COUNTERING EXTREMISM: ISLAMIC STATE AND BEYOND

Event Report
22-23 September 2015

Centre of Excellence for National Security

RSiS Nanyang Technological University | S. RAJARATNAM SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

NSCS NATIONAL SECURITY COORDINATION SECRETARIAT

Event Report

COUNTERING EXTREMISM: ISLAMIC STATE AND BEYOND

Report on the workshop organised by:
Centre of Excellence for National Security (CENS)
S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS)
Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

Supported by:
National Security Coordination Secretariat (NSCS)
Prime Minister's Office, Singapore

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The workshop adheres to a variation of the Chatham House Rule. Accordingly, beyond the speakers and presenters cited, no other attributions have been included in this report.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Welcome Remarks

Shashi Jayakumar, Senior Fellow and Head, Centre of Excellence for National Security (CENS), opened the Workshop by welcoming the speakers and participants. Jayakumar noted that while it had been little over a year since the Islamic State (IS) declared a caliphate, it was unclear what was effective in offering an alternative to the IS message and more generally in countering violent extremism (CVE). Bringing together professionals from diverse fields, the CENS Workshop on Countering Extremism: Islamic State and Beyond was intended to contribute to the formation of intellectual capital among stakeholders. Jayakumar stressed that the Workshop, aside from providing knowledge on CVE, was structured to provide ample opportunity for attendees to network. Such informal exchanges would help build relationships and friendships, which can lead to collaborative inter-disciplinary efforts necessary to counter extremism.

Panel 1
Measuring Success and Failure in Countering Violent Extremism

The first panel examined the various approaches used to assess the effectiveness of CVE initiatives. The first speaker was **Gentry White,** a Senior Lecturer from the Queensland University of Technology [Australia]. White spoke on the role of quantitative methodologies in assessing the effectiveness of CVE efforts. "Big Data" presented new opportunities for CVE by providing new metrics, allowing usage of open-data sources such as social media, and the study of patterns of online behaviour. Looking at case studies from domestic extremism in the UK, such as animal rights extremism and English Defence League, was the second speaker. **Alex Ttaris,** Detective Inspector, Metropolitan Police All-Source Hub [United Kingdom], outlined lessons learned and suggested potential opportunities in countering radicalisation. The final speaker **Majeed Khader,** Director of the Home Team Behavioural Sciences Centre, Ministry of Home Affairs, observed that the efficacy of CVE initiatives had been little studied. His presentation assessed success and failure in countering violent extremism through the use of a "4-P Framework": the (1) Politico-Geographic level; (2) the Policy and Government level; (3) the Peoples/ Community/Group level; and (4) the Personal level.

Panel 2
Assessing Foreign Fighter Involvement in Terrorist Campaigns

The second panel analysed the involvement of foreign fighters in Iraq and Syria. The speakers tackled this issue from four different angles. The first presenter, **Mina Al-Lami,** Jihadist Media Analyst, from BBC Monitoring [United Kingdom], explored the roles of foreign fighters in IS propaganda. She highlighted how foreign fighters had become the key messengers of a sophisticated recruitment campaign. The second panellist, **Navhat Nuraniyah,** Associate Research Fellow from CENS, described the dynamics of motivation and mobilisation of Indonesian Jihadists. She identified a major fault line between pro-Jabhat al-Nusra (JN) and pro-IS Indonesian groups and leaders. The third presenter, **Shiraz Maher,** Senior Fellow and Head of Research, International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation [United Kingdom] shifted to the question of European foreign fighters. Maher provided an update on the profiles, motivations, activities, and threats posed by both aspiring and returning European foreign fighters. The fourth panellist, **Thomas Samuel,** Director, Southeast Asia Regional Centre for Counter-Terrorism (SEARCCT) [Malaysia], exposed the challenges of counter-radicalisation initiatives in Malaysia. He outlined the most urgent gaps, including the lack of raw data on the nature of the radicalisation process and emphasized the crucial need to build "mental firewalls".

Panel 3
Counter-narratives: A Critical Examination

The third panel discussed alternative perspectives on how to best counter IS propaganda. The first speaker was **Solahudin,** an independent researcher and journalist, affiliated with the Indonesia Strategic Policy Institute. Solahudin shared his experience in

dealing with extremists and the counter-narratives present in Indonesia. He shared the main reasons as to why the IS continued to be attractive to Muslims in Indonesia, and evaluated the contending narratives presented by extremist groups such as the JN, the Indonesian government, and moderate Muslims in Indonesia. The second panellist was **Farish Noor,** Associate Professor, RSIS. Noor questioned the religious narrative of extremism, and suggested the notion that religion as a starting point for extremism could be a misdiagnosis of the problem. He commented that the increasing security focus in analysing the problem was counterproductive and suggested the whole gamut of the humanities and social sciences should be used to analyse the problem of extremism. The third speaker was **Anne Aly,** Associate Professor and Director, Countering Online Violent Extremism Program, Curtin University [Australia]. She shared her research on an online narrative campaign in countering violent extremist influence. She said it was difficult to interrupt online radicalisation because there was a distinct lack of focus in the counter-messages, which did not offer an alternative message to the consumers.

Panel 4
Policy Recommendations

The final panel examined various policy approaches and challenges faced in implementing counterterrorism measures. The first speaker was **Jenny Cartwright,** Coordinator—Diversion/Counterterrorism from the Australian Federal Police. Cartwright spoke about the need to employ and manage a range of punitive and non-punitive counterterrorism measures to intervene, prevent, and punish persons in the periphery as well as those who have committed related offences. **Animesh Roul,** Executive Director—Research, Society for the Study of Peace and Conflict [India], gave an overview of the situation in the South Asian region, with an apparent trend of a new wave of IS-inspired extremism, as well as a number of localised extremist groups pledging loyalty to the IS-led jihad in Syria and Iraq. The third speaker was **Kathline Tolosa,** Executive Director, Security Reform Initiative [Philippines]. Tolosa presented on counterterrorism measures from the perspective of grassroots initiatives in the Philippines; focusing on efforts to mainstream a conflict-sensitive and peace-promoting approach designed to encourage the agency of communities in engaging with security issues. The final speaker was **Scott Flower,** Fellow, University of Melbourne [Australia]. Flower presented on the increasing involvement of Muslim converts in violent extremist incidents, noting in particular the need for evidence-based programs designed to counter extremist narratives that appeal to converts.

Closing Panel/Moderated Discussion

The panel began with an encouragement to participants and speakers to raise major issues and recap some of the key points. It was suggested that statistical tools such as databases would be increasingly required for future research on violent extremism, yet it was important to favour inter-disciplinary approaches in the collection and analysis of information. The issue of extremists' use of open spaces on social media for communication and propaganda was also raised, with the increasing popularity of encrypted messaging apps. One participant took the view that regardless of how many extremists retreat into closed spaces, there will remain a valuable pool of data for intelligence gathering. Another recurring theme was that what works in CVE were context-specific. Passion and creativity were two important themes raised by one participant, who highlighted small-scale projects succeed because of their proponents' determination and willingness to think outside the box. It was also observed that further research was needed into how the IS continued to withstand challenges to its authority as well as strategic and tactical setbacks; all the while managing to provide a semblance of governance within the self-declared caliphate.

Opening Remarks

Opening Remarks
Shashi Jayakumar, Head, Centre of Excellence for National Security (CENS), RSIS

Shashi Jayakumar

Shashi Jayakumar opened the Workshop and welcomed the speakers and participants. Jayakumar briefly outlined the work conducted by CENS, which is one of five centres in the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS). CENS has four component research programmes : radicalisation, social resilience, homeland defence, and cybersecurity. A key part of the Centre's function is to inform the thinking of local agencies and government within Singapore, and through workshops such as these, prompt critical thinking on what lessons can be drawn and what can be adapted for Singapore's needs.

Jayakumar noted that while it had been little over a year since the IS declared a caliphate in Iraq and Syria, it was so far unclear what did and did not work in countering the threat posed by the group and other violent extremist organisations. By bringing together professionals from a range of diverse fields, the CENS Workshop on Countering Extremism: Islamic State and Beyond, hoped to contribute toward the formation of intellectual capital among participants, academic researchers, and government policy makers.

The Workshop consisted of four panels, each with an expert cast of speakers, who would run through the entire gamut of critical issues in the field of countering extremism. Key areas of focus included measuring success and failure in countering violent extremism, assessing foreign fighter involvement in terrorist campaigns, critical examination of counter-narratives, and policy recommendations stemming from these issues. A number of pertinent case studies would also be presented.

Jayakumar underscored that in order to extract maximum value from the Workshop, CENS decided to forgo the usual question-and-answer format in favour of syndicated discussions. Break-out groups would be organised among the participants with panel speakers circulating among the syndicates. It was expected that small group discussions would promote more in-depth and interactive conversations among participants and speakers.

