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ICSR

*Developments in Radicalisation
and Political Violence*

De-Radicalising Islamists: Programmes and their Impact in Muslim Majority States

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Developments in Radicalisation and Political Violence

Developments in Radicalisation and Political Violence is a series of papers published by the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence (ICSR). It features papers by leading experts, providing reviews of existing knowledge and sources and/or novel arguments and insights which are likely to advance our understanding of radicalisation and political violence. The papers are written in plain English. Authors are encouraged to spell out policy implications where appropriate.

Executive Summary

Violent extremism remains a major threat to global security. The global nature of the phenomenon is reflected in its unselective character. Capitals from Oslo to Cairo, Riyadh to Kuala Lumpur, and London to Washington have had to deal with the consequences. No region, or even country, can claim to be entirely immune from the problem.

Recent developments, such al-Qaeda's attempt (via Omar Farouk Abdulmuttalab) to blow up an airliner bound for Detroit in December 2009, and bombs sent from Yemen to Chicago in October 2010, suggest that violent extremist groups and individuals remain more determined, sophisticated, unpredictable, and hard to identify.

Counter-terrorism is therefore likely to remain an important policy preoccupation and gain further significance in international relations in the short to medium terms. The continuation of conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, the deterioration of the situation in Yemen and Somalia, and the volatile nature of the Middle-East peace process all contribute to the persistence of extremism. But so too do other, less obvious factors, and the understanding of this has generated considerable interest in new approaches initiated by several Muslim-majority states to counter the phenomenon of violent extremism.

This report is part of a larger project funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and will be published by Routledge in early 2012. The Report examines the approaches of eight Muslim-majority states[1] known to have developed 'soft' strategies to counter this problem, and demonstrates how all of these countries have developed varied approaches, strategies and processes. For example, some focus more on countering and preventing further radicalisation in their societies (what we refer to in this report as 'counter-radicalisation strategy'). Countries that fall in this category include Morocco and Bangladesh. Others, such as Yemen and Egypt, focus more on rehabilitating and counselling those

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[1]   These are: Algeria, Bangladesh, Egypt, Jordan, Malaysia, Morocco, Saudi Arabia and Yemen.

who have already become radicalised (De-radicalisation). Some have developed well-structured official programmes (Saudi Arabia), while others rely more on individual initiatives (Jordan). Finally, some have experienced collective de-radicalisation, whereby a group of former radicals decide to take a collective decision to denounce violence, admit their mistake and rejoin society. Such collective de-radicalisation can, and has taken place inside prisons (e.g. Islamic Jihad and Jihad Organisation in Egypt in 1997 and 2007, respectively) and outside prisons (e.g. the Algerian Islamic Salvation Army in 1997).

By studying the counter-radicalisation and de-radicalisation policies implemented in our eight Muslim-majority states, the report identifies certain key factors which can be considered as conducive to successful de-radicalisation programmes. These include the following: the role of popular support combined with a committed, charismatic, political leadership; the role of families; the role of civil society; and the role and quality of the clerics and scholars involved. The political and developmental strength of the state is also important, as is the relationship between national counter-radicalisation and de-radicalisation efforts on the one hand, and external factors and interventions on the other.

Finally, no single formula can deal with all cases of violent extremism, even within a single region. Counter-radicalisation and de-radicalisation efforts must take account of the culture, mores, traditions, history, and rules and regulations of each country.

About the Author

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Professor El-Said has published extensively on the Middle East and North Africa. He is the co-author of *Aid and Power in the Middle East and North Africa*, and *Economic Liberalisation, Social Capital and Social Welfare in the Arab World* (both published in 2009 by Palgrave McMillan with Professor Jane Harrigan). His latest work includes a book entitled *Globalisation, Democratisation and Radicalisation in the Arab World* (with Jane Harrigan, Macmillan Palgrave, 2011), and *Deradicalising Islamists: Learning from Counter Radicalisation and De-radicalisation programmes of Muslim-Majority States* (Routledge, 2012, in print).

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Introduction[2]

I n recent years there has been an important shift of emphasis in dealing with violent extremism. Scholars, practitioners and policymakers no longer focus solely on factors that may lead a group or an individual to choose the path of violence. They have now also begun to look carefully at what has caused some people, whether individually or as a group, to leave violent extremism behind, or even to turn against their former comrades and work to undermine their views and tactics.

In large measure, this shift has come about as a result of pioneering work by several Muslim-majority states that have established programmes designed either to forestall the violent radicalisation of groups and individuals in their societies (counter-radicalisation), or to rehabilitate and reintegrate groups and individuals that have already crossed the line and have either committed an act of extreme violence, joined a violent extremist organisation, or set off down the path to do so (de-radicalisation). Countries like Egypt, Malaysia, Morocco, Saudi Arabia and Yemen have implemented such programmes, whose most distinctive feature is an emphasis on non-coercive measures to win 'hearts and minds' in countering violent extremism.

The apparent success of these programmes has attracted the attention of other states, such as Australia, Canada, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States. However, although they are often referred to, information about national counter- and de-radicalisation programmes is not yet widely disseminated, analysed or understood. Despite their popularity, as Seifert noted, "exactly how [they are] accomplished", and how "successful" they have been "is not entirely clear."[3]

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2   Professor Jane Harrigan has contributed to the sections written on the Malaysian and Bangladeshi efforts in this report. Richard Barrett also read the early drafts of the report and made valuable comments.

3   K. Seifert, 'Can Jihadis Be Rehabilitated?', *Middle East Quarterly*, Spring 2010, pp. 21-30

This report is part of a larger project, funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to study counter-radicalisation and de-radicalisation programmes initially in eight Muslim-majority States: Algeria, Bangladesh, Egypt, Jordan, Malaysia, Morocco, Saudi Arabia and Yemen. All of these countries have programmes either to counter the appeal of violent extremism, to rehabilitate already radicalised individuals, or both. Some are considered to have the most successful reform programmes in the world, notwithstanding the difficulties of measuring success in this area. This report seeks to generate information on the approaches of the eight Muslim-majority states and identify lessons learnt and best practices that could benefit a wider audience within the international community.

Algeria's Civil Accord

Few countries have suffered from internal violence more than Algeria did during the 1990s in what came to be known as its 'dirty war'. Violence erupted after the army cancelled an election that would almost certainly have brought the religiously-oriented Islamic Salvation Front (ISF) to power. The Algerian President, Abdul-Aziz Boutaflika, subsequently said that "Algeria paid the highest price for survival, tens of thousands of victims and more than $20 billion worth of losses, stifling development… in addition to the deterioration of Algeria's international standing". He also estimated the human cost of the war, in 2005, to be "already over 100,000" casualties.[4]

In 1997, the Islamic Salvation Army (ISA), the ISF's self-declared armed wing and Algeria's largest militant group, unilaterally declared a ceasefire. The improved coercive power of the state was an important factor behind this decision. As one former Emir of a militant group stated: "Before 1995 we were winning the war. Things changed after 1995 when the balance shifted in favour of the state and we began losing. This was the most important factor behind us declaring a ceasefire in 1997."[5]

The reform process, however, only took hold two years later when Boutaflika won the 1999 presidential elections. Boutaflika was determined to put an end to violence in the country and to restore stability and economic development. Immediately after becoming President, he announced the major policies that he intended to implement and which he believed were necessary to bring peace. To mobilise public support behind his policies, Boutaflika personally promoted two referenda, one in 1999 and one in 2005. The former produced the Civil Concorde Law (CCL) and the latter, the Charter for Peace and National Reconciliation (CPNR). Both

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4   Author's interview, Algeria, December 2009
5   Author's interview, Algeria, December 2009

attracted overwhelming support from the Algerian people and laid the foundations for de-radicalisation in the country.

Algeria's de-radicalisation policies, encapsulated in the CCL and CPNR, revolved around three central packages. First, there were measures aimed at restoring peace. These included pardons, amnesties, reductions in sentences and the dropping of charges against all those who gave themselves up voluntarily, renounced violence and handed in their weapons. However, Article 10 of the CCL made an important exception for those "who had committed, participated in or called for the implementation of collective atrocities such as rape or the use of explosives in public places". Such people could not expect forgiveness.

Second, Boutaflika introduced measures aimed at supporting national reconciliation, solidarity and reintegration. These included either reinstating people who had lost their jobs and careers because of the 'national tragedy', or offering them compensation instead. The latter included the provision of health and education benefits to ailing and needy families of reformed militants, of imprisoned violent extremists and of those killed during the war by either civilian or militant groups. As with other measures later adopted in Saudi Arabia, such incentives aimed to check hatred against the state, ease the pain and financial burdens borne by the families of incarcerated breadwinners, and so prevent the future radicalisation of the siblings and offspring of detained or deceased individuals. Boutaflika also extended financial compensation to the families of the missing,[6] as well as to the families of other victims of the conflict.[7]

Finally, Boutaflika implemented measures aimed at preventing the recurrence of violence. These prohibited "political activity, in whatever form, by any person responsible for the excessive

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6   Algeria has more than 10,000 missing people attributed to the 'national tragedy', the largest number of missing people in the world after Bosnia. Article 30 of the CPNR defined missing as "Any person whose death is declared by a judicial order and about whom there is no news and whose body has never been found after investigation by all legal means."

