



## THE BATTLEFIELD OF THE MIND: REHABILITATING MUSLIM TERRORISTS

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### Abstract:

The Battlefield of the Mind, fighting the ideological principles that sustain the terrorist's mindset, is one of the missing duties. Rehabilitating a terrorist detainee is crucial to stem the spread of radicalism. A rehabilitation that involves fixing the terrorist's religious misconceptions, supporting him/her psychologically and offering reintegration into society is the necessary complement to repressive measures. Still the challenge of the diversity of contexts where Islam is located, calls for tailored programmes according to the place and the moment. For example reluctance in the West to lean on the support of clerics to fight ideological radicalism because of the separation of state and religion is an obstacle. To undertake it seriously, rehabilitation has to focus single terrorists and has to engage society in support at every level and with a multiplicity of actors in order to stem the spread of radical propaganda as to prevent any relapse. The evolution towards a global regime of rehabilitation's programmes is the final goal of a successful approach to change the mind of a terrorist.

**Keywords:** Battlefield of the mind, rehabilitation, Islam, terrorism.

### Resumen:

*El Campo de Batalla de la Mente, luchando contra los principios ideológicos que sustentan la cosmovisión de un terrorista es una de las tareas pendientes. Rehabilitar a un preso terrorista es crucial para poner coto a la expansión del radicalismo. Una rehabilitación que implique corregir las erróneas concepciones religiosas de un terrorista, apoyándole/la psicológicamente y ofreciendo la reintegración en la sociedad es el complemento necesario a las medidas represivas. Sin embargo el desafío que presenta la diversidad de contextos en los que el Islam se encuentra, exige programas a medida dependiendo del lugar y del momento. Por ejemplo la reticencia en Occidente a contar con el apoyo de clérigos para luchar contra el radicalismo ideológico por el dogma de la separación entre el estado y la iglesia representa un obstáculo. Para llevarla a cabo seriamente, la rehabilitación ha de centrarse en los terroristas a nivel individual e implicar a la sociedad en cada nivel y con una multiplicidad de actores para frenar la expansión de la propaganda radical y así prevenir cualquier recaída. La evolución hacia un régimen global de programas de rehabilitación es el objetivo final de un acercamiento exitoso hacia la tarea de cambiar la mente de un terrorista.*

**Palabras Clave:** Campo de batalla de la mente, rehabilitación, Islam, terrorismo.

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

## **2. 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>2</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>3</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>4</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 perspective, it is much easier to change behavior with rewards than with punishment. Introducing a carrot to accompany the many sticks we have, to reform terrorists may be less costly than to omit it out rightly. By showing terrorists that they can benefit from both denouncing a violent ideology and from becoming more socially accepted, will remove their reason to fight. Unless a major crime had been committed, their violence must not solely be

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<sup>2</sup> Interview with 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>3</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 with senior government official, July 2008.

<sup>4</sup> Ustaz bin Ali, Mohamed: "Striking the Roots o Radicalism, Reclaiming Islam's Intellectual Heritage", in Halim bin Kader, Abdul (ed.) (2009): *Countering Radicalism: The Next Generation and Challenges Ahead*, Singapore, Taman Bacaan, pp. 107-112.



met with punishment in the form of prolong imprisonment or detention as this may increase their rage and sense of social alienation.<sup>5</sup> For others, it could be misconstrued as injustice.

This leaves humankind with an obligation; a duty compelling immediate attention. The captured terrorists must be convinced that their imprisonment or detention is to allow them to participate in a rehabilitation program. They must be assured of getting all the help they need to understand where they went wrong and how to avoid falling into the same behavior patterns that trapped them in the first place. For this, they must be given access to enter into dialogues with qualified clerics and scholars of Islam. Their genuine concern for the suffering of Muslims in places such as Gaza and the West Bank, Iraq and Afghanistan must not be quickly dismissed as extremism. On the contrary, it should be considered as a window that can provide greater understanding on how their minds work. This will present the counselors with the opportunity to strengthen the poor reasoning capacity and poor communication skills most of them are known to have. Whenever they manifest emotional attachment to a certain issue, counselors must help them develop a positive attitude to deal with the issue and seize the opportunity to diminish extremist thought and behavior. With all these benefits, rehabilitation becomes not a choice but a must.

(3) Social Rehabilitation: When the head of a family is detained, he ceases to be the breadwinner of the family. Often the head of the family is the only breadwinner. As the family starts to suffer, both the wife and the children need assistance to survive. Social rehabilitation becomes essential because the family is traumatized by the detention. Social rehabilitation addresses the concern of the family. The means of livelihood for the family, the need for school for the children, and making sure the wife and children and have a roof over their head. Then family rehabilitation becomes a part of social rehabilitation. They should receive community assistance to carry on with their lives.

As a part of the community aftercare initiative, the wives should be visited by community and social workers. Children should not be socially isolated and treated as if everyone in the family is a terrorist. It becomes necessary to take care of children in a way where the children do not form the next generation of terrorists. By preventing isolation and trauma, the family's reintegrated back to society is facilitated.