Jayakumar thanked the speakers, who in many cases had travelled a considerable distance to attend the Workshop. He also thanked the participants for taking time from their respective organisations and agencies to contribute to the Workshop. It was also stressed that the Workshop programme allowed ample opportunity for attendees to network and engage each other through informal channels such as semi-structured discussions and tea breaks. Such exchanges would help build relationships and friendships, which can lead to the type of collaborative inter-disciplinary efforts demanded by the complex field of countering extremism.

PANEL 1

Measuring Success and Failure in Countering Violent Extremism

Measuring Success and Failure in Countering Violent Extremism

Gentry White
Senior Lecturer, Queensland University of Technology [Australia]

Gentry White

Gentry White spoke on the role of quantitative methodology to assess the effectiveness of CVE efforts. "Big Data" represented new opportunities for CVE by providing new metrics that allowed exploitation of open-data sources such as social media, and the study of online patterns of behaviour.

White observed that in the aftermath of the September 11th attacks in the US and the July 7th attacks in the UK, many CVE programmes were quickly established. These programmes, however, had been criticised for issues in theoretical foundations and implementation. The following generation of CVE programmes needed to have a means to measure effectiveness. White stated that there was no one-size-fits-all approach to measuring the effectiveness of CVE programmes. Both qualitative and quantitative methodologies had their merits and represented complementary approaches in contributing to CVE programmes. Therefore, both should be adopted in a unified manner.

In practice, the evaluation of CVE programme effectiveness remained challenging. While the desired outcome of CVE efforts was a reduction in violent extremism, precisely defining what a reduction meant was difficult and usually context-dependent. Because of the relative rarity of actual violent events, measuring the effectiveness of CVE efforts by looking at the decline of instances of violent extremism could be misleading. Instead, secondary measures should be considered. But while there was a large body of theoretical research on violent radicalisation, there remained no consensus on individual risk factors or trajectories; which made identifying observable indicators of efficacy a challenge.

"Big Data" techniques applied to this problem could create opportunities for new metrics. So too could open-data sources (such as social media content) present new areas to be mined. White expressed uncertainty as to whether the potential of big data, which in this case he took to mean quantitative measurements of people's behaviour, had been adequately exploited for CVE purposes. While he was confident that quantitative-based technology and methodology were constantly evolving and could certainly be applied to CVE, White was less certain whether adequate resources had in fact been dedicated in this direction.

To this end, White discussed the general testing framework and potential new metrics available for using "Big Data" approaches in studying social media content and patterns of behaviour for CVE. In terms of social media, two areas of opportunities could be explored. The first was counter-narratives; focusing on de-radicalisation, disengagement, and prevention. White noted that the unique aspects of social media such as the brevity and mixture of its content, flexible time frames for interaction, and virtual interactions; need to be acknowledged and understood when creating counter-narratives. The second was text mining, which involves extracting information from both actual content and metadata. Processing the huge amounts of metadata extracted had become the main challenge. White stated that it was necessary to both scale up existing technical methods and create new technologies to process the increasing amounts of metadata being gathered by states.

Lessons Learned from UK Domestic Extremism and Potential Opportunities in Countering Radicalisation

Alex Ttaris

Detective Inspector, Metropolitan Police All Source Hub [United Kingdom]

In his presentation, **Alex Ttaris** observed how social media had become an integral part of criminal intelligence monitoring in recent years. Ttaris discussed the potential challenges of measuring the success of a counter Islamic radicalisation programme under the UK's Prevent strategy and the potential opportunities in countering radicalisation through social media. He shared his experience monitoring online accounts and real-world activities of domestic extremist groups in the UK. The two groups of individuals his talk covered were members of animal rights extremist (ARE) groups and the English Defence League (EDL).

Ttaris noted that social media changed the way domestic extremist groups operated. Animal rights activists now preferred to seek support and disseminate their views through online social media; staying below the threshold of extremism that would be criminalised offline. This non-violent and more moderate method of operation using social media had actually proven more effective in achieving the twin effects of disrupting the life science sector and triggering robust public debates on animal rights online. Similarly, the EDL represented another protest movement that had reaped the benefits of social media, presenting an image that was constrained within the spectrum of free speech and democracy online.

Despite its benefits, U.K. domestic extremist movements had encountered difficulty in controlling how online messaging was being translated into offline activism by their real-world membership. For example, on 22 May 2013, the day of the murder of British Army soldier Lee Rigby, a massive outpouring of public support was received by the EDL on its Facebook page and a protest action was subsequently planned. However, when EDL Facebook followers realised the real aims and objectives of the movement, online support dwindled quickly. The offline, real-world support for the movement was also scant, with only approximately 2000 committed members and an average of 50-100 people of such members showing up during demonstrations. Ttaris argued that keeping the group together proved problematic and organisations such as the EDL were prone to splintering. Social media promoted the fracturing of groups such as the EDL. Through social media, fringe groups or ideas within a large organisation such as the EDL could occupy a social niche online. In time, what started as a small, fringe subgroup could attain a critical mass online through social media and split off formally from the original organisation in the real-world.

Ttaris discussed the challenges of measuring the success of CVE-related messaging using social media along with the potential opportunities. For example, the response to a recent appeal for women not to travel to Syria to join the IS by a female officer of the UK police had been lacklustre; creating a negligible digital footprint on social media. Ttaris noted the challenge inherent in attempting to measure success for initiatives to prevent an incident from taking place. There remained a gap in terms of behavioural-based research into the usage of traditional media and social media. Research on the dynamics of online and offline networks of movements to properly evaluate the effectiveness of CVE also continued to be limited. Going forward, Ttaris also believed that extremists would continue to use social media as it had proven to be an effective tool to broadcast their message.

Measuring the Effectiveness of CVE: Multi Level Measurement Levels and Measurement Challenges

Majeed Khader

Director, Home Team Behavioural Sciences Centre, Ministry of Home Affairs

Majeed Khader

Majeed Khader presented some initial thoughts on assessing success and failure in CVE programmes through the "4-P Framework". This comprised: (1) Politico-Geographic level; (2) Policy and Government level; (3) Peoples/Community/Group level; and (4) the Personal Level. Since 2001, many CVE initiatives had been introduced and implemented around the world. While there had been many studies that investigated CVE initiatives, very few studies explored the efficacy of these initiatives. A fundamental challenge was the inherent difficulty of developing empirical tools for assessment and evaluation of CVE initiatives. Khader stated that policymakers needed to think about different levels of measurement from macro to micro levels. While there were many possible dimensions to examine CVE, lack of clarity and definitions made assessment challenging. Policymakers may end up wasting resources on performing evaluation measures on CVE initiatives without actually addressing the underlying issues that triggered violent extremism.

Khader's elaborated on his proposed "4P Framework". On the Politico-International level, Khader emphasised the importance of assessing the effectiveness of dialogue and discussion between populations and their governments. For example, dialogues with farmers in Korea and protesters in Hong Kong had been shown to be significant in reducing violence. The Swedish police had also recognised the crucial role that communication played in its establishment of a "dialogue police". At the Peoples/Community/Group level, Khader stated that while it was difficult to measure community cohesion, attempts could be made through the incorporation of various methods of data triangulation and multiple data points. At the Policy/Government level, he noted that it was important to assess the effectiveness of initiatives such as community policing and rehabilitation programmes for the family of terror detainees. Finally, at the Personal level, Khader said that radicalised individuals as a group—or all those who had been shown to be at risk in terms of their thinking; must have their emotional status as part of the assessment. He cautioned that radicalised individuals tend not to be driven by logic, but by emotional and socio-cultural factors. Therefore, there was a need for proper assessment of current rehabilitative and engagement programmes, which covered both the irrational and rational aspects of a person's mindset.

Khader proposed several considerations for the improvement of current evaluation models. Firstly, measurement logic models must consider the needs aspects that had been neglected by current rehabilitation programmes. In particular, Khader noted that policy makers should better understand the reason behind why individuals become violent extremists in the first place. Secondly, policymakers should carefully consider which entity would be best tasked to do evaluations. For example, decision makers need to decide whether internal evaluators or external evaluators were the most appropriate party for the task at hand. Finally, an evaluation of non-events or those which had been prevented from happening by successful intervention should be considered. Evaluation measures should be focused on acquiring feedback to improve subsequent interventions.

Syndicate Group Discussions

A recurring theme with the Workshop participants was on how best to combine qualitative and quantitative methods to assess countering violent extremism CVE programmes. Extremism, as a form of human decision–making, cannot be fully modelled through quantitative measures. CVE initiatives would continue to require linguistic and cultural knowledge often found in qualitative methods. What quantitative methods could provide as complementary tools include text-mining, which could help analysts organise and visualise vast amounts of data. While still nascent, the combination of qualitative and quantitative methods could pave the way for predictive modelling to forecast the tendency of individuals to commit violence.

Participants also expressed some scepticism over best practices often cited in CVE programme assessments. There were several questions on how the rarity of violent extremism can skew observations. Could the measurement of non-events—the absence of violent extremist incidents, ever be a reliable indicator of the effectiveness of CVE initiatives? A speaker argued that secondary measures such as: (1) website traffic; (2) social media comments; and (3) tone and content of online discourse could be leveraged to indirectly assess CVE programmes' effectiveness.