7   Compensation included payment for damage to homes and their contents, for example, caused by explosives or military action between the authorities and violent extremists.

use of religion that led to the national tragedy", as well as by "those who refused to acknowledge responsibility for devising and implementing a policy of glorifying violence against the 'umma' and state institutions." (Article 26)

These policies were not easy to implement. Indeed, for some, they were extremely painful, particularly the families of victims, who felt that the state had not only failed to acknowledge and recognise their plight, but had treated them on an equal footing to the former violent extremists and their families.

Yet, perhaps the most important lesson that emerged from the Algerian experience relates to the role of civil society, an important source of 'soft power'. Participation in civil society organisations (CSO) promotes bonds of solidarity and cooperation among members and therefore influences such variables as trust and tolerance. Through their extensive social networks and their inherent dynamism, innovation and energy, CSOs have much wider access to society than the state. This also allows them to play an important role in countering violent extremism.

To promote his reform policies, President Boutaflika relied on CSOs, which had sprung up quickly in the 1990s as a result of a 1988 law that facilitated public associations within the country. As an Algerian observer wrote:

> *Civil society and political parties were also active in mobilising the population against the phenomenon [of violence]. They were instrumental in creating a modus operandi anchored in peace and national reconciliation. …. Even the bereaved, from victims-of-terrorism associations were actively involved in defending these principles and still fought for tolerance, peace and stability. The role of the community, therefore, was of strategic importance in defeating terrorism…*[8]

There is little doubt that the CCL and CPNR have achieved a great deal. For a start, and following the collective

8   M. Berkouk, 'The Role of Civil Society in Combating Terrorism in Algeria, Institute of Diplomacy and International Relations', University of Algiers, 2009, p. 13

de-radicalisation process, which first started in the mountains before being later facilitated by the CCL and CPNR, incidents of, and fatalities from, violent extremism plummeted drastically in Algeria. For example, the average number of terrorism incidents declined in Algeria from 73 in 2000–2001 to 26 in 2006–2007. Fatalities also declined from an average of 594 to an average of 132 over the same period.[9] Algeria has transformed over the last decade, yet the reforms do not seem to have gone far enough to eliminate all violent extremism from the country.[10] In 2005, President Boutaflika evaluated the situation as follows: "Now security and safety have been restored as a result of the policy of *al-We'am al-Madani* (national reconciliation)... However, our national wound has not been healed yet because of terrorism, whose evil has been reduced, but not completely removed …"[11]

Nonetheless, there are several other issues that still linger since Algeria's 1997 de-radicalsation process that have not been dealt with effectively. They are a cause of concern for an international community which is closely monitoring Algeria's de-radicalisation policies. For example, many de-radicalised individuals still feel neglected and undermined. This is largely because a significant number of them have not received state compensation, been restored to their former jobs, or been assisted in finding new employment. Algeria's de-radicalisation programme also lacked any training or rehabilitation programme to retrain and prepare de-radicalised individuals and equip them with the necessary qualifications that would enable them to find a job. Large numbers remain unemployed with low expectations for the future. Pardoned

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9   It is important to note here that by the year 2000, terrorism incidents had already declined drastically from their peak in the mid-1990s as a result of the collective de-radicalisation process which started in 1997 and led the leadership of the ISA to announce a unilateral ceasefire. This paved the way for thousands of former militants of ISA to abandon their weapons and rejoin their society. For details on terrorism incidents and fatalities in Algeria (and elsewhere), see START (2009). Global Terrorism Dataset: Variables & Inclusion Criteria, National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, Maryland University, Version 3, May.

10 For more details, see L. Vriens, 'Armed Islamic Group: Algeria, Islamists', Council on Foreign Relations, 27 May, 2009, available at: http://www.cfr.org/algeria/armed-islamic-group-algeria-islamists/p9154.

11 A. Boutaflika, Speech delivered in the Occasion of the National Seminar for Regional Activities, 14 August, 2005, available at: http://www.riassa.dz/arabe/discoursara/2005/08/htm1/D140805.htm.

former radical groups and individuals also remain disgruntled because the state has stripped them of their political role. They have not been permitted either to join political parties, establish their own parties and associations, or engage in any political activity. This has led to feelings of social, political and economic marginalisation among the graduates of Algeria's de-radicalisation programme.

Some victims' families also remain discontented because they wanted recognition from the state and for it to distinguish more clearly between them and former militants and their families. Of equal importance, the families of missing individuals still require answers as to the fate of their loved ones. This issue was further complicated by the fact that the state absolved its security personnel of any responsibility for atrocities and even based its pardons, reductions in sentences and all other benefits upon the premise that society could not pursue through the courts any state official suspected of committing atrocities.[12]

Finally, no guarantees were provided regarding the army and security forces' role in politics. Whether they will intervene to derail election results in the future, as they did in the early 1990s, remains to be seen. For the time being, most Algerians have had enough of bloodshed and instability, and have therefore accepted President Boutaflika's reforms.

Whether or not the above-mentioned unresolved issues will return to haunt the Algerian state in the future remains to be seen.

12   N. Jebnoune. 'Is the Maghreb the "Next Afghanistan"? Mapping the Radicalization of the Algerian Salafi Jihadist Movement', Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service Georgetown University, 2007; L. Vriens, 'Armed Islamic Group: Algeria, Islamists', Council on Foreign Relations, 27 May 2009, available at: http://www.cfr.org/algeria/armed-islamic-group-algeria-islamists/p9154

Bangladesh's Hybrid Approach

Bangladesh has traditionally promoted an inclusive, secular and tolerant brand of Sufi Islam. Over the past 60 years, Bangladesh has enjoyed positive relations between its four major faith communities. 88 percent of the population are Muslim and the remaining 12 percent Christian, Hindu and Buddhist. Major religious festivals are marked by national holidays and celebrated in an atmosphere of tolerance, with the main religions sharing many rituals in common and receiving extensive media coverage. Therefore, Bangladesh has not experienced any major religious unrest and, historically, relatively few people have been attracted to any violent extremist ideology. This is despite Bangladesh's problems of widespread poverty, limited land and other resources, and areas of poor governance.

However, between 1999 and 2005 Bangladesh experienced an upsurge in support for Islamic violent extremism. An influx of already radicalised groups, such as returning veterans of the Afghan war and migrant workers from abroad, influenced public opinion, as did events on the world stage, particularly U.S. interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan and events in Palestine which fuelled radicalism and anti-Western sentiment.[13] This occurred in a context of political neglect of the threat posed by violent extremism, poor governance and widespread corruption, which are cited as key factors in the increasing radicalisation of elements within Bangladeshi society.

With a new caretaker government in office between 2005 and 2007, and the subsequent election of the Awami League Government, a consensus began to emerge among all

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13   J. Harrigan, 'The rise of religious-based radicalism and the deradicalisation programmeme in Bangladesh', in H. El-Said and J. Harrigan, *De-Radicalising Islamists: Programmes and their Impact in Muslim Majority States* (Routeledge, 2011); International Crisis Group, 'Bangladesh Today', Asia Report, no. 121., 2006

parties that religiously-based violent extremism needed to be taken seriously.[14] This new concern was partly prompted by a wave of well-orchestrated and near simultaneous bombings in 2005 in all but one of the country's 64 districts for which the Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), the main violent extremist group in the country, claimed responsibility. The group's publicly declared objective was to remove the country's secular government and impose a Taliban-inspired Islamic theocracy in its place.

The caretaker government reacted quickly and repressively with swift arrests and the adoption of new legislation that resulted in the execution of six of the JMB's seven Shura Council leaders for the murder of two judges. It also established the death penalty for patrons, financiers and trainers of terrorists, with special tribunals set up to deal with such cases.

The authorities augmented these punitive measures with a 'soft' counter-violent extremism strategy.[15] This approach has been described as a hybrid between counter- and de-radicalisation programmes because, although it relied on group profiling, its target group was a mixture of those who had already become radicalised as well as vulnerable individuals who were susceptible to violent extremist ideology.

One of the programme's key objectives was to promote a more moderate version of Islam and expose violent extremist ideologies as misconceived. To achieve this, the authorities relied heavily on the country's vibrant NGO sector that had emerged over the years to provide communities with basic services which the government had failed to provide. After 2005, the authorities deliberately facilitated the setting up of new NGOs to help implement the country's de-radicalisation programme. It was felt that NGOs provided an ideal vehicle for delivering the government's counter-violent extremism agenda as they were well embedded in society and their work was well understood and appreciated at a local level.

