



POLICIES TO COUNTER THE APPEAL OF TERRORISM

First International Workshop on upstream prevention and downstream disengagement, rehabilitation and reintegration

Lucca, 24-26 May 2011

REPORT

I. Executive summary

71 persons from 22 countries, the UN, the EU, the OSCE, INTERPOL and 12 independent organizations participated in the workshop.

The opening session served to outline the context of a changing security environment within which the issue of violent extremism is emerging. Examples cited of good practices included the absolute supremacy of human dignity, fundamental rights, social responses through civil society in local communities, and the rule of law.

Regarding the subject of downstream disengagement, rehabilitation and reintegration, the debate centered on whether governments should change people's behavior, the way they think, or develop personalized *de-radicalization* interventions.

It was noted that the international community is at a critical juncture in the collective international effort to combat terrorism. While the death of the leader of Al Qaeda and developments in the Arab world are significantly damaging to this terrorist organization, the threat of ideology and of its potential influence on susceptible individuals has not diminished, and thus a global, strategic international effort with strong political will can deliver better results, notably by building state capacity.

Day I – National Experiences: discussion and exchange of views

Focus I: Asia (Malaysia, Bangladesh, Indonesia, and Singapore)

The delegates from these four countries, who share a similar threat assessment, provided insights into their extensive experience with upstream and downstream policies to prevent and counter violent extremism. Such policies are implemented through resource-intensive prevention and rehabilitation multi-disciplinary programs that rely on religious re-education, psychological counseling, vocational training, family support, reintegration, monitoring and after-care.

The expert presenters noted that the radicalizing narratives and messages used by terrorist recruiters demonstrated poor theological depth, and the ensuing discussion revolved around the centrality of civil society in both prevention and rehabilitation, as well as on the enduring gaps in *soft* responses to terrorism beyond *hard* security measures.

Focus II: Middle East (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Egypt)

The expert presenters shared valuable insights borne out of extensive experience implementing robust national prevention and rehabilitation programs. Noting that religion does not in any manner justify political violence, and recalling the historical backgrounds that provide conditions conducive to the spread of extremist narratives, the expert presenters observed that the main mission of their programs was to deconstruct the ideological justification that underpins violent extremism, in order to break the argumentative link between religion and violence, and enable the rehabilitation process.

Focus III: Africa (Mauritania, Algeria)

The expert presenters shared experiences based on institutionalized dialogue between imams and inmates, and on national reconciliation policies supported by social programs and media outreach.

The ensuing discussion touched upon the key issue to achieve effectiveness in any prevention or rehabilitation program: the indispensable *human capital* that formulates the content of these programs; this precious resource consists of scarce expertise and transmitting it (*training trainers*) is time-intensive, more than money-intensive.

Focus IV: the West (The Netherlands, Belgium, Spain)

The expert presenters implicitly acknowledged either that prevention and especially rehabilitation policies and programs remain in their initial phases in the EU, or that they are so sensitive that an unclassified multi-lateral forum is not necessarily the best environment to discuss them.

Special thematic focus, Different policy approaches on 1) Truth and reconciliation, and 2) De-radicalization

Drawing attention to groups and not to individuals, one presenter focused on transitions to peace displacing radicalism, making a deconstruction on how societies emerge from violence and on how groups move out of violence and transit into peace. Another presenter highlighted the notion of disengagement vs. de-radicalization. Though individuals do leave extremist and militant groups, this does not mean that they stop believing in the ideas that underlie the violent actions.

Day II: Outlining common trends and shaping the way forward

i. Perspectives from the European Union

The EU presenters acknowledged that the EU should be doing more to prevent radicalization and recruitment outside of the EU. Internally, the Directorate-General of Home Affairs of the European Commission informed about its new policy consisting of enabling a *network of networks* to integrate and disseminate existing knowledge and expertise: the EU Radicalization Awareness Network.

ii. Transatlantic perspectives: US rehabilitation abroad, lessons learned

Mr. Jay Alan Liotta, Principal Director, Office of Detainee Policy, US Department of Defense

The US expert presenters, both with extensive policy and field experience implementing pioneer rehabilitation and reintegration programs, shared some experiences from highly challenging, yet effective, programs in Afghanistan and other overseas detention operations. All programs had in common a commitment to multi-disciplinary approaches aimed at equipping inmates with both the capability to support themselves once free and the resilience to recidivist recruitment.

iii. Challenging the extremist narrative with victims' voices

This panel was widely considered the most powerful and moving session of the workshop. The discussion focused on how to incorporate victims' voices more centrally into the rehabilitation programs and into CT efforts more generally. It was argued that the terrorists need to see first-hand with the pain they inflict, not through confrontation, but through a positive and constructive dialogue.

iv. Disengagement, rehabilitation and reintegration of detainees and of prison inmates: differences and similarities

The expert presenters considered that past national experiences with radicalization in prisons involving different terrorist organizations offered valuable clues for the study of future programs. These programs would not work, they argued, without earning the trust of the detainees by dispensing them humane and dignified treatment.

1. Countering the Appeal of Terrorism: common trends and policies. Upstream Prevention and Downstream interventions: rehabilitation and de-radicalization

One expert presenter noted that in the field of prevention international organizations could have a very helpful role in identifying and helping disseminate good practices related to the positive impact that civil society can have on the fight against terrorism. Another expert presented on his theory of *de-radicalization*.

2. The way ahead: Measuring the impact of interventions and setting standards of progress

A former militant delivered a mock *radicalizing speech*, such as those used by radicalizers and recruiters to attract people into terrorist organizations. He then analyzed the radicalization process as he saw it and witnessed it during his militant years.

Main findings of the Workshop

The religious element – Many qualified participants observed that violent extremists exhibit a fundamental ignorance of the religion they claim to fight for. Thus, several rehabilitation programs include religious re-education. This includes valuable *counter-narratives* content.

Ideology and politics – Regardless of religious narratives, participants observed that ideology and politics lie at the core of the violent extremism problem.

Civil society and grassroots activism – Governments and international organizations obviously have a role in the fight against violent extremism, but the center of gravity should be on engagement and partnership with reliable civil society organizations that help promote positive grassroots activism to limit the influence of violent extremist ideology. Nevertheless significant gaps remain in this area, as it is relatively underdeveloped.

De-radicalization is not an exact science – Qualified speakers observed that while there are successes *de-radicalization* programs are highly sensitive and risky; different rates of recidivism are registered and developing these programs will always contain some degree of experimentation, and the gravity and extent of the challenge warrants the efforts.

Human Software - the most critical aspect of any rehabilitation program is developing a sustainable skill-set among a group of professionals who will develop it nationally. It is time intensive more than money-intensive.

Disengagement over de-radicalization – Many participants felt that disengagement from terrorism was more likely and therefore a more desirable intervention objective than the *de-radicalization* of the mind of the terrorist.

Good practices do exist, and can be exported – Qualified experts noted that the existing good practices are region and context-specific, but can be used to formulate capacity building programs globally.

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