Successful CVE initiatives could also create the paradox of obscuring the role played by effective CVE policy implementers, such as counsellors and community workers. Incentive mechanisms, such as awards and recognitions, were often tied solely to crisis management criteria (i.e. quick response to a terrorist attack). A speaker called for increased awareness over the role of individual crisis preventers. Leadership was deemed critical among organisations to make sure that both crisis managers and crisis preventers would be acknowledged for their efforts to respond to violent extremism.

The syndicate discussions also led to queries on the situation in UK. A participant asked a speaker about the radicalisation of South Asian migrants in the UK. In response, it was stated that the UK's utmost priority was to monitor any individual or group radicalised within the country or travelling outbound to Syria or Iraq. Another participant asked about the threat posed by returning foreign fighters into the UK. In response, a speaker pushed for a calibrated approach to either reintegrate or punish a returnee. States like the UK should first assess the threat level of each foreign fighter. Returning fighters should not be immediately criminalised, as less hard-core individuals could still fully reintegrate into their societies—or even take part in CVE initiatives for former fighters. On the other hand, returnees who are known to have participated in atrocities overseas should be severely penalised.

Community-level measures of CVE were also explored. One of the proposed measurements of CVE programme success was the level of engagement of communities. The degree of collective advocacy of communities could be a way to determine success. Consequently, there were questions on the possible conflicts, if any, arising between community-based interventions and law enforcement interventions. A speaker mentioned that different nations had used various approaches to the issue, and that there were lingering challenges in working with communities in trying to come out with the right counter-narratives.

A related question was raised in the syndicates on the dynamics between the monitoring of at-risk individuals, and intelligence sharing. A speaker noted that the sharing of intelligence between intelligence officers and social media researchers could lead to a holistic understanding of real-world and virtual-world knowledge. It was acknowledged that social media intelligence analysis remained novel among some law enforcement agencies. It was proposed that intelligence exchanges could be made between organisations tasked with CVE on the one hand and law enforcement officers on the other.

PANEL 2

Assessing Foreign Fighter Involvement in Terrorist Campaigns

Foreign Fighters in ISIS Propaganda

Mina Al-Lami
Media Analyst, BBC Monitoring [United Kingdom]

Mina Al-Lami

Mina Al-Lami began by noting that the most popular online propaganda of IS were their recruitment videos. The latter continued to be available in different languages and covered various countries/regions. According to an International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation (ICSR) assessment, foreign fighters represent less than 10% of the armed personnel of ISIS. Despite these small numbers, foreign fighters were over-represented in the recent IS media campaigns. Emphasising the role of foreign fighters in IS was of central importance to the group, as they attract international media attention and gave credibility to the IS claim of establishing a borderless and transnational Caliphate. Additionally, the rivalry between AQ and IS had led to an informal competition between the two organisations over who had the larger number of foreign fighters.

Elaborating on IS media strategy, Al-Lami emphasised the importance of linguistic diversity. Several jihadist media agencies played an important role in the production, translation, and distribution of propaganda. These included the Al Hayat media centre, a group tasked with the production of multi-lingual recruitment videos and magazines. In addition, Al Bayan radio delivered a daily broadcast in 8 different languages. Linguistic specialisation was further illustrated by a wealth of web magazines, first among which is the English language *Dabiq;* replicated in French (*Dar al-Islam*), Turkish (*Constantinople*) and Russian (*Istok*). For Al-Lami, the lack of an Arabic-speaking e-magazine revealed the importance placed by IS on foreign target audiences. The release dates of information could reveal strategic intent, as the first issues of Constantinople and Istok were released shortly before Turkish general elections and the "establishment" of a so-called IS province in the South Caucasus.

Al-Lami stressed how the actual, day-to-day responsibilities of foreign fighters within the IS hierarchy were far less than what is portrayed in IS propaganda. While they might be regularly portrayed at the forefront of key battles, foreign fighters rarely hold high-profile leadership positions. Al-Lami specified that many foreign fighters were used for suicide bombing operations, which likely indicated deeply-rooted ideological beliefs and convictions. Likewise, the highly sophisticated nature of IS propaganda suggests that Western-educated foreign fighters were substantially involved in media and technology work.

In conclusion, Al-Lami identified seven motives for recruitment, which included (1) ideology, coupled with military success and effective governance; (2) apocalyptic prophecies, based on ISIS' self-depiction as the group chosen to fight the end-time battle; (3) joining the "winning" group; (4) adventure or "jihadist tourism"; (5) benefits such as social status, wives, and a regular income; (6) the depiction of a normal if not prosperous life on ISIS territory, as opposed to situations of socio-economic disruption and crisis in neighbouring territories and countries; and (7) slick and multilingual media products.

Indonesian Fighters in Syria

Navhat Nuraniyah

Associate Research Fellow, CENS, RSIS

Navhat Nuraniyah

Navhat Nuraniyah stressed that foreign fighters were not a new phenomenon in Indonesia. More than 200 Indonesian jihadists linked with Islamist groups such as Darul Islam were trained in Afghanistan in the 1980s and the 1990s. While some Afghan returnees were involved in Muslim-Christian sectarian violence in Ambon and Poso, others directed the struggle on the "far enemy" in the early 2000s, leading to bomb attacks in Jakarta and Bali. The movement behind these plots, Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), gradually renounced armed violence from 2007. This led to the emergence of hard-line groups such as Jemaah Ansharut Tauhid (JAT) and Jama'at al-Tawhid wal-Jihad (JTJ), led by Abu Bakr Bashir and Aman Abdurrahman, respectively.

The Indonesian jihadist scene initially welcomed the Syrian civil war as a new "opportunity" for jihad, based on humanitarian, ideological/theological, and eschatological reasons. However, the rivalry between IS and JN, Al-Qaeda's affiliate in Syria, deepened long-standing divisions. The "Afghan generation" tend to incline to AQ and JN. Their stance was based on (1) a national/regional-focused interpretation of jihad that would limit any armed involvement in Syria to Syrians and people of surrounding countries and (2) the opportunism and extremism of IS. These positions were not inflexible, as some of the leaders interviewed by Nuraniyah expressed their approval of Indonesian fighters joining the ranks of JN. On the other hand, younger and diehard jihadists took the side of IS more readily, including local groups such as Anshar Daulah Islamiyah (ADI); the Mujahidin Indonesia Timur (MIT) and a faction of Abu Bakr Bashir's JAT.

As of July 2015, 202 Indonesians were identified in Syria, with a total number estimated at 250-300 fighters and members of their families. This reflected the significant impact of the propaganda message of IS; which gradually evolved from a call to jihad to an invitation to hijrah (emigration). Aspiring fighters needed to obtain a recommendation from well-known leaders and commanders, some of whom were involved with Aman Abdurrahman's networks. However, they might also take advantage of personal acquaintances and relatives living in Syria and Turkey.

Due to linguistic barriers, Indonesian jihadists fighting with IS in Syria created their own sub-group named Katibah Nusantara (Malay Archipelago) in September 2014. This combat unit was initially made up of around 100 fighters who were mostly deployed in the Sinjar region, but military setbacks and internal splits hampered its operational effectiveness. Nuraniyah noted that a few Indonesian fighters had come back disillusioned, but others remaining in IS territory had evinced the clear intention to return to establish a "province" of the Caliphate in Southeast Asia. Nuraniyah suggested that the more pressing issue came from Indonesian IS sympathizers and supporters, rather than its foreign fighters; the latter being more unlikely to return to Indonesia for fear of arrest and prosecution.

Europe's Foreign Fighters in Syria: Who They Are, Why They Go, What They Do, and What Threat Will They Pose on Their Return?

Shiraz Maher

Senior Fellow and Head of Research, ICSR, King's College London [United Kingdom]

Shiraz Maher

Shiraz Maher described how ICSR compiled its database on Western foreign fighters. Methods used included open-source intelligence; social media intelligence; interviews with western foreign fighters on the ground and fieldwork among insurgent groups involved in the Syrian civil war.

ICSR researchers identified 800 male foreign fighters and 100 females, with around 400 additional individuals suspected as foreign fighters. The figure of 20,700 foreign fighters was released by ICSR in January 2015, exceeding by 700 individuals assessments produced by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). From May 2013, the involvement of Hezbollah alongside Bashar al-Assad's forces increased the sectarian dimension of the conflict. Foreign fighter numbers stagnated between December 2013 and April 2014, but a substantial increase resulted from the "declaration" of the IS caliphate and its military success. This was followed in January 2015 by the first significant wave of foreign fighters who left IS.

Maher explained that specific motivations played various roles at different times of the conflict. The first foreign fighters he interviewed in 2013 referred to humanitarian motives to justify their involvement in Syria, while they focused their religious argument on the sense of ummah consciousness leading them to "defend" Muslims against oppression and tyranny, as well as the traditional importance of Syria in normative Islamic theology, where some of the Prophet's companions are buried. Other than these broad and encompassing motivations, there was also a more personal-level attraction to help specific conflict-affected communities, with the Syrian conflict considered by many to be a "good" war.