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14 S.A. Khan, in I. Ahmed (ed.), *Terrorism in the 21st Century: Perspectives from Bangladesh*, (The University Press Limited, 2009)

15 'Madrassahs Have Been Made an Easy Scapegoat', *New Age* (Dhaka), 21 August, 2009

A grass roots programme was implemented mainly in the three regions historically known for violent extremism, recruitment to militant groups, crime and violence: Cox's Bazaar, Bogra and Sylhet. The programme did not focus on rehabilitation of convicted extremists but was rather a broader-based, society-wide motivational programme, targeting village *madrassas*, mosques, imams and religious leaders with a strong local following. The programme also used influential figures from outside the target areas to deliver its key messages.

The scheme was tailored to address current concerns through workshops, seminars, conferences, roundtables and symposia held at various venues, including in *madrassas*, mosques, and community centres. The authorities channelled funds via NGOs, which were responsible for their own day-to-day operations. The events were highly interactive with question-and-answer sessions and 'an open floor' for discussion. Subjects discussed included Islam and peace, Islam and modernity, Islam and pluralism, Islam and human rights and the role of imams.

There was also a small financial component to the programme. A small number of individuals, for example the best *madrassa* graduates from each region, and those having difficulty finding work, have been offered small loans from NGOs. In some cases, financial support was extended to setting up businesses such as tea stalls, rickshaw operations and the like. Alongside this, there were offers of vocational training with small scholarships in areas such as mechanics, air conditioning maintenance and plumbing. All funding for such activities came from the government, which indirectly channelled it through NGOs.[16] Although Bangladesh does not have a specific de-radicalisation programme, the government still offers some financial assistance to the families of convicted violent extremists. This included, for example, assistance to help with education for the children of incarcerated individuals.

16   N. Fink Chowdhury and H. El-Said (2011), 'Transforming Terrorists: Examining International Efforts to Address Violent Extremism', IPI Policy Paper, 27 April, 2011

Internal and external observers have commended Bangladesh's strategy of involving and exploiting the extensive influence and reach of its civil society organisations in the country's de-radicalisation efforts.[17] However, they criticise the Bangladeshi programme for being hybrid, lacking focus, and its over-reliance on the profiling of individuals, mainly young *madrassa* graduates, which risks radicalising them further. As recent theoretical and empirical research has shown, it is extremely difficult to profile a terrorist. Borum rightly argued that "There is no 'terrorist personality', nor is there any accurate profile – psychologically or otherwise – of the terrorist."[18]

Observers of the Bangladeshi counter-radicalisation efforts have also noted the standard of religious scholars and leaders involved in the programme, who are seen to be poorly educated and not particularly articulate or well informed. The Bangladeshi authorities, on the other hand, have hailed the programme as a success. Their judgement is based on the decline of three key indicators since the programme's launch in 2005: the number of terrorist incidents, the level of local violence, and recruitment into religiously-based extremist groups.

However, causation is notoriously difficult to ascribe. Some of the decline in violent extremist activity may be due to the greater and more effective use of force in tracking down and apprehending violent extremists that followed the JMB's 2005 bombing campaign. However, it is perhaps too early to evaluate the real impact of the programme, since it has only been in place for less than five years. Like other counter-extremism programmes around the world, the success of the Bangladeshi programme is still in question.

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17   For information, see 'The rise of religious-based radicalism and the deradicalisation programme in Bangladesh', and 'Transforming Terrorists: Examining International Efforts to Address Violent Extremism'.

18   R. Borum, 'Psychology of Terrorism', University of South Florida, 2004, available at: http://worlddefensereview.com/docs/PsychologyofTerrorism0707.pdf

Egypt's Spontaneous De-Radicalisation Process

In the mid and late 1990s, Egypt became the first country to pursue a 'soft' approach to countering violent extremism. It is where prison-based de-radicalisation strategies, based on debate and dialogue with violent extremists, were developed inside the infamous Scorpion Cell of Cairo's Tora Prison. Other Muslim-majority countries later adopted similar methods.[19]

The process started when members of *al-Gama'a al-Islamiya* (IG), the largest and most organised Egyptian violent extremist group, unilaterally announced a cessation of violence. The IG's imprisoned leaders subsequently expressed their views in a series of books and pamphlets, collectively known as 'The Revisions', which they wrote from inside their cells, and in which they formally explained their new thinking, publicly renounced violence and expressed their recantation of violent ideology and tactics.[20]

Almost ten years later, in 2007, Egypt's second most violent group, *al-Jihad al-Islami* (IJ) followed suit. IJ was founded by two of the most significant individuals in the history of Egyptian radicalism: Ayman al-Zawahiri, the new leader of al-Qaeda, and Sayyid Imam al-Sharif (aka Dr. Fadl), one of the most influential ideologues in the history of the Salafi-jihadist movement. Indeed, the 2007 revision episode was announced by Dr. Fadl himself, who expressed his revised views in a new book *Advice Regarding the Conduct of Jihadist Action in Egypt and the World*, in which he set new rules for jihad in a way that de-legitimised all forms of

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19   'Can Jihadis Be Rehabilitated?'

20   O. Ashour, *The Deradicalisation of Jihadists: Transforming Armed Islamic Movements* (Routledge, 2009)

terrorism as un-Islamic and restricted holy war to extreme circumstances of self-defence. The book was also serialised in the influential London-based Arabic newspaper, *Asharq Al Awsat*.

The de-radicalisation process within the IG and IJ was a spontaneous, internally generated course of action. It was not initiated by the state through a professional, comprehensive or well-planned de-radicalisation process. On the contrary, according to Stracke it "was initiated by prisoners themselves," particularly by the leadership of both IG and IJ who then sought collective reform from their followers.[21]

Yet, one of the key lessons to emerge from the Egyptian experience of group de-radicalisation relates to the role of the state. Although the government did not initiate the reforms, it nonetheless played an important role in facilitating the *muraja'h* (revision) process among imprisoned leaders and members once it started. It did this not only by sparing the IG and IJ leadership from execution (unlike in Bangladesh), but also by facilitating dialogue, debate and meetings inside prisons between the leaders, their members, and other secular and political prisoners.[22]

As well as facilitating internal interaction, the Egyptian government also invited credible scholars from Al-Azhar University, one of the most respected institutions of Islamic scholarship in the world, to visit prisons to debate and discuss key issues with the leaders of the violent extremist groups. As Black wrote: "Like the Gama'a before them, the Interior Ministry and State Security allowed Sharif and other prisoners to meet and consult each other in prison and hold religious dialogue with clerics from al-Azhar, the fount of mainstream jurisprudence in the Sunni world."[23] Quietly, Egyptian authorities also facilitated prison tours by the IG and IJ leadership to encourage their followers to repent and renounce violence.

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21   N. Stracke, 'Arab Prisons: A Place for Dialogue and Reform', *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Volume I, Issue 4, 2007
22   *The Deradicalisation of Jihadists: Transforming Armed Islamic Movements*
23   I. Black, 'Violence Won't Work: how author of Jihadist' "bible" stirred up a storm', *The Guardian*, 27 July, 2007

Although the majority of members of both IG and IJ accepted and ratified their leaders' revisions, a minority did not. In this respect, the Egyptian government performed another facilitating role. Through monitoring prisons and surveying where the reform movement was making headway, it was able to identify individuals who were attempting to sabotage the revision process. Therefore, "the Egyptian authorities decided to facilitate the process by separating the supporters of the reform or 'revision' process from the small group that was objecting to the process. It did this simply by relocating about 30 of the 'rejectionist' militant Islamists to other prisons".[24]

Finally, once the reform process got underway inside prisons, the Egyptian authorities used the media to counter the appeal of violent extremism within wider society. For example, they allowed de-radicalised leaders of IG and IJ to publish articles in the main newspapers which explained their new thinking and included their renunciation of violence.[25] Many of the emotional discussions that had taken place inside prisons were widely covered in the Egyptian press. Ideologues of IG and IJ and prominent members of Egyptian society were also allowed to attack radical ideology and extremist groups through articles in daily newspapers, and to publish more than 25 volumes of revisions in a series called *Tashih al-Mafahim* (Corrections of Concepts). The latter not only de-legitimised violent ideology, but also tackled doctrinal issues such as declaring someone *takfir* (apostate), attacking civilians (both Muslims and non-Muslims), and the meaning, conditions and ethics of jihad.