As a part of the social rehabilitation, social workers assigned to the program gave the children toys and helped them with school. When the images of the father were published in the newspaper, a child was ridiculed that the father was a communist.<sup>6</sup> The community and social workers arranged for the child to be transferred to another school.<sup>7</sup> To give them strength to live, the community and social workers regularly visit and motivate them. Mentally and otherwise engaging them, prevent anger and resentment. Otherwise, it would create the opportunity for extremists and extremist groups to reach out to them. To deny bitterness and counter extremism, community and social workers provide aftercare by way of jobs, monetary assistance, and a fresh outlook. By the time the detainee is released, the family is also transformed. Even after release, community and social workers should continue to work with the family.

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<sup>5</sup> Conversation with Ustaz Mahfuh Halimi, International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, February 22, 2009.

<sup>6</sup> Halim Kadir, President Taman Bacaan, Singapore, Question and Answer Session, Panel on Singapore Experience, International Conference on Terrorist Rehabilitation, February 26, 2009.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*



(4) Vocational Rehabilitation: To reintegrate the detainees and inmates back to society, they need to be guided and prepared through skills development and educational attainment. Designed to provide necessary skills for a job, vocational rehabilitation imparts skills useful to detainees and inmates upon release. This ranges from teaching them metal and wood work, carpentry and masonry, dairy farming and agriculture, computer and language skills and self study and distance education. Unlike the other modes of rehabilitation, vocation rehabilitation runs a security risk. To minimize the risk, detainees and inmates are not taught certain skills such as electronics, a capability that could be used to build circuitry for bombs. More than in any other country, under the careful guidance of Major General Douglas Stone, vocational rehabilitation was developed in Iraq to an unprecedented level. Working with OSS, a U.S. Department of Defence contractor specializing in rehabilitation, and the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research in Singapore, Dr. Stone's vision and mission, created renowned resident expertise.<sup>8</sup> After release, "Picasso," a former Al Qaeda in Iraq detainee with a talent for art was recruited by OSS to teach art.<sup>9</sup> A master theoretician and practitioner of rehabilitation, Dr. Stone built a wide ranging program in Iraq that governments interested to create rehabilitation programs continues to benefit. Coupled with vocational rehabilitation, the integration of art, dance, song, and other cultural expressions into the rehabilitation package broadened the horizons of the detainees. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia established a care centre in a suburb of Riyadh with games, cooking, and the study of arts. A beneficiary of the centre, Mohammed Dousery, a Guantanamo detainee for six years, said: "The centre prepared me to engage gradually with the rest of society; 'You can't go directly from Guantanamo bay to normal life. This is an extremely difficult thing, and everything changes, Saudi changes and so does the rest of the world. I have a great wife, and she is encouraging me to try and forget Guantanamo and she says to me; forget that prison, you are a new man and you have a new life in front of you and you have your family. Focus your concerns on this. This makes me feel much better.'<sup>10</sup> The five compounds, each with a capacity for 1200 people, support reintegration back to Saudi society. The beneficiaries, as they are called, are able to swim, play football, table tennis, and TV-games. In an air-conditioned tent converted into a dining hall serve traditional food where they engage in dialogue. In vocational rehabilitation, as in other modes, the range of activities is only limited by human imagination.

### **3. Working Model:**

There are practical difficulties of developing a universal model to rehabilitate terrorists seeking to justify their actions through Islam. To start with, Islam comes to every country in different ways. As such, there is a need to understand diverse values and traditions of the

<sup>8</sup> After assessing the degrees of radicalization of detainees at Camp Cropper, Singapore delegation trained U.S. and Iraqi personnel on how to build a rehabilitation program in Baghdad in December 2007, and thereafter worked with OSS to build the religious rehabilitation manual and counseling guide. Singapore's assistance to build a rehabilitation program in Iraq was classified until it was publicly acknowledged both by General Stone, the former Deputy Commanding General in Iraq responsible for detainee rehabilitation, and the Singapore delegates at the inaugural International Conference on Terrorist Rehabilitation in February 2009.

<sup>9</sup> Stone, who assumed duties in mid-2008 was impressed by the art program for detainees in Saudi Arabia. He adapted it in Iraq with the assistance of Dr. Ami M. Angell of OSS.

<sup>10</sup> "Special centre for rehabilitation of deviating groups in Saudi Arabia", *Al-Jazeera*, July 9, 2008, at <http://www.al-jazirah.com.sa/277512/ua1d.html> .



Muslim community – how they practice Islam, how they relate to each others, and how they see the world. The economic context, political environment, and unique language and culture make standardization a challenge. As the security landscape in every country is different, the terrorists are also different. As the conditions of capture, treatment during incarceration, and release differ, there will never be one standard rehabilitation program. A government can develop a standard model but it will be applicable to a specific threat group at a specific place and time. Every rehabilitation program operates in a community context. Although criminal justice and prisons systems are unique to different countries, an approach to rehabilitation must exist. Instead of a standard model, a working model on rehabilitation should consider a number of essential aspects.