Attempting to delineate a general profile based on the 700 to 1000 British foreign fighters studied, Maher described a man in his 20's, of South Asian ethnic origin, often with some higher education, and contacts (sometimes international contacts) to other individuals/ groups. Delving further, Maher suggested that there were five different "types", including: (1) known radicals; (2) individuals with a humanitarian/activist background; (3) martyrdom seekers; (4) criminals/adventure seekers; (5) individuals considering that support to the Caliphate is a religious obligation.

Online contacts of foreign fighters and supporters provide key indications on the networks involved and the identities of individuals who are most likely to leave to take part in the conflict. Maher said there were diverse ethnic, national and socio-economic backgrounds; growing numbers of converts, and a common phenomenon of groups of friends or relatives migrating to IS-controlled areas as one party. Maher said that the average age of females making the trip to join IS was 20. He stated that women interviewed by ICSR proved to be highly intelligent, motivated and ideological, contrary to stereotypes that would profile all women leaving for Syria as "naïve" or "brainwashed" recruits. The major activity of male foreign fighters was combat, while foreign women present in Syria were particularly active on social media which they use for the purpose of proselytisation. Maher specified that an important part of women's "role" was to populate the IS and to contribute to its development by raising children.

Maher concluded by assessing the levels of threat involved. Basing his assessments on studies conducted by Thomas Hegghammer and Jytte Klausen, Maher suggested that a majority of returning foreign fighters (75 to 90 percent) would not follow the path of terrorism. However, the threat remains serious as terrorist plots involving ex-foreign fighters are more viable and lethal, while traumatised returnees will pose risks to society, regardless of their ideological motivations.

M.A.D (Making A Difference) Amidst Mad People: Addressing Foreign Fighter Involvement in Terrorist Campaigns

Thomas Samuel
Director, Research and Publication, SEARCCT [Malaysia]

Thomas Samuel

Thomas Samuel explained that Malaysian jihadists involved in Afghanistan passed on to domestic Malaysian militants the fighting skills and tradecraft they had acquired once they returned home. Samuel expressed concern that a similar phenomenon might be repeated in the context of the current Syrian and Iraqi conflicts. Such a possibility would be all the more credible as returnees could act as key sources of experience; bridging between Malaysia-based violent extremists supporters and groups such as JN and IS in Syria-Iraq region.

Among the main drivers and triggers of radicalisation, Samuel mentioned thrill and adventure seeking, which lead young people to look for stimuli, as well as ideology. These generic incentives may be coupled with a set of individual motivations ranging from atonement and personal issues to cognitive opening via secondary trauma. Identifying such factors would be a major step forward, but the prevalence of gaps continued to complicate the design and the implementation of counter-radicalisation strategies and policies.

Other major shortcomings included the lack of data on a transnational and comparative basis, about the origins and the process of radicalisation. Samuel mentioned how there was insufficient information dissemination about intervention programmes from the policymakers to the frontline staff such as social workers. There was also a lack of adequate training sessions for personnel involved in CVE. Finally, Samuel underscored how the dearth of assessment measures could hamper efforts to tweak and improve CVE-related policies.

In proposing solutions, Samuel underlined the importance of a structured research network, which would answer the crucial need to specify the categories of individuals targeted. Such a system would also lead to singling out the factor(s) of radicalisation involved, while identifying the nature of the messages conveyed and the ways they are channelled, in order to come up with appropriate alternative or counter messages.

In this holistic perspective, lecturers, teachers, community leaders, religious clerics and former militants should be fully involved, as these individuals would be in an ideal position to provide valuable input and continuous monitoring. Likewise, expertise and knowledge from psychologists, marketers and advertisers were considered key assets in shaping an indispensable public response. Resource centres and other organisations that can house and produce materials for CVE initiatives were described as important entities. CVE resource centres' major function would be the creation of "mental firewalls"; systems of critical analysis used by individuals to "block" the temptation of radicalisation.

Samuel stated that terrorist messaging should be watched carefully and requires substantial investment. This would allow the development of appropriate counter-narratives, their crafting, and online/offline dissemination. In a second step, credible messengers such as community and religious leaders should be trained to communicate on radicalisation-related issues. The cornerstone of this approach lies in the development of formal and informal monitoring capabilities, to develop and institutionalise assessment mechanisms. In particular, criteria of success of intervention programmes need to be properly defined in order to appropriately implement rectification measures. Samuel stressed the high level of legitimacy and credibility of former terrorists—uniquely placed to expose the reasons for leaving a militant group and the futility of terrorist violence. In conclusion, he defined counter-radicalisation as a constant process of learning, adjustment to existing conditions, and improvement.

Syndicate Group Discussions

In all syndicates, there were questions on what would be the most effective ways to combat IS' use of online propaganda. Primarily, governments would take down content as quickly as possible. However, such steps had limited effects as IS propagandists were quick to propagate and upload new material as soon as old material got taken down. Some speakers also expressed the view that taking content off the internet to protect vulnerable individuals had the unintended effect of potentially denying security agencies open source intelligence.

Discussion turned to what kind of content could work in terms of countering the narratives of extremist groups. An interesting example was given of a series of short, fun videos from the UK, called the "Diary of a Badman", which fused urban street culture and humour

with Islamic messages denouncing extremism. It was suggested that support for such efforts would be more effective if coming from technology companies such as Google, rather than governments, which often lacked legitimacy among the target audiences.

Other participants asked how the IS media strategy had evolved. A speaker highlighted the appeal of the slick English-language videos and materials propagated by IS to the younger generation. Ideological messages of conquering far-off lands and the idea of restoring the caliphate—and its attendant message of bringing back the Golden Age of Islamic civilisation was a powerful lure to young people.

The effect of IS propaganda was also considered in the syndicates. One speaker underscored the point that the easiest way to conceptualise and measure the impact of extremist groups' propaganda was through the number of people joining IS. More significantly, IS could also be considering the extent of news coverage on their activities on social and mainstream media as an internal measure of their propaganda's impact. IS appeared to increase the production and dissemination of its propaganda material in response to the media coverage their daily releases had attracted. JN, on the other hand, had not been able to gain as much attention from both social and mainstream media and continued to run a more limited propaganda campaign.

There was also some discussion on how the intended audience of IS propaganda responded. It was observed that many young people attracted to jihadism could argue that anything coming from the West was propaganda, while refusing to recognise that IS' communication was propaganda, too.

A participant enquired about current trends on the number of foreign fighters in Syria. A speaker said that any estimate of foreign fighters remained fraught with approximations and conjecture. At best, estimates of foreign fighter numbers were an "imprecise" science. But while individual fighters continued to come and go, the longer IS exists, the more attractive it would become.

Some participants challenged the commonly-held notion that religion was the main driver behind radicalisation. A speaker mentioned that individuals most vulnerable to religiously-based radicalisation and recruitment were the youth. Such individuals possess poor knowledge and a shallow perspective of their religion. To counter this, it was stressed that governments should observe the messaging of terrorists, which would be valuable in designing counter-narratives. Educating vulnerable youth in fields such as pedagogy and communication could help foster their resistance to radicalisation.

Related to this issue was how alienation among the youth could be a factor of radicalisation both in Muslim minority or Muslim majority countries. One speaker noted that European Muslims were often minorities in their respective countries and were more prone to harbouring feelings of alienation. Nonetheless, even in Muslim-majority countries like Indonesia and Malaysia, individuals were motivated to join terrorist campaigns as foreign fighters. It was stressed that there were different kinds of motivations and these also varied from one person to another. It was shared that some Indonesian extremists feel that they have an obligation to fight in Syria to compensate for living in a secular republic instead of an Islamic-based society.

Other aspects of discussion related to specific country initiatives to counter radicalisation. A participant asked about the effectiveness of a religious training that engaged potential Indonesian militants. A speaker stressed that peer influence was crucial – the likelihood of being radicalised was greater if an individual has pro-IS friends. In addition, religious training did not automatically lead to more moderate views. Religious training for individuals vulnerable to radicalisation, if done poorly could deepen extremist convictions. There was also a question raised on the efficacy of introducing new legislation, such as the Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA) in Malaysia. A speaker answered that the POTA appeared to deter people from using Malaysia as a transit point on the way to the Middle East.

PANEL 3:

Counter-narratives: A Critical Examination

Counter-narratives: A Critical Examination

Solahudin

Independent researcher and journalist, Indonesia Strategic Policy Institute

Solahudin

Solahudin, an independent researcher and journalist, talked about the counter-narratives being used in Indonesia and the effectiveness of these messages. Solahudin described the attractiveness of the IS to Indonesian extremists and the narrative that had been propagated by pro-IS groups in Indonesia.