Apart from releasing almost 12,500 repentant individuals, the Egyptian authorities provided few other incentives to counter radicalisation more broadly. Indeed, the state made few, if any, attempts to facilitate the reintegration of released individuals into society through, for example, provision of jobs, financial stipends, training, education or health care, as has been the case in Saudi Arabia. This led many to argue that the Egyptian programme was incomplete and "has not been

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24 'Arab Prisons: A Place for Dialogue and Reform'
25 For more details, see J. Harrigan and H. El-Said, 'Group Deradicalisation in Egypt: The Unfinished Agenda', in H. El-Said and J. Harrigan, *De-Radicalising Islamists: Programmes and their Impact in Muslim Majority States* (Routledge, 2011)

actively pursued."[26] Some observers have even questioned the entire de-radicalisation process, arguing that these prison debates and recantations were no more than "fake co-operation" to "ensure a quick release of members" from prison.[27]

Yet those who attended prison debates and discussions in order to mediate or report on them believe that these were "sincere" and "genuine" revisions. This includes senior analysts and politicians such as: Montasser al-Zayyat, legal advisor of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood; Makram Mohamed Ahmed, closely affiliated to the Minister of the Interior and then editor of the government weekly, *Al Mussawar*; and Diaa Rashwan, analyst for the al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies in Cairo. They assess that the leaders had "occupied themselves with endless theological debates and glum speculation about where they had gone wrong," prompting a change in their views and tactics.[28]. Others also noted that "Egypt's de-radicalisation work had helped to keep violence at bay: the proof … is that there has not been an incident in the Nile Valley since Luxor" in 1997.[29]

However, the lack of further efforts in Egypt to counter violent extremism within wider society may give some cause for concern. The country suffers from problems that are often seen as contributing factors to the radicalisation process such as widespread poverty, inequality, corruption, restricted political rights, and regular human rights violations. Some commentators warn that if de-radicalisation is not supported by measures to deal with the root causes of the problem, then it is not difficult to imagine a resurgence of the phenomenon in the future.[30]

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26 'Can Jihadis Be Rehabilitated?'
27 'Can Jihadis Be Rehabilitated?'
28 Quoted in L. Wright , 'The Rebellion Within: An al-Qaeda mastermind questions terrorism', *The New Yorker*, 2 June, 2008, available at: http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2008/06/02/080602fa_fact_wright?printable=true.
29 I. Black, 'Violence Won't Work: how author of Jihadist' "bible" stirred up a storm', *The Guardian*, 27 July, 2007
30 For more details, see: 'The Rebellion Within: An al-Qaeda mastermind questions terrorism'; D. Lynch, 'Egypt's economy soars; so does misery', *USA TODAY*, 14 May, 2008; and 'The long wait: A special report on Egypt', *The Economist*, 15 July, 2010.

Jordan's Lack of a 'Soft' Strategy

I n November 2005, Jordan experienced its first ever suicide attack when three bombers blew themselves up simultaneously in three of the capital's most prestigious hotels, killing 60 people and injuring more than 100. This came as a shock to many in a country historically known for its relatively stable and modern secular government, and conservative yet often pro-Western policies.

In the 1990s, Jordan, along with much of the rest of the region, experienced a dramatic growth in radical Salafi movements. The return of 'Afghan Jordanians'[31] in the late 1980s and early 1990s marked the beginning of the evolution of an extremist movement in the country. Regional and national politics also led to further radicalisation, including the 1991 Gulf War, the peace treaty with Israel in 1993, and the close alignment of the country's foreign policy with the United States. So too did national factors, such as the state's failure to manage economic growth and stem unemployment, inequalities in wealth, and the lack of any prison reform policy or rehabilitation programme to retrain and qualify Afghan Jordanians for jobs in the labour market.

Jordan's approach to countering the growth of violent extremism lacked coherence and was characterised initially by a total reliance on traditional security approaches, such as attempts to infiltrate extremist groups, arrest their members and pre-empt attacks. By the late 1990s, according to Amnesty International, more than 1,700 people had been arrested in connection with religious and violent extremist groups.[32] While most of the detainees were put on trial, court proceedings were neither free nor fair. Allegations

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31 Jordanians who had fought against troops from the Soviet Union in Afghanistan

32 'Amnesty International Annual Report: 2001', available at: http://web.amnesty. org/web/ar2001.nsf/webmepcountries/JORDAN?OpenDocument

of torture, confessions extracted under duress, the fabrication of charges and the coercion of witnesses were widespread.

Jordan learned the hard way that prisons and detention centres can become breeding grounds for hardliners and recruitment centres for violent extremism. Abu Rumman and Abu Hanieh documented how Jordan's prison environment transformed sympathisers who vaguely understood the notion of violent jihad into hardliners, and caused them to undergo further radicalisation.[33]

Jordan's most innovative counter-radicalisation initiative, the *Risalat Amman* (Amman Letter) was launched in 2004 by King Abdullah II, who ascended to the throne in February 1999 following the death of his Father, King Hussein. The Amman Letter aimed to attack the *takfiri* culture of violent extremism. It launched an unprecedented counter-ideological drive against the *takfir* creed and was meant to serve as a key example of how to confront radical ideology. The letter was issued by a convention of 180 Muslim scholars, handpicked by the king and representing various strands of Islam, who were brought together to project a more tolerant and apolitical version of the faith than that endorsed by the extremists. It advocated peaceful coexistence between peoples based upon respect, mutual pacts and agreements, and rebutted the *takfiri* ideology of the Salafi-jihadis.

The Amman Letter also aimed to de-legitimise fatwas issued by violent extremists that typically excommunicated other Muslims and justified violent acts, and to confine the right of issuing *fatwas* to officially recognised, competent scholars. To this end, the Government organised a conference of prominent Islamic scholars, representing all schools of Islamic thought, in Amman. The conference adopted the Amman Letter in full and approved *fatwas* advocating co-existence, moderation and *al-Wasatiyya*

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33   M. Abu Rumman and H. Abu Hanieh, *The Jihadi Salafist Movement in Jordan After Zarqawi: identity, leadership crisis and obscured vision*, (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2009)

(the middle way), rejecting all forms of violence as un-Islamic and a distortion of the basic peaceful principles of Islam.[34]

The Amman Letter did not reflect a new approach to countering violent extremism in Jordan. Nor did it involve any key Jordanian social or non-governmental organisations, or credible religious leaders. On the contrary, civil society organisations were further restricted, new press laws undermined freedom of speech and expression, and a new and controversial anti-terrorism law gave further powers to the state's security and law enforcement agencies. In fact, it was the hotel bombings of November 2005, almost one year after the Amman Letter, and five months after the Amman conference, that did the most to turn Jordanian public opinion against violent extremism.

Jordan's experience also draws attention to the importance of choosing credible and competent messengers to promote interfaith initiatives or other proposals to counter the message of violent extremists. In 2008, there was a curious and surprising development within Jordanian prisons. According to the Director of the rehabilitation and correction centres, Colonel Sharif Al-Omari, imprisoned extremists called upon the Jordanian authorities to treat them in the same "way the Saudi authorities treat their radicals, and carry out dialogue with us".[35] As a result, the Jordanian authorities organised a two-month *ad hoc* programme, the aim of which was not so much to debate with the inmates as to lecture them on the key religious issues that underpinned the Amman Letter: a moderate version of Islam and a refutation of *takfiri* ideology. The scholars chosen to address the detainees came mostly from Jordanian universities; they were little known to the prisoners and were seen as mere instruments of the state, with little credibility. As a result, the most radical elements in prison not only refused to participate in the programme, but also refused to communicate with, pray behind or even eat and drink with the scholars and professors because, according to Bassam Al-Emoush, one of the key professors

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34 The conference was organized in July 2005. For more information, see Y. Minzili, 'The Jordanian Regime Fights the War of Ideas', *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology*, Vol. 5, Hudson Institute, 2007

35 Author's interview with Colonel Sharif Al-Omari, Director of the Rehabilitation and Correction Centres, Amman, December 2008

chosen by the authorities to talk to prisoners, they believed that they "were sent by the state, which made me an infidel in their eyes."[36]

Most observers of Jordan's attempts to counter violent extremism are sceptical of the country's efforts so far. As Ibrahim Gharbiya, a senior Jordanian expert on extremist Islamic organisations, noted:

… [the] denunciations of terrorism and the information campaign to inculcate moderate Islam have not reached deeply into the general public, except among those who were already moderates. Extremist ideas and violent groups … continue to serve as an instrument for recruiting activists … Our ideological and administrative campaign to forestall extremism has not succeeded because it has not yet reached the sources of violence and crime. The existing simplistic solutions have not helped in the war against violence and have even served it. The search for the correct approach cannot be postponed.[37]

36   Author's interview with Dr Bassam Al-Emoush, Amman, December 2008
37   Quoted in 'The Jordanian Regime Fights the War of Ideas'

Malaysia's De-radicalisation: Learning from the Past[38]

Not all Muslim-majority states suffer the problems of violent extremism to the same extent. Malaysia, for example, though by no means immune to the threat, has not experienced any major terrorist incidents in the past twenty years. The country has a long history of terrorist insurgency dating back to the 1940s, involving a communist insurrection that spanned 41 years from 1948 to1989. The insurrection was waged largely by ethnic Chinese, and consisted of a guerrilla-style armed rebellion by an ideologically-driven group that wanted to topple the government and take control of the country. The groups' terrorist tactics, which are not unlike those used by current ideologically-driven groups such as Jemaah Islamiah (JI), included attacks on rubber estate managers, tin mine operators, the security forces and members of the public as well as the sabotage of rural development projects.