First, those selected to undergo rehabilitation should be viewed as a beneficiary and no longer as an inmate or detainee. Most security prisoners and detainees are treated poorly, at times harassed, and even tortured. Most guards have a pre-conceived notion of detainees and inmates that lead them to act aggressively towards them. In a testimony, Brandon Neely, a U.S. soldier assigned to Guantanamo Bay said: “We would be coming face to face wit the worst people the world had to offer.”<sup>11</sup> As most penitentiaries and detention centres have no rehabilitation space, the potential beneficiaries should be relocated to a facility that mirror society. As the beneficiary is to be released back to society, he should no longer be isolated but engaged. To build understanding and create a channel for peaceful articulation of differences, an environment conducive for dialogue with the beneficiary should be created.

Second, rehabilitation should begin on day one of arrest. If the captured terrorist is beaten, he is likely to harbour a grudge at least remember the treatment meted out to him on day one. Even the best form of interview with a detainee is rapport based. Threats and torture is unlikely to yield truthful information. Rehabilitation is a painstaking process that requires patience, dedication and reflection. It requires finding and matching the right counsellor with the beneficiary. For instance, a Shia cleric will not be able to rehabilitate a Sunni beneficiary. The moment, the cleric walks in the beneficiary will think that Satan has arrived. To ensure successful reintegration back to society, rehabilitation should be continuous during incarceration and upon release to the family and community leaders.

Third, rehabilitation is a collective effort not only by investigative officers and operations officers but by the clergy and the academia. Although it involves different interest groups working together, the most crucial is the public-private partnership between the security and intelligence service and the clergy. It is paramount to build a lasting relationship between the government holding the detainees and inmates and the clerics and scholars committed to protecting their faith from misinterpretation and misrepresentation. Unless government and clergy work together, the most crucial platform, the rehabilitation program will fall apart. The most crucial platform built for rehabilitation can be eventually expanded to engage the Muslim community.

Fourth, as religious justification was used to bring about the terrorist mind into the concept of hate and violence, counselling by clergy should be an essential part of the program. In the West, where church and state are separate, there is a reluctance to use religious counsellors. By neglecting this crucial dimension, other modes of rehabilitation are unlikely to work. Government should cast aside their suspicions and find a channel to better understand and work with the clerics. Gradually, the clergy themselves must be made to witness what terrorism has done to individuals. The clergy should decide for themselves that

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<sup>11</sup> Testimony of Spc. Brandon Neely, Guantanamo Testimonial Project, December 4, 2008.



the terrorists are wayward from the right Islamic teachings. When it becomes apparent that a few minorities are casting a bad image on the religion, there will be many clergy volunteering to protect Islam. Then working with terrorists becomes the responsibility of clergy keen to uphold the dignity of the religion itself. The members of the clergy must be careful not to project his own school or orientation as the right interpretation of Islam. That will lead to discord between the clergy. Clerics from the diverse schools and orientations should join hands and work together to fight a common threat.<sup>12</sup>

Fifth, successful rehabilitation requires the continuous study of the evolving terrorist narrative and ideology as well as their perceived and real grievances and aspirations. It requires access to studies by other programs and institutions. The terrorists and their supporters thought that they can help Muslim brothers by doing “jihad” in Somalia, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Palestine, Chechnya, Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines. The clerics and scholars should develop an intellectual capacity to rebut the ideology and deliver an Islamic alternative to traveling and fighting in conflict zones. The response should be a rebuttle to correct the deviation, that jihad permits killing non-Muslims.<sup>13</sup> Instead, an alternative can be proposed to support the humanitarian work in Gaza and Kashmir. Energy and resources can be committed to work peacefully to rebuild the lives and property of those who have suffered in conflict zones.

Sixth, constant training and education of the professional and support staff at the rehabilitation centre is essential. Whether it is a guard or a sports instructor, no one should be assigned to the rehabilitation centre without undergoing an orientation course. Even momentarily, if a guard on duty ill-treats a beneficiary, the goodwill built by others will be damaged.<sup>14</sup> There is no standard text book to rehabilitate a terrorist. As terrorist rehabilitation is a new discipline, it is necessary to nurture a culture of research where a specialist team will constantly learn, develop and refine the existing understanding and knowledge.<sup>15</sup> Terrorist rehabilitation is neither an exact science nor a romance. Rehabilitation is both a science and an art. As such a rehabilitation centre should never be run by a bureaucrat but by a dynamic leader. As beneficiaries differ from another, it requires creative leadership, not classical bureaucracy at work. It is essential to evaluate successes and failures and maximise successes and minimise failures.

Seventh, trained and dedicated expert staff is needed to classify and profile the detainee and inmates. Before selection as a beneficiary of the rehabilitation program, it is necessary to assess if the terrorist is a high, medium, or low risk as well as to profile his education, family, the depth of his operational involvement and ideological commitment. Both his involvement and ideology is not dependent on his level of education (low, medium

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<sup>12</sup> There is a maxim in the Islamic law stating that if you busy yourself with something which is not the objective, it is the same like turning away from the objective. Conversation with Ustaz Mahfuh Halimi, March 10, 2008.

<sup>13</sup> From the Medina charter to the Alliance of Excellence [hilm al-fudul], Islam has promoted peace between Muslims and non Muslims. For instance, when Ali, the fourth Caliph was asked the relationship between a Muslim and a Muslim, he said, “we are brothers in faith.” When asked for the relationship between Muslims and non Muslim, Ali answered, “we are brothers in humanity.” Conversation with Ustaz Mahfuh Halimi, March 10, 2008. Also visit: Muslims United Against Humanity, at <http://www.muat.co.uk/islam.asp>.