These narratives largely focused on religious hadiths that rationalise travelling to Syria and Iraq. The hadiths included references to the defence of Sunni Muslims against the Alawites in Syria, end-times prophecies, and the implementation of shariah law. Solahudin said that the IS narrative also encouraged Muslims in Indonesia to migrate with their families to the IS. Staying in Indonesia goes against Islamic teachings, the narrative further states. Solahudin also shared how IS tried to soften its image to appeal to potential recruits. IS narratives stressed how the group was cruel only to its enemies, but would care for its followers through the provision of public services and monthly stipends.

Solahudin however said that these narratives were now being challenged by returnees from IS territory. He cited how a meatball soup seller was enticed to join IS because of the generous stipend promised to him, not for religious reasons. The man returned to Indonesia when the promised stipend did not materialise. Solahudin also shared how the joining process for potential foreign fighters to reach Syria prevented the number of foreign jihadists from rapidly increasing. Potential foreign fighters who could have been radicalised online had to join a religious study group before proceeding to join IS (unlike people who had been radicalised online in other countries). The waiting list to join IS in Indonesia was thus very long due to the protracted process of religious study.

Solahudin said that the narrative JN presented was far more attractive to Indonesians than the call of IS. The presence of an alternative extremist organisation splintered opinions even within extremist families in Indonesia. The narrative of the JN continued to rest on delegitimising the IS narrative, portraying the latter as "takfiri" or infidel. JN also highlighted the relationship of IS to Baathists, through articles critical of IS published daily.

Solahudin then assessed alternative narratives currently available in Indonesia and their effectiveness. He used other extremist groups, the Indonesian government, moderate Muslim initiatives, and victims of terror attacks as a demonstration of how the message of IS could and should be countered. Solahudin was critical of the Indonesian government's efforts at countering extremism. The basis of the Indonesian government's message was to emphasise how the IS narrative was anti-Islamic. In Solahudin's opinion, the approach was not effective in countering the IS message. The government's blanket censorship of extremist websites also harmed the counter-narrative that JN presented to the public. Consequentially, the most popular IS-linked website (shoutussalam.org) in Indonesia reached more people than the Indonesian government's CVE and peacebuilding website (damai.id).

Solahudin recounted the effects that religious grassroots organisations such as Islam Toleran had over radicalisation. This ground-up initiative had the most popular religious website in Indonesia to date, and performed a big role in the creation of an anti-radicalisation message. Solahudin recounted the use

of the narratives from former victims and perpetrators of terrorist attacks to prevent radicalisation in schools. Solahudin described the process as highly emotive and powerful in preventing radicalisation.

Solahudin concluded by stressing the need for a credible alternative to the IS message, and not summarily dismiss the IS narrative as anti-Islamic. He urged patience in dealing with IS, and the need for dedicated people to lead the creation of counter-narratives.

Shifting from Theology to Political Economy
Farish Noor
Associate Professor, RSIS

Farish Noor

Farish Noor evinced scepticism as to conventional narratives presented by experts in anti-terrorism, and questioned if there was a misdiagnosis of religion as the root cause of extremism and consequently, if religion was the solution. Noor noted that debates in Islamic thought were not a new phenomenon in Indonesia. He commented that all sects within a religion send out messages against each other. The differences in narrative should not be seen as confined within a pro-IS or anti-IS narrative. Noor further noted that states that viewed religions as monolithic entities were in danger of oversimplifying the threat posed by extremists.

Noor theorised that the IS phenomenon was from the outset about political rather than religious participation. For Noor, scholars should use the whole array of humanities and social science tools to understand why individuals join violent movements. He suggested that violent extremists should be examined with the same perspective used in the sociology of warfare or criminology; where an individual's actions could be viewed within the context of rationality. Noor opined that these tools of the social sciences were abandoned whenever radicalism with the end-goal of political change was invoked. Historical precedents highlighted by Noor showed that when radicalism sought to overthrow the state system, such as the Marxists and Jacobins, the radicals were expectedly persecuted. Based on this conceptualisation of radicalism, Noor argued that religious explanations were over-privileged and dominated the discourse on IS.

Noor commented that radicals were essentially leading the same lives as common men, and operated within the current state system. While ostensibly confronting structures of governance, radicals were in fact confined to the very system they sought to overthrow. To Noor, IS was a prime example of "state capture", in which the group took over the roles once played by the states of Iraq and Syria. He also highlighted the irony of IS affiliates forming units based on current regional borders. The aim of some Southeast Asian militants to create an ASEAN province of the caliphate, conformed to the modern state system, highlighted the dissonance between the universalist aims of IS ideology on the one hand and the parochial orientation of some violent extremists

Noor also touched upon the role of violence in the media in desensitising individuals to IS atrocities. Noor suggested that it would be a radical step to show images of non-violence in creating an alternative narrative to IS. Violence, Noor said, was the phenomenon of violent extremist language. The motivations of extremists could be understood better by deconstructing this narrative and breaking down the semiotics of violence, such as violent images shown on television.

In this vein, Noor said that counter-narratives could not be seen solely as a religious problem, but as a complex problem that could encompass various fields of study within the humanities, such as gender studies and sociology. As an example, Noor shared an anecdote of how a girl who "escaped" to Syria from the UK could be seen as breaking out from a traditional arranged marriage. In that perspective, the girl's flight to Syria was less an act of religious-inspired radicalisation than the act of a rational individual in determining her own marital future. Noor stressed that these alternative

perspectives were few and far between, as what prevailed at this time was a vacuum of analysis and the securitisation of issues covered by radicalisation studies.

In conclusion, Noor encouraged the use of broader social science methods to study radicalisation, and understand the individual motivations of extremists. He cited advances made in the study of criminology and political economy through the use of humanities and social sciences, and suggested that such an approach would be beneficial to studying counterterrorism.

Waging War on the Virtual Battlefield: Online Narrative Campaigns to Counter Violent Extremist Influence

Anne Aly

Associate Professor, and Director, Countering Online Violent Extremism Research Program, Curtin University [Australia]

Anne Aly

Anne Aly suggested that technology had changed the way people see the world, and that online narratives matter in today's world. Recounting a conversation with American generals, Aly said the generals understood the goals of individuals who joined the IS and what IS as a group sought to accomplish. However, the same generals found it inexplicable that individuals were taken by the IS narrative. Aly said the reach of online media also contributed to the spread of the IS narrative. She said the current strategy behind the creation of online counter-narratives failed to reach its audience. Aly criticised the lack of an alternate narrative to challenge the IS, pointing out that the messaging only focuses on the negative aspects of IS and not of the positive aspects of living in a modern, secular state.

Aly shed light on her ongoing work: the Counter Narratives to Interrupt Online Radicalisation (CNOIR) Project. She explained that she was collaborating with scholars from the UK to develop datasets of online counter-narratives and responses. Using qualitative methods, these datasets will be analysed to produce three main outcomes: (1) identifying indicators of vulnerabilities for online radicalisation; (2) setting guidelines for developing effective online counter messaging; and (3) forming a metric to evaluate the effectiveness of online counter narrative engagement. To do this, Aly conceptualised counter-narratives as cultural and psychological noise to disrupt the engagement with radicalising influences online. Aly shared how the different levels of analysis used in the study look at the terminology, narrative and the persuasive elements, as well the credibility of previous campaigns. Fundamentally, Aly's research dealt with how to engage people in a discussion to move them away from radicalising narratives online.

Aly outlined some of the results and the guidelines developed by CNOIR, and how models were operationalised to reflect the different phases of online radicalisation. Based on her interviews with former radicals, Aly said that these individuals started first with a "seeker" phase, and were driven by curiosity. These individuals then moved on into a "lurker" phase, where these individuals were not only driven by the search for information, but also to interact online. The next step was what Aly terms the "inquirer" phase, where these individuals personalised the group identification he or she was aligned with, and begin engaging with radicalisation material online. The fourth stage was the "advocate" phase, when individuals go online in support of various radical causes, and often would be confrontational in their discourse. The final stage would be the "activator" phase, when an individual deems himself/herself operative and committed to action.

Aly shared that in the course of research, four subjects were found to be "activators" and were referred to law enforcement. Aly clarified that her approach was layered and multi-dimensional, and not linear. She warned against using only superficial indicators, like when an individual posts photos of black flags online, to judge if a person was radicalised. Aly favoured a multi-faceted approach which covered emotive and behavioural aspects.

In conclusion, Aly stated that it was impossible to de-radicalise individuals online, but online counter-narratives are effective in "sowing seeds of doubts" in individuals. She also noted that individuals in general tended to disengage when there was no effective debate on the issue and when they were told their views were wrong. Aly also said that engagement with radicalisation narratives (ERN) online were driven by personal identity and social interaction needs. In line with the findings, individuals were more likely to be responsive to alternative narratives and engagement attempts that are centred on personal identity as opposed to countering facts or ideological beliefs. Aly suggested leaving radical material online and letting non-coerced discussion disprove the messages online, rather than relying on contrived messages made by governments. Aly also suggested that collective messaging such as the use of discussion boards or social media campaigns was more effective for targeting individuals and groups with early warning signs of ERN. One-to-one engagement online could be more effective for targeting individuals in exhibiting stronger beliefs to radicalisation narratives.

