategically fight the contemporary wave of radicalization and violence, the understanding and knowledge rests within that terrorist. Rehabilitation allows communicating to the captured terrorist, allaying any misgivings he harbors. Such an approach will eventually defeat terrorism by decreasing the need for militaristic means.

The battlefield of the mind is the neglected battlefield. A strategic investment, fighting the battlefield of the mind is less costly. Extricating the negative feelings and replacing them with positive thoughts is a more humanitarian approach. Making terrorist rehabilitation mandated

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by law will have other benefits. It will reduce humiliation, abuse and torture, routine in most detention facilities and penitentiaries in the developing world.

**Modes of Rehabilitation:**

Rehabilitation requires engaging the beneficiary on all its facets. A successful program must recognize all modes of rehabilitation. Within each mode of rehabilitation, there are various styles. The four principal modes of rehabilitation are: first, religious rehabilitation, second, psychological rehabilitation, third, social rehabilitation, and fourth, vocational rehabilitation.

(1) Religious Rehabilitation: Every religion bring peace harmony and values tolerance. However, the ideas or religion or religious ideology has been used to provide justification for violence. Although all the great religions teach us compassion, toleration and moderation, religion was misused in the process to convince people. In the past two decades we have witnessed terrorism stemming by the propagation of deviant version of Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism, or Sikhism. Only the religious teachers and scholars can correct this by replacing the wrong interpretation and wrong teachings. Many terrorists believe that the U.S. its allies and its friends are deliberately attacking Islam and killing Muslims. They are made to believe that the West is the Satan and a religious obligation binds them to attack the U.S. its Allies and friends. Through the imposition of an extremist and militant interpretation of Islam, the terrorists are committed to re-establishing the Caliphate.

To derive legitimacy for their struggle, they interpret the Qur'an in a manner that portrays them as the true guardian of Islam. A learned Islamic scholar and a cleric have the understanding, knowledge and authority to correct the Islamic misconceptions a terrorist believes to be true. Unfortunately, among religious community, the realization of the dangers of terrorism has not adequately touched them. Only the men of religion are adequately equipped to address this urgent issue. If the right formula is not applied, the terrorist message will spread to epidemic proportions. A systematic methodology is needed to bring the misguided back to the right fold path. Singapore's Religious Rehabilitation Group produced two manuals in 2004 and in 2009 to aid religious counselling of Jemaah Islamiyah detainees held by the Internal Security Department (ISD), the security and intelligence service of Singapore. In addition to imparting structured counseling sessions, the detainees are provided religious texts

to correct their misconceptions about Islam. In addition to the Koran, books on Tfsir (exegesis of Koran) hadith (sayings and deeds of prophet), and Fiqh (jurisprudence) and Sira (prophets history) are provided.<sup>1</sup>

As wives were close to their husbands, the services of Ustazahs (female clerics) are made available to counsel wives. In some cases, the husband tried to indoctrinate the wife and the children with extremist beliefs and thoughts. As the husband went through a period of exposure to deviant teachings, the wife must understand that husband has been propagating wrong. In the future, the wife must neither propagate nor facilitate such views within the family. Some wives, especially those who attended similar classes were highly exposed. When husbands became very secretive, wives became confused with husband's ideology and behavior. As such, it is necessary for wives to be provided religious counseling. Although some children as young as 14 were exposed, the preference is that they be counselled by family.<sup>2</sup> To prevent this vicious cycle, mothers are counseled with the hope that they understand their mistake and guide the children to follow the correct principles.<sup>3</sup>

Through a combination of tools, a terrorist who need help can be reformed. While psychological, vocational, and social and family rehabilitation can change ones heart and mind, the most powerful is religious rehabilitation. Religious rehabilitation has the power to unlock the mind of a detainee or an inmate. It has the power to make a beneficiary of rehabilitation repent, become remorseful and re-enter the mainstream.

(2) Psychological rehabilitation: The psychologist adds an important dimension to the rehabilitation process. Psychology enables to understand why some cross the line and kill. The methodology involves psycho profiling, assessment and solution. From a psychological

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<sup>1</sup> Interview, Ustaz Mohamed bin Ali, former Secretary, Religious Rehabilitation Group, and Associate Research Fellow, International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, February 22, 2009.

<sup>2</sup> After coming to know of the father's arrest, his indoctrinated son said: "Dadda, you terrorist! Very good dada." As the son believed the father to be fighting the U.S., its allies and friends, the father was his personal hero. Interview, senior government official, July 2008.

<sup>3</sup> Ustaz Mohamed bin Ali, "Striking the Roots o Radicalism, Reclaiming Islam's Intellectual Heritage" In, *Countering Radicalism: The Next Generation and Challenges Ahead* edited by Abdul Halim bin Kader, (Singapore: Taman Bacaan, Singapore, 2009) 107-112.