<sup>14</sup> The Governor of Helmand Province in Afghanistan, Mullah Abdul Salam Zaeef, the former Taliban Ambassador to Pakistan, spent three years at Guantanamo Bay. In his book titled “Da Guantanamo Anzoor”, he admires a few Americans who were nice to him, did not torture or beat him, and spoke to him kindly. See webpage: <http://www.cageprisoners.com/print.php?id=28123>.

<sup>15</sup> The motto of RRG is “Loving, Caring and Sharing. See: Khadijah Mosque (2008): *Winning Hearts and Minds, Embracing Peace*, Singapore, Khadijah Mosque, p. 1.



or high) but the degree of his exposure. Even the most educated are susceptible to the message of a charismatic preacher: “By doing jihad, we can go to paradise.” Like love, ideology makes terrorists and supporters blind. As the degrees of indoctrination and commitment differ, government experts together with clerics and scholars should work on a structured program and a tailored syllabus for each of the beneficiaries. Otherwise the message will not reach the beneficiary and the investment will be wasted.

Eighth, resources are needed to create an environment conducive for counselling. As most detention and penitentiary facilities are over crowded and conditions are exceptionally poor, the environment is not conducive for rehabilitation. As such governments should invest resources to construct new facilities or relocate the beneficiaries to appropriate facilities. As opposed to mass and group counseling, one-to-one counseling will involve a dialogue in a comfortable room.<sup>16</sup> Seated on a sofa, the preacher and the beneficiary will sit sipping tea, eat dates, listen to each other and discuss matters of interest from God to the Koran and Islam to Muslims. If it is mass counselling, it is necessary to determine the target audience. It is necessary to structure the message by looking at who we want to talk to and what we want to talk about. There should be continuous assessment of the beneficiary/beneficiaries to assess how well he is responding to counseling.

Ninth, no rehabilitation program will achieve its desired impact unless government works to counter the extremism dormant in the community. While the reverse of radicalization in custody is rehabilitation, the reverse of radicalization outside detention is community engagement. Ideally, the blue print for winning hearts and minds should come from debriefing and deprogramming detainees. Terrorist rehabilitation holds the key to inoculating communities against the contemporary wave of extremism and terrorism.

During rehabilitation, the counselors can elicit from the beneficiary the content to counter terrorist propaganda targeting and affecting the community. As the terrorist in custody portrays both the problem and solution, the detainee needs to be managed and handled to be useful to cure the others in the community who are also affected but undetected.

Tenth, no one can give a guarantee that a person’s mindset can be changed through rehabilitation. To ensure he will not become a contaminant upon release, it is necessary to support his gradual reintegration into society. Even before final release, the beneficiary should be placed in a half way house where he can spend time with his family and friends and remain committed to peace. To prevent rejuvenation of extremist ideas and thoughts, the counselors that helped in his transformation should remain in contact. If the milieu is hostile, the revival of earlier beliefs will lead him to violence. A classic example is Said Ali al-Shihri alias Abu Sayyaf, a detainee released from Guantanamo in November 2007, who went through the Saudi rehabilitation program.<sup>17</sup> After he was approached and recruited by the Yemeni branch of al Qaeda, he travelled to Yemen where he was appointed deputy leader of al Qaeda in Yemen. He participated in the bombing of the U.S. Embassy in Sana in September 2008 that killed 16 people.<sup>18</sup> Abu al-Hareth Muhammad al-Awfi alias Muhamad Attik al-Harbi, another Saudi beneficiary who joined al Qaeda in Yemen returned home after the clergy and his family spoke to him.<sup>19</sup> As there is no methodology to read the mind or to test if the

<sup>16</sup> For instance, in the Malaysian case, the detainees stay in dormitory. They live together and receive both group and one to one counseling.

<sup>17</sup> Robert F. Worth: “Freed by the U.S., Saudi Becomes a Qaeda Chief”, *New York Times*, January 22, 2009 .

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> “Yemen Captures al Qaeda Commander, A former Guantanamo Detainee”, *Associated Press*, February 17, 2009.





beneficiary has transformed after treatment, there will always be lapses in judgement and assessment. High rates of recidivism will adversely impact on the reputation of the program.

Eleventh, a fully transformed beneficiary is a strategic weapon in the fight against terrorism and extremism. If successful, upon release, every beneficiary can play their role to spread the message of peace. Both in the real and cyber world, they could serve as guardians of their faith and champion of peace.

Twelfth, formulate, implement, and manage a comprehensive security framework in place to rehabilitate the detainees and inmates. This should involve both security and religious screening of staff. Dependent on the environment, it is necessary for professional and support staff to be screened routinely and if necessary continuously screen. The beneficiary should be closely monitored during counseling sessions, when with family and other visitors, and fellow detainees and inmates. If there is suspicion that a beneficiary has not fully transformed and will return to violence, he should not be released. It is necessary to understand that rehabilitation should never be the end goal but safety of the community. Early release should be regarded as a breach of security. After release, the beneficiary should be monitored to ensure that he does not return to violence. In a conflict zone, there are inherent difficulties of monitoring a terrorist that has been released. By releasing a beneficiary to a tribal elder and to the family and swearing an oath on the Koran and to a religious figure, mechanisms have been developed to enhance compliance.