Syndicate Group Discussions

During the syndicate discussions, a participant brought up the pitfalls of the war on terror narrative, specifically how it can backfire and further radicalise the youth. In response, a speaker stressed the importance of maintaining the control on the narrative; through grassroots initiatives such as mentoring, youth engagement, and social media programmes. It was further reiterated that youth involvement and peer-to-peer influence were crucial factors in the development and control of counter-narratives.

Follow-up questions considered which forms of media would be most suited for counter-campaigns. A speaker pointed out that there was a wide spectrum of media that can be used such as cartoons/animation, websites, and social media accounts. However, speakers cautioned that some media may not resonate with the target audience. It was unfortunate that the IS appeared to have a more coherent understanding of how to target their potential recruits, compared to the lumbering campaigns of CVE stakeholders.

Content-wise, participants asked what non-religious counter-narratives could be utilised by CVE policymakers and practitioners. A speaker enumerated true love, family, and victims' experience as impactful subjects for counter-narratives. These concepts were arguably more accessible and understandable, to help highlight the costs of terrorism. A speaker cautioned how religious approaches to countering violent extremism may be overrated, especially when applied without proper context. For instance, nationalist violent extremist groups could be best countered by a more tempered nationalism narrative. It was suggested by a speaker that applying social sciences and other faculties to understand the rationale for behaviours could lead to new approaches in countering violent extremism.

Related to this issue of non-religious counter-narratives were inquiries on how governments should substantively engage with youths. Sports programmes were posited as a potential vector of constructive engagement. Engaging vulnerable populations through tangential measures such as games can provide access to individuals reluctant to participate in intervention programs. Engaging individuals using non-punitive methods to determine best interventions should also be a continual process.

Among all the syndicates, there was consensus that for all CVE programmes, the critical requirement was to ensure the coherence of both offline and online narratives.

PANEL 4:

Policy Recommendations

Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) in Australia: Practical Implications for Policy from a Law Enforcement Perspective

Jenny Cartwright

Coordinator—Diversion, Counter Terrorism, Australian Federal Police

Jenny Cartwright

Jenny Cartwright focused her presentation on policies and practices designed to identify and provide early intervention assistance for persons at risk of becoming radicalised, in particular those who are at the periphery of law enforcement investigations. The presentation began with an overview of measures that had been put in place for prevention and early intervention as part of Australia's overarching terrorism and counter-radicalisation approaches. This was followed by issues encountered during the implementation of policies, and concluded with a number of challenges faced in balancing punitive and non-punitive measures.

A primary concern in strengthening Australia's national security was the reduction of the risk of home-grown terrorism. In this regard, recent attention had shifted towards the early identification of persons at risk of radicalisation with the necessary preventative measures to stop this process and to channel such persons away from these pathways. Broadly, steps had been put in place for the referral of individuals who may be on the periphery of official investigations but not necessarily the target of specific counterterrorism investigations. Such persons may be exhibiting behaviours which concern law enforcement officials, but which may not warrant punitive measures. These scenarios present authorities with the opportunity of taking steps to intervene and prevent further radicalisation.

Under the existing intervention framework, the Attorney-General's Department had developed a set of tools with two main purposes. The first was the identification of where such persons may be in terms of their levels of radicalisation. The second was identifying the behavioural factors that had to be addressed. Such needs range from religious mentoring to addressing and providing assistance with schooling, employment or housing needs. Overall, these assessments sought to identify factors in the lives of such individuals which are contributing to their feelings of disengagement and alienation with society, as well as those that have put them on the pathway towards radicalisation. Cartwright emphasised the fact that different lenses were used to examine each individual's radicalised pathway, not just from a religious point of view.

Cartwright highlighted a number of practical lessons learnt. An important consideration would be whether to proceed with intervention measures when there was an active ongoing investigation. Cases of this nature were of great public interest and attracted a lot of media attention. As such, the risks and justifications for taking intervention measures must be carefully weighed against the possibility of taking steps to prosecute the persons involved. Another area of contention was the sharing of information, especially classified information with other government departments, as well as relevant institutions such as schools.

In conclusion, Cartwright noted that the current threat of terrorism and violent extremism needed to be countered across the entire spectrum, by means of punitive as well as non-punitive measures. In particular, law enforcement officials must come to the realisation that they would not be able to manage such threats solely through making arrests and prosecuting all cases. Measures for early intervention, in diverting individuals from the pathway of becoming radicalised, are a necessary component in strengthening national security.

Countering the Allure of the Islamic State in the Indian Subcontinent: Challenges and Opportunities

Animesh Roul
Executive Director—Research, Society for the Study of Peace and Conflict [India]

Animesh Roul

In his presentation, **Animesh Roul** provided an overview of the current situation in South Asia. His presentation focused on India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and the Maldives, in terms of outreach activities carried out by IS in these countries. This was followed by a broad overview of a number of government initiatives to counter such threats. The presentation concluded with a discussion of the issues and challenges faced by these countries in dealing with the threat of terrorism and violent extremism. According to Roul, India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and the Maldives were witnessing the increasing impact and influence of IS. A worrying trend had been attempts by IS to develop connections with existing militant extremist groups already operating within the region.

The Indian government had recently implemented counter-radicalisation initiatives. This was prompted by the trends which had seen a number of localised extremist groups pledging loyalty to IS-led jihad in Syria and Iraq, as well as the arrest and detention of some 17 individuals attempting to leave for Syria. Six other Indians had already died in the conflict there. Indian counter-radicalisation efforts had so far included attempts to conduct de-radicalisation counselling, and to involve family members to turn radicalised individuals from violent extremism. As many of those detained were well-educated youths from different parts of the country, the government placed emphasis on curtailing the spread of IS propaganda online.

While the official estimates suggested that only a small number of Bangladeshi nationals had joined IS, the issue of the involvement of the Bangladesh diaspora in the United Kingdom and the Middle East was of concern. A number of Bangladeshi families from the United Kingdom had travelled to Syria, including a family of 12 in 2015. For the Maldives, the increasing number of nationals that joined IS had been alarming, with official estimates on the number who had left for Syria standing at 200. There had been reports of protests and active social media recruitment occurring, and concerns that a number of Maldives' uninhabited islands may be used as training grounds. For Sri Lanka, there had been evidence of recent active recruitment attempts via a Facebook page ("Seylan Muslims in Shaam"). While there were no reliable estimates on the number of recruits, Roul argued that this development could potentially pose a serious threat to the peace and stability of Sri Lanka.

A major challenge faced by the countries mentioned by Roul had been the lack of a comprehensive counterterrorism model. This gap in policy approach needs to be managed given the complexity of the security landscape in the Indian sub-continent, with various active terrorist organisations such as Al Qaeda running rigorous propaganda and recruitment machineries besides the growing presence of IS. In conclusion, Roul highlighted the need for each country to promote moderate Islamic scholars in providing credible counter-narratives to challenge IS propaganda. Ensuring that all schools, including madrassas schools, were streamlined with the main education system would prevent youths from being radicalised. Last but not least, measures to build trust with disenchanted Muslim communities should be prioritised by all the governments concerned.

Grassroots Perspectives in Countering Violent Extremism

Kathline Tolosa
Executive Director, Security Reform Initiative (SRI)
[Philippines]

Kathline Tolosa

Kathline Tolosa, Executive Director of SRI, presented on counterterrorism measures from the perspective of grassroots initiatives in the Philippines. She highlighted efforts to mainstream a conflict-sensitive and peace promoting approach designed to encourage communities to engage with security issues. She began with an introduction to the current security landscape in the Philippines, followed by details about several measures in place to promote community responses and strengthen cohesion. The presentation concluded with a number of challenges that grassroots efforts face to achieve cohesion between top-down government policies and bottom-up community initiatives.

Currently, the security landscape in the Philippines has become increasingly uncertain, with spikes in numbers of extra-judicial killings, and kidnap-for-ransom activities. There is a constant interplay between criminal elements, terrorism and violent extremist incidents. Responses to such security issues cannot be easily compartmentalised into neat packages of peace-building, development or conflict resolution but need to contain elements of all three initiatives when dealing with the challenges involved.

In light of this dynamic environment, the promotion of community cohesion and resilience has taken on a conflict-sensitive and peace-promoting aspect. This has come about through an understanding of the interactions between the local context, the roots and drivers of conflict, and the proposed intervention strategies. An important first step is to understand the context of the conflicts. This is necessary given that no developmental or peacebuilding work that could be viewed as neutral by all parties and to ensure that responses will not further exacerbate existing grievances.

The second step involves the identification of the most appropriate intervention measures. In this regard, developing a community's resilience depends on an understanding of what works in the local context. This could enable new levels of partnership to be formed, taking stock of local practices that work and identifying local champions for such causes. For example, the promotion of community policing initiatives would not only strengthen the resilience of the community, but would also provide improving relations between the police and people at the ground level.