To counter the communist threat, the state resorted to tactics which are common in other countries facing violent extremism today, such as Saudi Arabia and Morocco. These included strengthening the armed forces[39], revising the Internal Security Act in 1960 (which was first introduced by the British colonial power in the 1940s), and launching psychological operations and a counter-insurgency campaign to gain the population's allegiance and reduce the appeal of the views and ideology of the insurgents. A massive resettlement and development project was also launched to resettle those parts

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38   Unless otherwise stated, most information for this section is generated from fieldwork and personal interviews conducted with Malaysian officials at the ministry of interior and incarceration centre during a two-week visit in April, 2010.

39   In 1970 another six brigades and two more divisions of the army were formed to help safeguard the country from the insurgency

of the population that provided most support to insurgents in safe, well-defended, well-equipped and economically viable new villages. The aim was to break the link between the insurgency and the Chinese community.

The authorities also introduced a de-radicalisation programme for captured communist insurgents, aimed at reshaping their outlook, including through spiritual counselling. In addition, they provided support to their families to check hatred against the state and marginalisation in society.

In dealing with subsequent threats from violent extremist groups such as Jama'a Islamiya (JI), Malaysia has built upon the lessons learnt from the communist insurgency. Between 2000 and 2005 the authorities arrested a small group of Muslim Malays for attempting to mount a violent struggle against the state. These were mostly young but radicalised members of the opposition Pan-Malaysia Islamic Party (PAS)[40], who were previously religious students in Pakistan and Taliban-trained. They killed a Christian State Assemblyman, tried to steal arms from a police station, robbed banks and detonated a few ineffectual bombs but were eventually tracked down and arrested.[41] The authorities established a prison-based rehabilitation and counselling programme to convince them to moderate their views and repent.[42] The ISA was used again as an important pre-emptive law that gave the police sweeping extra-judicial powers to search, arrest and detain without trial in order to prevent any acts prejudicial to the security of Malaysia.[43] This meant that suspects could be arrested before they committed any act of violence, and there were to be no trials, even where enough evidence existed to bring a case to court.

40   Following the sacking of Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim in September 1998 PAS became more radical and critical of the incumbent regime.

41   J. Harrigan, 'Malaysia: A History of Dealing with Insurgency and Extremism', in H. El-Said and J. Harrigan, *De-Radicalising Islamists: Programmes and their Impact in Muslim Majority States* (Routeledge, 2011)

42   Ibid.

43   Z. Abuza, 'The Rehabilitation of Jemaah Islamiyah Detainees in South East Asia', in T. Bjorgo and J. Horgan, *Leaving Terrorism Behind: Individual and Collective Disengagement* (Routledge, 2009)

The ISA allowed for a sixty-day interrogation period by the police. If the prisoner was not released after this sixty-day period he was to receive a detention order for a two-year period which could be renewed indefinitely.

While in detention, prisoners were subject to a relatively well-designed de-radicalisation programme, which drew on elements later found in the Saudi programme. The programme's objectives were to offer robust alternatives to the detainees' deviant and misconceived ideology in order to ensure that they understood that their activities were a threat to the country and contrary to the true teachings of Islam, and to instil awareness of the responsibilities of citizenship regarding race, religion, loyalty to the nation and obedience to its ruler. The program involved religious and social counselling, moral education and self-esteem classes, and vocational training to enhance detainees' skills.[44]

Religious scholars mainly drawn from Jakim, the state religious department, held religious instruction sessions for the detainees while prison officers worked closely with the scholars to produce tailored programmes. Outside scholars, such as university professors who, unlike official scholars, are widely respected due to their independence from the government, were also invited to visit once a week. Most of the daily classes, however, were given by the prison staff themselves. Topics discussed with detainees included jihad, *osoul al-fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), the right interpretation of the Qur'an, and Islam's position *vis a vis* other races and religions.

The religious education sessions were delivered to groups or, where necessary, on a one-to-one basis. In addition to religious scholars, psychologists were involved in the rehabilitation programme with counselling sessions to discuss individual problems.

Religious classes took place on a daily basis for one-and-a-half hours, on a purpose-built campus. While radical detainees were isolated from other prisoners, they lived together in dormitories where they socialised among

44   'Malaysia: A History of Dealing with Insurgency and Extremism'

themselves. As in Egypt, the few most radical elements who steadfastly refused to repent, opposed the programme and attempted to undermine it, were moved to a separate facility.[45]

While in detention, detainees were subject to evaluation once every six months by a special committee of three officials directly linked to the King himself. This had the authority to recommend the detainee's release if it felt that he no longer presents a threat to society. On average, detainees spend almost three years in detention, during which their rights to family visits, medical check-ups, representation, defence, and court appeals against their detention are constitutionally protected. They are also treated humanely and lawfully so as to reduce the risk of re-offending.

Significantly, the Malaysian programme does not end at the prison gate but continues after the detainee's release, normally under a Supervision Order. At this stage, the Police Department takes over from the Prison Department, and the released detainee is provided with continued counselling and religious education as well as with other assistance to facilitate his reintegration into society. This includes training and the provision of a job if necessary, while some detainees are provided with financial assistance to start up small businesses.[46]

As is the case with any de-radicalisation and rehabilitation initiative, it is difficult to judge the success of the Malaysian programme. Since 2001, 154 radicals have been detained under the ISA. All except six were deemed to have successfully completed the de-radicalisation programme and were released, without later re-offending, which is taken as one indicator of the programme's success. However, many of those released remain under Restriction Orders, with tight supervision and monitoring, and therefore have no incentive and less opportunity to resume extremist behaviour.

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45   Author's interviews with officials at the main incarceration centre at Kamunting, April, 2010.

46   Author's interviews with counter terrorism state officials, Ministry of Interior, KL, April, 2010.

Morocco: Promoting Islamic Beauty

Morocco has introduced the most extensive counter-radicalisation measures among the eight countries studied in this report. The 2003 and 2007 Casablanca bombings were taken very seriously by the Moroccan regime, which derives its legitimacy from two traditional religious sources: its descent from the family of the prophet Mohammad; and its role as the 'Commander of the Faithful' and mediator between and among all factions of Moroccan society.

Morocco, in some respects like Malaysia, has developed an important reconciliation programme for political prisoners, which it could extend and build upon as a base for a potentially effective de-radicalisation policy if it so decided. Since independence in 1956, the Moroccan state has been accused of grave violations of human rights, particularly under the reign of the late King Hassan II (r. 1961–1999), including long imprisonments, "forcible disappearances, torture and mass political trials…"[47] Most Moroccans today recall those years as *zaman al-rasas* (the time of bullets) or *al-sanawat al-sawda* (the black years).

As a result of both internal and external pressures, King Hassan II agreed to the creation of an Independent Committee (IC) in 1999, whose main tasks were to reconcile Moroccans with their past by investigating all human rights violations committed by the regime between 1956 and 1999 and to compensate victims and their families. Despite some progress, the IC was hampered by internal divisions and splits, and was unable to produce a full reconciliation process that satisfied all Moroccans. The impasse was overcome by the new king, Muhammad IV, who succeeded his father in 1999 and ratified, in 2002, the establishment of the Equity

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47   M. Clouser, *The Performance of Human Rights in Morocco* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005)

and Reconciliation Commission (ERC) to replace the IC and move the reconciliation process forward.[48]

In many respects, the ERC developed a very similar programme to the CCL and CPNR in Algeria. For example, the IC and the ERC called for the release of, and amnesties for, all political prisoners and exiled individuals. The authorities also sought to return political prisoners and other victims of human rights violations to their former jobs. A compensation scheme was also introduced to compensate all victims of human rights violations and their families financially.