#### **4. Challenges:**

There are multiple challenges in initiating, building and sustaining national programs.

First, the government should understand that religious justification was used to bring about the terrorist mind. Furthermore, government should understand that Islam is never the driver but Islam has been misinterpreted and misrepresented to legitimize violence. As such, the role of the ulema is at the core of dismantling the concept of hate and violence harbored by operational terrorists and extremist supporters. This understanding should generate willingness by every government to bring Islamic scholars and clerics - those learned and knowledgeable about Islam – to the frontline.

There must be recognition that a theologian is as important as a counter terrorism practitioner.<sup>20</sup> Without Islamic scholars and clerics, we can fight operational terrorism but not its precursor and generator, ideological extremism. However, most governments treat terrorism as a mere law enforcement issue and extremism as a non-issue. Church and state are separate in the west, the group of nations with a global reach, staying power, and discipline to fight terrorism. As such, there is reluctance in North America, Europe and Australasia, to bring in Islamic scholars and clerics to the forefront in matters of state. Government also has a difficulty of identifying the rightful scholars suitable to staff and lead the ideological fight. Without having negative thoughts about religious leaders, government must understand the ground reality and start to work with them.

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<sup>20</sup> At Singapore's International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research in Singapore, the specialist counter terrorism research and training center, 60% of the staff are Muslim and 25% are Islamic scholars and clerics.



Second, Islamic scholars and clerics through training and education should develop a full understanding of the ideology and psychology of detainees and inmates. The scholars and clerics know about Islam and Islamic law (sharia) but they do not know the religious understanding of the terrorists. Even if government identified the scholars and clerics with the right attitude, they must be trained. The training should cover two principal areas: first, terrorist ideologies, the linkages between ideology and operations, and second, the skills to psychological counseling, especially to listen patiently to the inmate or detainee. The Islamic scholars and clerics must relearn the Islamic concepts in Islam especially its misinterpretation and misrepresentation. They should examine the writings and speeches of ideologues of hatred and violence especially how Abu Mohamed al Maqdisi and his followers perceive Islam and Osama bin Laden's followers understand jihad as holy war.

The Islamic scholar and cleric engaged in rehabilitation is a part psychologist. In the human system, there is a link between belief and feelings. Although feelings of hatred, anger, and the resentment to the West by the terrorist have nothing to do with Islam, the ideology will support these feelings. The psychologists know how to deal with the feelings. While the heart produces the feelings, the mind controls it. It is natural to get angry but a sound mind prevents him or her from killing. About 80% of the staff of Singapore's Religious Rehabilitation Group (RRG) has completed a seven month diploma course in psychological counselling. Without a dedicated, well trained, and a motivated staff, such a program cannot succeed.

Third, without a vision, resources and a strategic direction, no program that requires a long term investment will succeed. For a rehabilitation program to be successful, a long term commitment is a must. Rehabilitation comes with the notion that a country must gain a greater understanding from others and put more resources. For instance, the Saudi Interior Ministry spent 1.7 billion riyals to construct five modern headquarters and high-tech security prisons in Riyadh, Jeddah and the eastern region, and Abha, Qassim in 2008.<sup>21</sup> Prince Nayef bin Abdul Aziz, Minister of the Interior, and his son, Prince Muhammed Bin Nayef, the Assistant to the Interior Minister for Security Affairs oversaw the establishment of nine centres for rehabilitation, which began in a centre near Riyadh. In addition to the special facilities for housing families and meeting visitors, high tech class rooms and libraries for reading and studying were built. A special committee oversaw specialists in security, sports, Islamic law, social science and psychology drawn from government and university working together.

## **5. Guiding Principles:**

Terrorist rehabilitation specifically deals with those incarcerated but have not disengaged with violence. Although not all security detainees and inmates can be rehabilitated, it is the moral responsibility of every government and well meaning citizens to advocate the establishment of rehabilitation programs in every penitentiary and detention centre from Asia, the Middle East, Africa, Europe and North America should As no one is born an extremist or terrorist, rehabilitation is the only intelligent thing to do. By transforming a terrorist into a person who actively seeks peace takes time but it has the potential to influence our threat landscape! Successful terrorist rehabilitation comes with several premises and notions,

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<sup>21</sup> "1.7 billion Riyals to develop Saudi prisons and rehabilitation centres for terrorists", *Arabian Business*, 2008, at <http://www.arabianbusiness.com/arabic/517622?refresh=1&r=1> .



First, there must be zero tolerance towards any promotion of hate and violence using religion as justification. By condoning the fighting in Iraq as a jihad but not at home, a program would not succeed. Only by developing, instilling and adopting the principle of zero tolerance, can there be success. From the world of drugs, a parallel can be drawn. The world failed to take action to control party drugs. As a result, party drugs have become a worldwide phenomenon. Party drugs are as harmful as any other form of drugs.