In conclusion, Tolosa highlighted the need to ensure synergy of top-down and bottom-up (community) approaches. A related challenge Tolosa pointed out was finding which measures actually work—and those that do not. Given the difficulties in compartmentalising threats and responses, measuring the success of initiatives was no easy task. More than the sum of its parts, the responses in place need to ensure that the local context is respected, and that interventions take into account development and peace building needs, not just focus on counter-radicalisation and violent extremism.

North American Muslim Converts in the Context of Security and Society

Scott Flower
Fellow, University of Melbourne [Australia]

Scott Flower

Scott Flower centred his presentation on the increasing involvement of Muslim converts in terrorist activities. Through information and evidence from two ongoing research projects, the presentation outlined reasons for this trend, factors which had contributed to it, and concluded with a number of features that may be important in countering narratives that led to radicalisation of converts.

While there had been no consistent studies which compiled the number of converts to Islam, there had been a notable trend of the involvement of converts in terrorism and violent extremism incidents. For example, in the United Kingdom, 60 000 to 100 000 of the Muslim population (approximately 2 percent) are converts. However, when plots, plans and actual terrorist attacks were examined, more than 31 percent of those involved were converts to Islam. In the case of Canada, two recent so-called lone wolf terrorist attacks had been carried out by converts. Such trends pose obvious implications for law enforcement officials, providing a rough indication of certain types of profiles which may be more prone to violent extremism.

A number of features have emerged from such profiles. First, it has been noted that converts tend to view themselves as outsiders of the faith in which they have entered; hence, there is a tendency for them to try harder at proving their dedication and loyalty to their new faith. Further, there is an issue of new converts not being trusted, or regarded as spies, even by the religious communities that they had chosen to join. In such situations, converts are perceived, not with hostility, but with great suspicion, driving them to seek out other channels of support which they may lack.

Another interesting feature, which has come to light through research in Canada, is the fact that the bulk of converts interviewed entered their new faith from the ages of 17 to 25. There are also more women converting than men; the women had been found to be converting on their own accord, and not because of marriages. Further, the post-9/11 period has seen a shift towards more religious conservatism, not just within the Islamic faith but also other religions such as Christianity, with a more conservative interpretation of theology and practice.

In terms of converts who have become radicalised, a pattern of mixed ethnicity has been detected, with parents from different ethnic groups. The online dimension is another important factor to consider, given that many converts were not readily accepted within the main Muslim communities and were therefore more likely to be pushed towards seeking support online. An understanding of the dynamics of online communities is therefore necessary for understanding the drivers and motivations towards the radicalisation of converts.

In conclusion, Flower noted the need for specific programmes designed to counter the specific narratives that directly appeal to and radicalise persons with a profile of being a convert. This would enable the design of more comprehensive policy responses and testing the viability of particular policy interventions.

Syndicate Group Discussions

In the syndicate groups, observations were made over an apparent increase of religiosity after the 9/11 attacks. A speaker opined that this general trend was observed among Islamic converts. Multiple factors prompted conversions and should not be considered as a direct result of fundamentalism. For instance, the impact of global media on 9/11 brought the issue of religion to the fore in the minds of some people. Consequently, this newfound religiosity sent some individuals into a

quest to find answers. For many of the converts, the contradiction between what they see in the media and what they see in real life while interacting with Muslims made them believe that Islam is the true path to righteousness.

In other countries, the role of religion in triggering extremism was less pronounced. It was raised in the discussions that religion was less important as a factor behind extremism in the southern Philippines. A speaker highlighted how motivations for extremist behaviour did not really rest mainly on religion but more on historical injustices, legitimate grievances, and absence of basic services and governance. These factors, rather than religious ideology, made people vulnerable to radicalisation.

Questions were asked about the most effective method to manage radicalisation in the community in the Philippines. The speaker acknowledged that managing radicalisation was indispensable for fostering peace and development, especially in conflict-affected areas in the southern Philippines. The local community would have to take ownership and responsibility over managing the potential spread of radicalisation, by first encouraging families to be more involved in the de-radicalisation programmes. Authorities would also be supporting these families financially and socially to further encourage a family member's rehabilitation.

Other participants asked about the monitoring of lone wolves by governments. Specifically, there was discussion on the initiatives of the Australian government. A speaker described how people who were deemed dangerous by the authorities became the focus of investigations, as long as there was credible evidence. Without evidence, the relevant agencies try to engage with suspicious individuals from an intervention perspective, rather a law enforcement perspective.

Areas with greater levels of violence from extremist groups were also tackled in the syndicates. There were several questions on the status of IS affiliates in the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. A speaker explained that there was an ongoing government offensive against the Taliban in the tribal areas of Pakistan. Across the border, the new Afghan government was trying to strike a peace deal with the Taliban, with the latter launching show-of-force attacks in a bid to extract more favourable terms. It was stressed by a speaker that reports about disgruntled members of the Taliban having joined IS should not be interpreted simply as a sign of the weakening support enjoyed by Al Qaeda. Some Taliban commanders who pledged allegiance to IS remained indifferent to AQ presence in their areas.

There was general agreement that certain types of groups would have more effective initiatives to prevent radicalisation. For example, Islamic societies in schools and campuses can be strengthened to reach out to Muslims students. This can encourage social inclusion, with any individual's peculiar behaviours being addressed immediately. Another group would be convert-care or convert support groups specialised enough to address any concerns a new convert to the religion may have.

Closing Panel/Moderated Discussion

Shashi Jayakumar encouraged participants to discuss the major issues raised over the two days of the Workshop and to recap some of the key points made. Jayakumar suggested that statistical tools such as databases would be increasingly required for future research on violent extremism. However, it was vital not to ignore human input and intuition, as well as inter-disciplinary contributions, which both ask the right questions of the data and facilitate its intelligent extrapolation. A participant spoke of the complexity and labour involved in creating and maintaining a scientifically rigorous database, and said there was no current best practice to act as guidance; collection and collation still proceeds on a trial and error basis.

The issue of extremists withdrawing from open spaces on social media to communicate was also raised, given the increase in popularity of messaging apps using encryption techniques. A participant offered that while the future remained unclear, the open space inhabited by users of social media would probably continue to expand steadily. Regardless of how many people retreated into closed spaces for more extreme discussions, there will remain a valuable pool of data and intelligence from which to collect information and develop understanding.

Jayakumar observed that in many cases, what works and does not work in CVE was largely context specific; for example, religious counselling may have good results in some settings but not in others. In some nations ideology appears to be a strong motivating force for violent extremists while elsewhere social issues such as disenfranchisement and frustration may play a greater role.

Passion and creativity were two important themes raised by one participant, who highlighted small-scale projects that were meeting success because of their proponents' determination and willingness to think outside the box. An extension of these ideas was the importance of approaching the study of violent extremism with an attitude of humility, as connecting with those who had committed acts of violence was essential to understanding motivations. Research into the potential for victims of violence to play a larger role in a restorative justice approach to disengaging extremists was also deemed pertinent.

In 2011, many experts in the field of terrorism considered the so-called "war on terrorism" won. The rise of the IS clearly proved otherwise and demonstrated the importance of taking a longer view of the struggle against violent extremism. Further research was needed into how the IS withstands strategic or tactical setbacks, as well as governance difficulties within its self-declared caliphate.

The perceived glorification of the IS in the media was raised by a participant, who asked one of the speakers about a recent article he had written: an article that might in the eyes of some dramatise the exploits of foreign fighters. The author responded that reporting did not mean exaltation as such although it inevitably meant publicising to some degree. This, he said, was something that he and his colleagues had regularly debated, but argued there was a public interest in the reality of what was happening on the ground.

Jayakumar rounded off the session by thanking the speakers and participants for sharing their knowledge and contributing to fruitful discussions, and also the team from CENS for facilitating the smooth running of the workshop.