However, the IC and ERC were only entrusted with the responsibility of investigating human rights violations that took place in Morocco between 1956 and 1999. Their remit did not include, and has not yet been extended to, prisoners and their families subject to similar treatment after 1999.[49]

According to the International Crisis Group, the Moroccan authorities have arrested "over 2,000 suspected militants or sympathisers" since 2003.[50] Yet no attempts have been made to debate, counsel or rehabilitate them. The Moroccan authorities remain adamant that Salafi-jihadi detainees are "not subject to revisions" because they are "ignorant, radical and reckless".[51]

Paradoxically, Morocco has simultaneously launched an extensive and wide-ranging religious reform programme following the 2003 and, in particular, the 2007 bombings. The aim of the reforms was to counter radicalisation and the appeal of violent ideology in society. They did so by strengthening the official religious establishment, particularly the three key religious institutions of the state: the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MRA); the Supreme Council of Scientists;

48   Moroccan Centre for Studies and Contemporary Research (MCSCR). *Taqrir al-Hala al-Dineya in Morocco* (The Report of the Religious Status in Morocco), CEMERC, Morocco, 2009

49   'Transforming Terrorists: Examining International Efforts to Address Violent Extremism'. Also see H. El-Said, 'Counter Radicalisation Without De-radicalisation: the case of Morocco', in H. El-Said and J. Harrigan, *De-Radicalising Islamists: Programmes and their Impact in Muslim Majority States* (Routeledge, 2011)

50   International Crisis Group, 'Morocco Conflict History', September, 2008

51   'The report of the Religious Status in Morocco'

and the *al-Muhamadiya* Foundation, putting them in charge of all religious activities in the country.

To take one example, mosques are now the only places of official worship recognised and controlled directly by the MRA. All donations to build new mosques or renovate existing ones must also go through the MRA. Moreover, Friday sermons have been brought more directly under MRA control. The MRA prepares Friday *khutbas* (speeches) in advance, which are delivered in the name of the king himself. The MRA has been encouraged and funded to increase its role in the dissemination of religious knowledge. For example, before 2003, the MRA used to issue, at most, two magazines a year. In 2006, the MRA published 17 books on subjects such as 'true Islam', 'religion and society', and 'religion and the state'.[52]

The role of the mosque was also expanded to include human development. Given the high illiteracy rates in Morocco and the inadequacies of the education system, literacy programmes were incorporated as an important part of mosque activities from 2007. These programmes not only teach basic reading and writing skills, but also seek to overcome religious illiteracy and expose misleading ideologies. More than 176,000 Moroccan students participated in such programmes in 2007/08 alone.[53]

The Supreme Council of Scientists (SCS) – the highest religious institution in the country – has also undergone similar reforms. For example, the number of local councils, supervised by the SCS, increased from 14 in 2003 to 70 in 2007. These local councils have been delivering over 295,000 *wa'ath* (religious) lessons annually since 2007. A new, *Ifta'* (religious ruling) committee was created under the umbrella of the SCS, which today is in sole charge of issuing *fatwas* in Morocco.[54]

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52   'The report of the Religious Status in Morocco'
53   'The Religious Case in Morocco' (Taqrir al-Hala al-Diniya fi al-Maghrib), first
     edition, The Moroccan Centre for Contemporary Studies and Research,
     October 2009
54   'Counter Radicalisation Without De-radicalisation'

Moreover, the Moroccan authorities also turned to the media to spread the message of toleration, moderation, Sufism and a state-sanctioned version of the 'true path of Islam'. After 2003, the authorities licensed 28 new religious radio stations, both private and public, including the popular government-owned and run *King Muhammad VI* Radio Station. In 2008 alone, Morocco's religious radio stations broadcast more than 200 *halaga dinyeah* (religious discussions) on issues related to *osoul al-fiqh* (the study of Islamic jurisprudence), modern Islam, *hadith*, family relations, the state and society, true Islamic practices, and values and principles. The authorities also established the *King Muhammad VI* TV Channel *(al-Sadisha)*, which specialises in religion and religious education. It regularly broadcasts live question and answer programs as part of its daily 10–12 hour content.

Finally, Moroccan authorities encouraged the MRA, SCS, key Moroccan ulama and pro-regime religious parties and movements to establish their own websites to counter and rebut radical ideologies. This effort is now led by the Al-Muhammadiyah Foundation. Dr. Abadi, the foundation's director, claims to have the most effective anti-terrorism website (www.arrabita.ma) in the entire region, judged by the 7,500 daily hits that it receives. Al-Muhammadiya provides web-based lessons in religious education and peer group sessions. Dr. Abadi has a live discussion program on the internet once every two weeks, where he says that he, "simply answers questions on all religious aspects, including terrorism. It is an open encounter for two hours." In addition, Dr. Abadi has a daily seven-minute program on Morocco's main TV channel which he uses to "provide a daily interpretation of the Qur'an, verse by verse. My plan is to do the whole Qur'an." Finally, Dr. Abadi runs a weekly, live, interactive question-and-answer program on Morocco's main radio station, lasting from 9–11pm. "We frankly and openly promote a Sufi version of Islam in our work, which we call Islamic beauty."[55]

Most observers argue that it is too early to judge the effectiveness of Moroccan counter-radicalisation efforts.[56]

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55   Author's interview with Dr. Abadi, Rabat, December 2009.
56   'The Religious Case in Morocco'

Moreover, Moroccan authorities have sought to promote official religious institutions and practices in isolation from its vibrant, dynamic and active civil society. This, along with denying Islamist detainees the right to fair trials, widespread allegations of torture, forced confessions, and a failure to engage the families of incarcerated violent extremists in an interactive counselling programme, has had negative effects. It appears that the authorities may already have lost the support of the families of detained violent Islamists for its counter-radicalisation policies, and that many of their siblings, offspring and friends have tended towards extremism.

In Sufism, Morocco has also sought to promote its own version of apolitical Islam, which most mainstream Sunni movements traditionally frown upon. Unsurprisingly, Morocco's leading academic expert on Islamist movements, Dr. Muhammad Dareef, is sceptical of official efforts to reduce the appeal of violent extremism. He stated that Morocco's policies not only keep the country "under the threat" of violent extremism, but may have also increased exposure to this threat.[57]

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57   Dareef, Muhammad. Terrorism is the Product of External Contradictions and Morocco is Still Threatened, in al-Tajdid, May 16-18.

The Art of De-radicalisation: Saudi Arabia

While Egypt may have pioneered a new approach to de-radicalisation, it is Saudi Arabia that has developed the most professional, comprehensive and successful of such official programmes. However, the counselling programme is only one component of a wider effort to counterradicalisation in the country that dates back to at least the mid-1990s.

The year 1995 was a turning point in the country's history. It marked a high-point of anti-American sentiment, which was reflected in two major attacks against American targets in 1995 and 1996.[58] The country also saw a smooth transfer of power and the arrival of a new regime when Crown Prince (CP) Abdullah became the *de facto* leader of the country after a heart attack incapacitated the late King Fahad. Known for his nationalist tendencies and religious credentials, the radical *sahwa* (awakening) Islamists who emerged in schools and universities in the 1970s saw CP Abdullah as more credible and legitimate than his predecessor.

CP Abdullah's first move was to distance himself from the United States. He openly criticised American policy in the region, particularly America's perceived bias towards Israel, the nation which he held responsible for escalating hostilities between Palestinians and Israelis on the one hand, and radicalising thousands of Muslim youth on the other. In an extraordinary letter in which he threatened a reconsideration of bilateral relations, CP Abdullah warned the U.S. Administration, that "from now on we will protect

58   'Can Saudi Arabia Reform Itself?', *Middle East Report*, No. 28, International Crisis Group, 14 July, 2004 ; 'Saudi Arabia Backgrounder: Who Are the Islamists?', *Middle East Report*, No. 31, International Crisis Group, September 21, 2004

our national interests, regardless of where American's interests in the region lie".[59]

CP Abdullah's second move was to initiate gradual political reform and broaden political participation. For example, the *Majlis al-Shura* (Consultative Council-CC), established in 1992 to promote more political participation, increased its staff from 60 to 90 and then to 120. None of the CC members came from the Royal family and all were highly respected and credible members of Saudi society. He also created provincial councils in the mid-1990s to allow public opinion on daily affairs to reach the leadership.

One product of reforms initiated by CP Abdullah was related to the educational system. This led to a more balanced curriculum between religious and non-religious subjects. Textbooks were also purged of lessons that inculcated hostility, particularly towards non-Muslims and especially towards Christians and Jews.[60]

Finally, the Saudi authorities relaxed regulations on the media and allowed its right-wing Islamist clerics and preachers, particularly *sahwaists*, to criticise the system, including the quality of education, health, and, most importantly, the *wahhabi* official establishment. They held the latter responsible for the rise of violent extremism in the country because of what they perceived as a rigid and strict interpretation of the sacred text. It is important to note that a large number of those clerics and preachers, known as *sahwaists*, went through a process of radicalisation in late 1980s and early 1990s, culminating in the imprisonment of many of them. While in prison, the majority underwent a process of *muraja'h* (revision) in a similar fashion to the Egyptian IG and IJ movements; a process which has received little, if any, attention.