Second, terrorist rehabilitation should not be a symptomatic approach. It should be a cure for all. It should address those who are sick – those radicalized - and those who are constantly exposed to the sickness out there. Those susceptible will fall immediately. Those who are regularly bombarded with propaganda will eventually fall too. As such, any rehabilitation program should be complimented with public education and public awareness. Otherwise contamination – those who are supposed to be immune will fall wayward towards radicalization. In drug rehabilitation provides a good analogy. De-toxification of the offender includes increasing the physical aspects to make them stronger and drug counseling to prevent a return to drugs. However, as the environment is not drug free, many become repeat offenders. Unless there is larger effort to prevent contamination of the rest of the community by former terrorists or by terrorists not exposed to rehabilitation, the effort to rehabilitate terrorists will not yield the best results. A few countries have developed programs where community participation is lacking and absent. As the need of hour is to protect the community, for optimal outcome and synergy, government should works with the community. If to prevent community from being infected and prevent ideas festering within the community, the effort must be sustained and wide ranging.

Third, a successful rehabilitation program requires the support of a range of actors: endorsement at the highest level of government, community participation and a good press. Media can shape public opinion and build support across the spectrum. In many Muslim countries, the media is promoting and projecting Osama bin Laden but media has not given space to Muhammad Sayyid Tantawi.<sup>22</sup> Many do not even know that Sheikh Tantawi is the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Mosque and Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar University, the highest seat of learning in Sunni Islam. As practitioners especially security officials and clergy lack access to resource, academic scholars can support their efforts. As ideology is evolving, constant research and analysis is needed to both produce and update rehabilitation manuals. Academic community generates new ideas, look at the antecedents, look at success and failure, and scan, analyse and raise potential gaps. The academic look beyond the immediate and the urgent, and provide strategic direction. For instance by reviewing detainee debriefings, academic specialists can formulate the counter ideological arguments to rebut the terrorist narrative aimed at deradicalizing the detainee as well as the community. Building a partnership between government, the Muslim community and the academia is at the heart of a successful rehabilitation program.

## **6. Classifying the Terrorists:**

As different levels of extremism require different levels of response, government should be able to differentiate between terrorist leaders, members or operatives, and supporters and sympathizers. As there are circles of extremism, there are multiple target audiences. Counter

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<sup>22</sup> While google recorded 14 million.hits for Osama bin Laden, it only recorded 25,300 for Muhammad Sayyid Tantawi.



terrorism practitioners, Islamic scholars, and academic specialists should work together to develop a program and a syllabus that can tailor to every category from extremists that advocate and support to the terrorists that kill, maim and injure. As not all detained are identical in their understanding, it is necessary to divide them into leaders, operatives and supporters. For instance, many foot soldiers do not know ideology. But if told, "To die as a shaheed is the best thing," they will. When a terrorist is detained, he is assessed. As each of these categories requires different approaches, the detainee is categorized into high, medium and low risk.

High risk: They are mostly spiritual and operational leaders. They are usually the hardcore. They believe in the ideology and they do not want to move from it despite many counseling sessions. Such people are very few. But they had contact with and received direct inspiration from the terrorist leadership. Even though Mullah Omar never completed his religious education and Osama bin Laden had no formal religious education, many terrorists received instruction and guidance from them. They regard a poor educated Afghan or a Saudi more important than a scholar or cleric from their own country. They believe that what they believe is correct. It is necessary to use most prominent ulema to talk to them and allow them to reflect and repent. When released, they become the most susceptible to return to violence.

Medium risk: They are the operatives and the experts that form the bulk of the membership. They are active ideologically and operationally. They are full of hatred and ready to commit violence. They will always look for justification and interpretation that suits their current mindset. They are usually served long in the organization. They know the ideology and accept it. They can be rehabilitated. In a few cases, it is debated if there was genuine transformation or strategic calculation. There are cases where they tried to mislead the counselor by agreeing with the religious counselor with the intention of gaining an early release.

Low risk: They are active and passive supporters. They are mostly foot soldiers, inactive members and not involved in crimes. They do not know the ideology. They joined thinking that their peers (relatives, colleagues and friends) were fighting for Islam. They completely believe that whatever they do is justified by religion. Some provide money without realizing that their contributions have been used for purchasing arms.

After a process of assessment, the right cleric or psychologist is assigned to counsel the detainee. The detainee is continuously assessed. It is essential to identify the problem with the detainee. Is it character or dangerous ideology? Is he still sympathetic to jihadist ideology? What is his actual problem? The process of rehabilitation is long and multifaceted. Unlike in many countries, Singapore will not release a detainee unless the government is fully convinced they he does not pose a threat to the security. If a detainee or inmate is prematurely released, he is likely to participate in terrorist and extremist activity. That will risk discrediting the vital tool of rehabilitation and the program itself.

## **7. Towards A Global Regime:**

The U.S., the nation leading the global fight against terrorism, was late in buying into the idea of rehabilitation. After 9/11, the U.S. leadership did not see rehabilitation as a solution. Although the U.S. invested expertise and resources to build a rehabilitation program in Iraq,



as a government the U.S. did not espouse the concept of rehabilitation. Building on the success of Task Force 134 in Iraq, there is some interest on the part of the U.S. to initiate a similar program by Task Force Guardian in Bagram, Afghanistan. At this point of time, there are more countries that do not believe in rehabilitation compared to the countries that embrace and promote it. A number of other countries including Israelis do not believe that terrorists can be ideologically rehabilitated.<sup>23</sup> Even if terrorists disengage from violence, they need to be de-radicalized. Otherwise, there will be no end to hate and violence in the Middle East! To break the cycle of violence and bring about peace, rehabilitation is a worthwhile investment and endeavor.