Even after revising their views and tactics, the *sahwaist* clerics and preachers remained critical, and largely autonomous, of the regime, which gave them tremendous credibility and legitimacy. They understood the consequences

59   'Saudi Arabia Backgrounder: Who Are the Islamists?'
60   'Can Saudi Arabia Reform Itself?'

of violent extremism and set out to mediate between the state and society, including its radical and violent extremist elements. Although critical of the *wahhabi* religious establishment, the *sahwaists* demanded stronger but more independent religious institutions. The regime encouraged them to express their views, and even to play a greater role in moderating the views of their followers. This was because they opposed and rejected violent extremism,[61] an outlook that they shared with the state whose official *wahhabi* establishment's standing and credibility had suffered a great deal.

Given the increased role of the internet, the Saudi authorities encouraged its clerics, as its security allies, to establish their own websites in order to monitor radical websites, prepare statements to rebut radical ideology, and answer public questions. Examples of such websites include the murajaat (revisions) (www.murajaat.com), *sakeenah* (inner peace), and *alifta* (www.alifta.com).

One of the major outcomes of the waves of terrorist attacks that struck Saudi Arabia in 2003 and 2004 was the introduction by the powerful Ministry of Interior (SMI) of a professional, coherent and comprehensive counselling programme for which the kingdom has become well known. According to SMI, the aim of the counselling programme is, "to deal with the wrong convictions of the detained person in order to change and substitute them with correct convictions that agree with the middle way of Islam and its tolerance. This is realised by using the method of dialogue, wisdom and gentle preaching by competent people, specialists in religious, psychological and social sciences, with a follow up by security experts…".[62]

The SMI established a special Advice Committee to oversee the programme. The latter relied on a large number

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61 This was particularly the case following the revision *(muraja'h)* process which a large number of *sahwaist* leaders, including such figures as Salman al-Awada who initially praised Bin Laden, went through in the late 1990s and early 2000s. For more details see *De-Radicalising Islamists: Programmes and their Impact in Muslim Majority States*

62 'Centre for Muhammad Bin Nayef for Advise, Counselling and Care', Riyadh, Public Security Press, 2009

of competent and credible clerics, psychologists, and scientists, mostly drawn from *sahwaist* elements who had moderated their views and who were able to emphasise their independence from the state to the detainees. At the core of the programme is the treatment of the detainees who are seen as 'misled' and in need of good advice, rather than criminals requiring punishment.[63]

The counselling programme starts with the *al-Munasah* (advice) scheme, which takes place inside prisons. Here, detainees are voluntarily subjected to short-term (up to two weeks) and long-term (up to six weeks) individual and group sessions. Towards the end of their sentences, the detainees who collaborate, moderate their views, and renounce violence are moved to a purpose-built, 'halfway-house' facility called the Mohammed bin Nayef Centre for Counselling and Care, located in the outskirts of Riyadh. Here, the beneficiaries undertake several 'diets' or courses, which include: a religious programme; a social programme; a psychological programme; an art programme; and a history programme. These programmes aim at correcting the deviant ideas and views of the beneficiaries from all aspects and directions.[64]

One feature that distinguishes the Saudi de-radicalisation programme from others like it is the essential role played by the beneficiaries' families, both in *al-Munasah* and even more so in the Care Programme. Families are encouraged not only to visit their sons regularly at the authorities' expense, but also to take part in the programme itself. They are briefed on the condition of their sons, their experiences and how they have been affected. Families are persuaded and counselled on how to talk to their sons, to encourage them to repent and return home to rejoin their families and loved ones. This is sometimes harder than it may seem, as families have often rejected their sons due to the shame that their extremist

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63   Author's Interview with Sheikh Ahmed Al-Jelan during a visit to Prince Mohammed Bin Nayf Centre For Advice, Counseling and Care, Riyadh, August, 2009

64   'Centre for Muhammad Bin Nayef for Advise, Counselling and Care'; author's interviews with scholars and scientists at Prince Mohammed Bin Nayef Care Centre, Riyadh, August, 2009.

activities have brought. It is therefore a process of working on both parties; the families and their errant members.[65]

In addition to the curricular courses outlined above, the Care Programme includes extra-curricular activities, such as sport, in which all members of the programme take part in, including scholars, scientists and security personnel. The objective here is not only to create a cordial atmosphere and a certain amount of bonding, but also to "give us the opportunity to study the participants' attitudes. Some show aggression in the games, which may suggest that they need more counselling."[66]

Upon release, beneficiaries receive help to prevent recidivism and ensure their smooth reintegration into society. This includes the payment of a monthly stipend for up to one year or until they are able to stand on their own feet without state support. The state also intervenes to find jobs for released participants, the authorities encourage and pay for beneficiaries to resume their education, while also facilitating marriage for single beneficiaries. This aims at engaging them in family responsibilities and to refocus them away from violent extremist activities. According to some observers, "this strategy [has] proved to be very successful."[67]

When measured in terms of terrorist incidents and recidivism, Saudi Arabia is considered a success story for the 'soft' approach to countering violent extremism. A wide range of observers share this evaluation; including Christopher Boucek, who concluded that: "The [Saudi] programme has succeeded in helping detainees repudiate extremist ideology…Roughly 1,400 out of 3,000 individuals who have completed the programme…only 45 have been re-arrested. The programme's overall success has made it a model for 'soft' counter-terrorism around the world."[68]

65   'Can Jihadis Be Rehabilitated?'
66   Author's interview with Dr. Abdualrahman al-Hadlaq, Riyadh, August, 2009.
67   'Arab Prisons: A Place for Dialogue and Reform'
68   C. Boucek, 'Saudi Arabia's 'Soft' Counterterrorism Strategy: Prevention, Rehabilitation, and Aftercare', Carnegie Paper Middle East Program, Number 97, September, 2008

However, it is important to note that Saudi Arabia has not fully succeeded in eliminating all attempts to carry out violent extremist acts. In fact, some groups seem to have undergone further radicalisation in recent years, evidenced by the merger of the Saudi and Yemeni branches of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula in January 2009 and the attack in August that year on the patron of the counselling programme, Prince Muhammad Ben Nayef himself.[69] Prince Nayef bin Abdul-Aziz, the Interior Minister, stated that the kingdom "aborted more than 230 operations in recent years."[70] This may be the result of both internal and external factors, including an incomplete reform agenda, which has left limited opportunity for political participation and popular representation, as well as political events outside the kingdom. Saudi officials have no control over what happens in Iraq, Palestine and Afghanistan, but "every time something happens there, recruitment in Saudi Arabia, including inside prisons, increases dramatically."[71]

However, although recidivism will continue to occur, whether influenced by internal or external factors, public support for the programme remains high. The programme was not designed for Saudi citizens who had been incarcerated in Guantanamo Bay (the group most prone to recidivism) but as Prince Mohammed has said, if a man reverts to violent extremism having been given everything by the state, he attracts little if any public support, whereas if a man returns to violence because he has been tortured or otherwise mistreated he is likely to take others with him.[72]

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69   'Saudi prince vows to fight terrorism after attack', *Associated Press*, 28 August, 2010

70   Quoted in *Middle East Online*, September 27, 2010

71   Author's interview with Dr. Abdulrahman Al-Hadlaq, Riyadh, August 2009.

72   'Arab Prisons: A Place for Dialogue and Reform'

Yemen's Attempts at Rehabilitation

Following the attacks of 11 September 2001, a Dialogue Committee (DC) was established by presidential decree (on 30 August 2002) to debate and engage with hundreds of individuals who had been arrested on suspicion of collaborating with al-Qaeda. Yet, only three of the country's fifteen most prominent official clerics and scholars who the President invited to participate in the DC agreed to do so. "The rest refused because they felt that this could undermine their reputation and they could be perceived to be overly complicit with the state. They also believed that these men were already radicalised and could not be changed as a result."[73]

Judge Hittar, who headed the DC, together with his fellow DC members, chose to select just four or five detainees, who were believed to be among the most radical and hardened supporters of al-Qaeda, to engage in dialogue. The intention, was that by convincing the most committed members of the group to change their views and moderate their tactics, the debate with other less radicalised inmates would be made easier and therefore more likely to succeed.

The first meeting took place on 5 September, 2002 and lasted for five hours, during which the following subjects were discussed and debated: the Islamic nature of the state, the responsibilities of the Muslim ruler, the meaning of jihad, relations with non-Muslim states, and who has the right to issue *fatwas* in Islam.

Between 30 August 2002 and 2010 a total of 500 detainees were released after engaging in debates, first with their colleagues and then in large group sessions with the official scholars of the state. Social and economic incentives were also provided to both detained and released prisoners.

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73   Author's interview with Judge Hittar, Sana'a, June 2010

For example, and as part of selective inducements provided by the state, families of the detained individuals were encouraged to visit their incarcerated sons and relatives more often. The Yemeni authorities wanted to demonstrate to the families that they were not torturing or treating their sons with cruelty as al-Qaeda had publicly claimed. They also hoped that the families would exert social and tribal pressures on the detainees to moderate their views and repent, and at the same time persuade other sympathisers and collaborators with al-Qaeda to give themselves up voluntarily without fearing torture.[74]

Secondly, released detainees received up to YR 20,000 each to help them rebuild their lives after prison. The state also sought to ensure, whenever possible, the return of released prisoners to their former jobs in the public sector, though often with little success. After their release some received cheap loans and/or grants from the state to establish private businesses, which many used to buy cars and become taxi drivers. Marriage was facilitated too, with the state covering most of the costs involved. This went hand-in-hand with assistance in-kind, such as a food bag full of cooking oil, rice, sugar, tea and coffee.[75]

The Yemeni de-radicalisation curriculum received very negative feedback from observers and state officials alike. President Ali Abdullah Saleh himself spoke of only achieving a 60 percent success rate. Officials in the Political Security Organisation (PSO), established in 2002 to deal with all issues related to security detainees, argue that the programme was successful between 2002 and 2005. During this period, they state that the country did not see a single act of terrorism and that none of the freed detainees returned to violence. But things, they add, started to go bad in the second half of 2006 when 23 detained violent extremists escaped from

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74 Author's interviews with Ahmed Derhum, Head of anti-Terrorism Unit at National Security Centre, Sana'a, June 2010. Also see 'Transforming Terrorists: Examining International Efforts to Address Violent Extremism'

75 Author's interviews with Colonial Muhammed Ben Break, head of Counter-terrorism Analysis Team at the Political security Organization, Sana'a, June 2010. Ahmed Derhum, Head of anti-Terrorism Unit at National Security Centre, and Judge Hattar also confirmed the accuracy of this information. Personal interviews, Sana'a, June 2010. Also see 'Transforming Terrorists: Examining International Efforts to Address Violent Extremism'

prison, mobilised a large number of sympathisers and began to spread violent ideology. This led to the termination of the programmeme in 2006.

It is difficult to speak of a professional, comprehensive, and financially-sustainable counselling and rehabilitation programme in Yemen. To start with, Yemeni has not been able to mobilise sufficient numbers of competent and credible clerics to disrupt the message of the violent extremists; their numbers were too small to be able to convince hundreds of detainees to revise their views. Secondly, there was insufficient dialogue between clerics and detainees. "Detainees had more conversations and discussions with each other than they did with official clerics, and it was this which convinced most imprisoned individuals to moderate their views and tactics."[76] As Seifert noted, it was not a programme *per se* but rather an "attempt" to steer detainees away from violent extremism by going "through the motions of… signing up a slip of paper, [and] being granted their freedom" in return.[77]

Thirdly, and after 2004, the authorities faced a renewed Houthi rebellion in the North followed by an increasingly violent secessionist movement in the South. With meagre resources, the authorities had to shift whatever limited funds they had to meet these new challenges, and were no longer able to continue to finance the de-radicalisation programme. With high unemployment and poverty rates in the country and the low qualifications and education of most detained individuals, the state was able to secure jobs for only a very limited number of the released prisoners.

Within a short period of time, released former prisoners had spent the YR 20,000 they received from the state and, since they failed to find jobs and came from poor families, had no other sources of income. On the contrary, "most felt that they had to assist their families. Of those who got married, many quickly became short of money and marriage and family became a liability, rather than an asset."[78] Under the

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76   Author's interviews with four former detainees, Sana'a, June 2010
77   'Can Jihadis Be Rehabilitated?'
78   Author's interview with four former detainees and graduates from the Yemeni Dialogue Committee, Sana'a, June 2010

circumstances, many "re-joined al-Qaeda who pays its cadre around $300 monthly."[79]

Finally, external interventions may also have led to recidivism. For example, after 2006, the Yemeni authorities began to rely on tribal leaders, especially those co-opted by the state through official patronage and other largesse, to convince al-Qaeda members within their tribes to give themselves up to the state and renounce violence.[80] This mechanism found some success, but was undermined by attacks which were perceived to be foreign led or foreign inspired. The fact that these attacks killed civilians made negotiating deals with violent extremists far more difficult. It also put further pressure on the unity of Yemeni society, turned Yemeni tribes against the state, and led disgruntled tribes to provide shelter and protection to al-Qaeda members.[81]

79   Author's interview with Abu Jandal, former bodyguard of Bin Laden's in Afghanistan, Sana'a, June 2010

80   A. Oudeh and I. al-Mamari (2010), 'Amnesty Condemns Presence of US Cluster Bomb in Yemen', *Yemen Observer*, Volume XII, Issue 42, 9 June 2010

81   'Amnesty Condemns Presence of US Cluster Bomb in Yemen'

Conclusion: Some Key Lessons

Despite the varying approaches to countering violent extremism in each of the eight Muslim-majority states in this study, based on the extent of the problem, its historical roots, and the resources available to deal with it, there are several general lessons that emerge from studying their experiences.

First, national consensus behind such policies is vital for their effectiveness. For example, lack of popular and political support has denied de-radicalisation efforts in Jordan the social underpinning that has contributed to their success in Saudi Arabia. It is also equally important to maintain such a consensus over time. For example, initial support for de-radicalisation efforts ebbed away in Yemen, thus undermining the programme, while in Algeria it has remained relatively strong.

Second, committed and charismatic leadership is necessary for counter- and de-radicalisation policies to succeed. State leaders play an important role in initiating the change of approach to violent extremism that is necessary to adopt 'soft' policies, provide them with impetus, inject them with confidence, build trust in their purpose, and so create and maintain a consensus around them. The experience of Saudi Arabia after 1995, Algeria after 1997 and Morocco after 1999 all provide examples of this leadership role. Even in the absence of such leadership at the national level, the support of the government remains of paramount importance in both counter-radicalisation (Bangladesh after 2005) and de-radicalisation efforts (Egypt).

Third, states alone do not have all the tools necessary to counter violent extremism, while Civil society organisations have wider reach and more resources. By pursuing de-radicalisation and counter-radicalisation policies solely at the

state level, however extensive they may be, governments may miss identifying and reaching the groups and individuals who are of most concern. The engagement of society more broadly is likely to provide new ideas and reinforce the action of the state through the empowerment of local communities and associations that are directly in touch with vulnerable individuals and groups. For example, it is unlikely that a purely state-run programme could ever identify and influence the tight-knit groups of Moroccan youth from the country's large under-privileged areas that have been responsible not just for the attacks in Morocco in 2003 and 2007, but also in Madrid in 2004.

Fourth, It is not enough simply to imprison violent extremists and then isolate them from each other and/or the rest of the prison population. Without a professional, comprehensive and financially sustainable de-radicaisation programme, supported by consciously designed prison policy, as exists in Malaysia, radicals are not only likely to harden their views, but to also persuade other prisoners to adopt them, as has happened in the past in Jordan.

Fifth, de-radicalisation and counter-radicalisation programmes inevitably work most effectively where the Government makes some attempt to improve the overall environment in which society operates. Countries with strong developmental capacity (those able to manage sustainable high growth rates, and check corruption and inequity), are less vulnerable to the threat of persistent violent extremism than those that lack governance. For example, in Malaysia the authorities saw improving the socio-economic conditions of the population as a vital way to remove sources of discontent, which could be exploited by the insurgents.

Sixth, it is highly unlikely that relying on religious dialogue and counselling alone will terminate violent extremism. Programmes should not ignore other, non-ideological, social, economic and political factors, which may also contribute to radicalisation. Equally, in an increasingly globalised world, national counter-radicalisation and de-radicalisation efforts cannot be studied and evaluated in isolation from external factors. Incidents that play to the violent extremist narrative

of 'them and us', exacerbated by events in Iraq, Afghanistan and the Palestinian territories, are bound to occur. It is for the global community to ensure the immediate and unconditional condemnation of all abuses of human rights and of any attempt to stir up hatred between peoples, as well as to encourage and allow an appropriate popular response.

Finally, there is no single recipe for success. Counter-radicalisation and de-radicalisation programs must be consistent with and derive from each country's mores, culture, rules and regulations, and take account of what is acceptable and not acceptable in their societies. For example, the Saudi de-radicalisation programme would be difficult to implement elsewhere, not only because of its resource-intensive nature, but also because of the unique structure of the society and the abundance of competent and credible clerics and scholars. Developing soft programmes to counter violent extremism that are consistent with and derived from the 'cultural tool kit' of their society will be the main challenge facing countries threatened by the phenomenon and seeking to develop such policies.

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