To make terrorist rehabilitation a global imperative, there must be agreement that rehabilitation is a part of the global solution to solve the problem. The key to establishing a global rehabilitation regime is to build a sufficient number of national rehabilitation programs. A roadmap towards establishing national programs includes establishing:

(1) Common database: An information repository – a common pool of resources – was launched by Singapore Law and Second Minister for Home Affairs K. Shanmugam at the inauguration of the first International Conference on Terrorist Rehabilitation on February 24, 2009. The p4peace portal has both a public and a restricted interface. The password verified restricted section for practitioners and scholars is a dedicated space for counter ideology content focusing on terrorist rehabilitation. This includes a database of articles, papers and other documents for use by practitioners and scholars. P4peace solicit contributions for writings by delegates and their colleagues on counter ideology focusing on rehabilitation.

(2) Exchange of personnel: Governments worldwide lacked both human expertise and material resources to start ad hoc rehabilitation initiatives and structured rehabilitation programs. One of the most effective methods to build capacity to rehabilitate terrorists is to exchange personnel. Exchange of personnel will lead to information sharing on systems, modes and best practices of terrorist rehabilitation. Capacity building helps to raise new and improve existing capabilities of detainee and inmate rehabilitation. Countries with rehabilitation programs can either attach or second their specialist staff to support countries keen to build rehabilitation programs. Likewise countries keen to build rehabilitation programs can learn from countries with rehabilitation programs. Such exchanges will also enable countries with ad hoc programs to build systematic programs and countries with no programs to initiate programs. The personnel can learn by observing inmate/detainee counselling to management of facilities and operations.

(3) Joint research, publication, education, and training: Joint research into terrorist mindset, psychology, use of religion and other areas could pave the way for collaboration in more challenging areas. For terrorist rehabilitation to be successful, all the staff of the program should be oriented. As a specialist discipline, the clerics, scholars, the psychologists, the security and intelligence professionals, prison guards, and the others servicing the program should be trained. While course on counseling skills could range from 7 months to one year, a course on counter extremism and counter terrorism could range from one week to two years. Specialist trainers or trainees can be exchanged either to impart training or to receive training. When conducting courses, countries with fully-fledged rehabilitation programs could invite staff from countries keen to initiate rehabilitation programs to participate. As the number of specialist trainers is limited, some courses could be jointly conducted. A successful

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<sup>23</sup> Like most other countries, Israel's vocational and educational rehabilitation programs are geared towards rehabilitating convicted criminals not security detainees.



rehabilitation program requires the government, academia and community to work together. Without well trained dedicated and motivated staff a national program cannot succeed. Together with the Religious Rehabilitation Group of Singapore, the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research plans to host the first International Course on Terrorist Rehabilitation in August of 2009.

(4) Transfer of expertise and resources: Without a vision and a strategic direction, no terrorist rehabilitation program can succeed. For a rehabilitation program to be successful, a long term commitment of intellectual and material resources is a must. Rehabilitation comes with the notion that a country must gain a greater understanding from others and put more resources. The program in Egypt died a natural death because the resources were diverted. In contrast, governments from Uzbekistan to Singapore and Saudi Arabia have allocated significant resources. Although Malaysia, Indonesia, and Yemen have allocated resources, they need to have a full time dedicated specialist staff focusing exclusively on terrorist detainees and inmates. To make terrorist Rehabilitation a global imperative, wherever possible, countries need to share the expertise and resources with countries that lack them. As of 2009, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Thailand and Philippines expressed an interest to build programs. To build a global regime to rehabilitate terrorists, governments with the expertise and resources needs to pave the way and create a path for other nations. Every successful program requires a long term investment of intellectual and other resources.

(5) Sharing of experience: Every national rehabilitation program is country specific. In Saudi Arabia for instance, they look for wives, buy them cars, homes, give them jobs, and assist to start businesses. To change the mindset, there is sustained family pressure to transform. Some have made use of the benefits and gone back to violence. Instead of seeking to replicate national models, what would be useful is to draw lessons and adapt them to the specific country conditions. However, there are many common areas for collaboration from research into key Islamic concepts misinterpreted by the terrorists to how to assess progress or non-progress in rehabilitation.

(6) An international advisory council: To sustain momentum, to ensure common interest, and to create synergy, it is necessary to create an international advisory council of practitioners and scholars. The council will determine membership, set modalities and provide strategic direction to the community of terrorist rehabilitation practitioners and scholars. The council will plan and prepare for an annual international conference on terrorist rehabilitation. This conference should continue to serve as a platform to project to the world the message of rehabilitation. Formal and informal education of leaders and others of the importance of such an approach rather than incarcerating and throwing the key away until the day the terrorist is released.

To make terrorist rehabilitation a global imperative, government need to move from a cooperative to a collaborative model. While preserving their unique identities they must be willing to advance common interests. To have universal acceptance of an idea such as terrorist rehabilitation, the understanding of the community of nations especially the West is paramount. Towards a United Nations convention making it mandatory for member countries to pass legislation, the nations that constitute the U.N. needs to be convinced. It will require a step by step approach of formally and informally educating the government and the intelligentsia, building a significant number of national rehabilitation programs and initiatives, an eventually approaching the U.N. By national programs collaborating, the case can be built to make terrorist rehabilitation a global regime. A regime will enable orderly progression towards dismantling the terrorist ideology.



## **8. The Future:**

After 9/11, the Western-led kinetic, lethal and punitive approaches have emerged as the dominant strategies to fight terrorism. These tactical and operational responses have produced mixed successes. Although several important terrorists have been killed or captured, the strategic threat has not diminished. Soon it will be ten years after the terrible attacks in New York and Washington D.C. Unless governments share and adopt non-kinetic non-lethal measures to fight terrorism and extremism, the threat will persist. The ideology driving violence including terrorism is growing. Unless the ideology in the environment and inside the minds of the terrorist is dismantled, the threat is likely to persist in the foreseeable future. Terrorist rehabilitation is a classic example of using smart power. It is neither soft nor hard power. It is a combination of integrating our laws to detain and hold but also our goodwill and judgment to correct the misled and the misguided. As no one is born an extremist or a terrorist, it is necessary to reverse the global trend of radicalization.

The science and the art of terrorist rehabilitation rest within the rubric of counter ideology. Ideological and intellectual response presents a positive and plausible avenue to create an environment that is hostile to terrorists and unfriendly to extremists. For it to be effective, it must come from the Muslim community. However, unless Muslim majority and minority governments and all communities work with and support the Muslim leaders, it is unlikely to happen. As the urgent and the immediate take priority over the important and strategic, terrorism will remain the tier-one national security threat to most countries in the foreseeable future. al Qaeda and its associated groups will continue to inculcate the Muslim world with its vicious ideology producing the next generation.

The world is at an early stage of understanding both extremism and terrorism. An evil political ideology espoused by a violent group masquerading as religious men drove youth from worldwide to flight and fight thousands of miles from home. For three decades, many participated in all facets of the global terrorist network's support activities and operations. For every active terrorist, there are thousands of active supporters and tens of thousands of passive sympathizers. As every supporter is a potential terrorist, early ideological intervention is an absolute necessity. As heightening of extremism leads to violence, approaches of engagement and legislation should be applied to prevent, deter, cure, and punish.

## **9. Conclusion:**

Rehabilitation is a holistic program. For rehabilitation to work, community engagement is as important as the four modes of rehabilitation. The confluence of these two domains must take place to bring about successful rehabilitation. The most crucial partnership is government and community working together. As communities produce extremists and terrorists, the participation of the community in the fight against extremism is essential. Law enforcement, intelligence and militaries can help but ultimately, the community must defeat terrorism. Without community participation, where the ulema and other secular leaders take the lead, no program can succeed. There should be synergy where government works with the community elite to create an environment hostile to the terrorists and unfriendly to extremists.



The Islamic World has yet to play the frontline role in both countering extremism and its vicious by product terrorism. As religion has been misused and abused, the Muslim world looks up towards Saudi Arabia to debunk the terrorist ideology. Although there are early tell-tail signs, the Royal family, religious scholars and ulema in Saudi Arabia should give a bold mandate, resources and the direction in the Muslim World. Other strong referral points should be Egypt and Pakistan, where radical movements emerged and festered. Unless the ulema in Muslim-majority countries such as Indonesia, Bangladesh, Jordan, Algeria speak-up, a segment of the Muslim community will continue to consider Osama bin Laden, Dr. Ayman al Zawahiri, Abu Bakar Bashir, and Abu Mohomed al Maqdisi as the ulema. More than ever before, the Muslim nations are facing a grave challenge. For success, a coordinated and collective effort is needed.

In most Muslim-minority governments, the greater challenge rests with government. Muslims have little or no channels to government. As counter terrorism is within the realm of national security, if to successfully target the conceptual terrorist infrastructures, government has no option but to invite Muslim leaders, elders and the elite to work with government. Governments must take the initiative and create bridges and pathways: by opening doors, inviting participation, and making them belong to the country, their identity will become a national Muslim identity. To foster government-community partnerships towards building a viable program, government should take the lead. At the beginning, initiatives to engage the Muslims will only have the support of a handful of genuine Muslim leaders and institutions. With success and time, more volunteers will join and greater participation.

To enlist greater Muslim participation and support, the orientation of the fight should change from a tactical and operational to a more strategic footing. Rather than enforcement, it will be on an engagement footing. The very concept of terrorist rehabilitation will refocus the attention of the world to the battlefield of the mind and make them think strategic and long term. If the UN, a world body, passes a resolution on rehabilitation, more countries will pay attention. They are likely to initiate rehabilitation programs that will produce results convincing others that rehabilitation works. Similar to the countering the financing of terrorism or banning torture, a worldwide resolution to enforce rehabilitation will be regarded humanitarian particularly by the Muslim world.