WORKSHOP PROGRAMME

Tuesday, 22 September 2015

0830 – 0915hrs **Registration**

0915 – 0930hrs **RSIS Corporate Video & Welcome Remarks** *by* **Shashi Jayakumar** *Senior Fellow and Head, Centre of Excellence for National Security, RSIS*

0930 – 1030hrs **Panel 1: Measuring Success and Failure in Countering Violent Extremism** *Around the world, states and non-state actors actively engage in various initiatives to diminish the appeal and mitigate the effects of violent extremism. This panel will explore current trends in evaluating counter-terrorism efforts.*

Chairperson :
Shashi Jayakumar, *Senior Fellow and Head, Centre of Excellence for National Security, RSIS*

Speakers :
Measuring Success and Failure in Countering Violent Extremism *by* **Gentry White,** *Senior Lecturer, Queensland University of Technology [Australia]*

Lessons Learned from UK Domestic Extremism and Potential Opportunities in Countering Radicalisation *by* **Alex Ttaris,** *Detective Inspector, Metropolitan, Police All Source Hub [United Kingdom]*

Measuring the Effectiveness of CVE: Multi Level Measurement Levels and Measurement Challenges ***SMajeed Khader****, Director, Home Team Behavioural Sciences Centre, Ministry of Home Affairs*

1030 – 1050hrs **Tea Break**

1050 – 1200hrs **Panel 1 Syndicate Discussions**

Syndicate 1
Venue :
Vanda 4, Level 6

Syndicate 2
Venue :
Vanda 5, Level 6

Syndicate 3
Venue :
Vanda 6, Level 6

1200 – 1330hrs **Lunch**
Venue :
Pool Garden, Level 5

1330 – 1450hrs **Panel 2: Assessing Foreign Fighter Involvement in Terrorist Campaigns** *The threat posed by returning foreign fighters from conflict zones emerged with the increased violence in the Syria-Iraq frontier controlled by Islamic State (IS). This panel will explore the state of foreign fighter involvement to draw relevant lessons for both present and future scenarios. This panel will examine the changing motivations, courses of action, and post-conflict status (i.e. disengagement) of foreign fighters.*

Chairperson :
Norman Vasu, *Senior Fellow and Deputy Head, Centre of Excellence for National Security, RSIS*

Speakers :
Foreign Fighters in ISIS Propaganda *by* **Mina Al-Lami,** *Jihadist Media Analyst, BBC Monitoring [United Kingdom]*

Indonesian Fighters in Syria *by* **Navhat Nuraniyah,** *Associate Research Fellow, Centre of Excellence for National Security, RSIS*

Europe's Foreign Fighters in Syria: Who They Are, Why They Go, What They Do, and What Threat Will They Pose on Their Return? *by* **Shiraz Maher,** *Senior Fellow and Head of Research, International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation, King's College London [United Kingdom]*

Wednesday, 23 September 2015

0830 – 0845hrs **Registration**

0845 – 0945hrs **Panel 3: Counter-narratives : A Critical Examination** *Religious counter-narratives often take the spotlight in initiatives to displace and defeat the ideological appeal of extremists. This panel will be an examination of the effectiveness of religious discourse against extremism and will explore potential non-religious (e.g. secular, socio-economic) counter-narratives.*

Chairperson :
Caitríona H. Heinl, *Research Fellow, Centre of Excellence for National Security, RSIS*

Speakers :
Counter-narratives : A Critical Examination *by* **Solahudin,** *Independent Researcher and Journalist, Indonesia Strategic Policy Institute*

Shifting from Theology to Political Economy *by* **Farish Noor,** *Associate Professor, RSIS*

Waging War on the Virtual Battlefield: Online Narrative Campaigns to Counter Violent Extremist Influence *by* **Anne Aly**, *Associate Professor and Director, Countering Online Violent Extremism Research Program, Curtin University [Australia]*

0945 – 1000hrs **Tea Break**

1000 – 1115hrs **Panel 3 Syndicate Discussions**

Syndicate 1
Venue :
Vanda 4, Level 6

Syndicate 2
Venue :
Vanda 5, Level 6

Syndicate 3
Venue :
Vanda 6, Level 6

1115 – 1200hrs **Panel 4: Policy Recommendations (I)** *This panel will explore potential future evolutions in the gaps in counter-terrorism policy and CVE. There will be focus on bottom-up approaches to CVE, to complement more top-down, state-led approaches. This panel will comprise of speakers who will share insights on the role played by community actors, international civil society, and grassroots organisations in countering extremism.*

Chairperson :
Damien D. Cheong, *Coordinator, Homeland Defence Programme and Research Fellow, Centre of Excellence for National Security, RSIS*

Speakers :
Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) in Australia: Practical Implications for Policy From a Law Enforcement Perspective *by* **Jenny Cartwright,** *Coordinator – Diversion, Counter Terrorism, Australian Federal Police*

The Countering the Allure of the Islamic State in the Indian Subcontinent: Challenges and

Opportunities *by* **Animesh Roul,** *Executive Director – Research, Society for the Study of Peace and Conflict [India]*

1200 – 1330hrs **Lunch**

Venue :
Pool Garden, Level 5

1330 – 1410hrs **Panel 4: Policy Recommendations (II)**

Chairperson :
Damien D. Cheong, *Coordinator, Homeland Defence Programme and Research Fellow, Centre of Excellence for National Security, RSIS*

Speakers :
Grassroots Perspective in Countering Violent Extremism *by* **Kathline Tolosa,** *Executive Director, Security Reform Initiative [Philippines]*

North American Muslim Converts in the Context of Security and Society *by* **Scott Flower,** *Fellow, University of Melbourne [Australia]*

1410 – 1600hrs **Panel 4: Policy Recommendations (II) Syndicate Discussions**

Syndicate 1
Venue :
Vanda 4, Level 6

Syndicate 2
Venue :
Vanda 5, Level 6

Syndicate 3
Venue :
Vanda 6, Level 6

Syndicate 4
Venue :
Vanda 7, Level 6

1600 – 1620hrs **Tea Break**

1620 – 1645hrs **Closing Panel / Moderate Discussion**
For this session, all participants and speakers will be able to discuss as a group some of the key issues and takeaways uncovered during the course of the Workshop

1645hrs **End of Workshop**

1800 – 2030hrs **Closing Dinner (by invitation only)**

Venue :
AquaMarine, Level 4

LIST OF SPEAKERS AND CHAIRPERSONS

SPEAKERS

Mina Al-Lami
Media Analyst
BBC Monitoring [United Kingdom]

Anne Aly
Associate Professor, and Director, Countering Online Violent Extremism Research Program
Curtin University [Australia]

Jenny Cartwright
Coordinator—Diversion, Counter Terrorism
Australian Federal Police

Scott Flower
Fellow
University of Melbourne [Australia]

Majeed Khader
Director
Home Team Behavioural Sciences Centre, Ministry of Home Affairs

Shiraz Maher
Senior Fellow and Head of Research, ICSR
King's College London [United Kingdom]

Farish Noor
Associate Professor
S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS)

Navhat Nuraniyah
Associate Research Fellow
Centre of Excellence for National Security (CENS)
S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS)

Animesh Roul
Executive Director—Research
Society for the Study of Peace and Conflict [India]

Thomas Samuel
Director, Research and Publication
Southeast Asia Regional Cenfre for Counter-Terrorism (SEARCCT) [Malaysia]

Solahudin
Independent researcher and Journalist
Indonesia Strategic Policy Institute

Kathline Tolosa
Executive Director
Security Reform Initiative (SRI) [Philippines]

Alex Ttaris
Detective Inspector
Metropolitan Police All Source Hub [United Kingdom]

Gentry White
Senior Lecturer
Queensland University of Technology [Australia]

CHAIRPERSONS

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Caitríona H. Heinl
Research Fellow
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Shashi Jayakumar
Senior Fellow and Deputy Head
Centre of Excellence for National Security (CENS)
S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS)

Norman Vasu
Senior Fellow and Deputy Head
Centre of Excellence for National Security (CENS)
S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS)

ABOUT CENS

The **Centre of Excellence for National Security (CENS)** is a research unit of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS) at the Nanyang Technological University, Singapore.

Established on 1 April 2006, CENS raison d'être is to raise the intellectual capital invested in strategising national security. To do so, CENS is devoted to rigorous policy-relevant analysis across a range of national security issues.

CENS is multinational in composition, comprising both Singaporeans and foreign analysts who are specialists in various aspects of national and homeland security affairs. Besides fulltime analysts, CENS further boosts its research capacity and keeps abreast of cutting edge global trends in national security research by maintaining and encouraging a steady stream of Visiting Fellows.

ABOUT RSIS

The **S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS)** is a professional graduate school of international affairs at the Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. RSIS' mission is to develop a community of scholars and policy analysts at the forefront of security studies and international affairs. Its core functions are research, graduate education and networking. It produces cutting-edge research on Asia Pacific Security, Multilateralism and Regionalism, Conflict Studies, Non-Traditional Security, International Political Economy, and Country and Region Studies. RSIS' activities are aimed at assisting policymakers to develop comprehensive approaches to strategic thinking on issues related to security and stability in the Asia Pacific.

For more information about RSIS, please visit www.rsis.edu.sg.

ABOUT NSCS

The **National Security Coordination Secretariat (NSCS)** was set up in the Prime Minister's Office in July 2004 to facilitate national security policy coordination from a Whole-Of-Government perspective. NSCS reports to the Prime Minister through the Coordinating Minister for National Security (CMNS). The current CMNS is Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Home Affairs Mr Teo Chee Hean.

NSCS is headed by Permanent Secretary (National Security and Intelligence Coordination). The current PS (NSIC) is Mr Benny Lim, who is concurrently Permanent Secretary (National Development) and Permanent Secretary (Prime Minister's Office).

NSCS comprises two centres: the National Security Coordination Centre (NSCC) and the National Security Research Centre (NSRC). Each centre is headed by a Senior Director.

The agency performs three vital roles in Singapore's national security: national security planning, policy coordination, and anticipation of strategic threats. It also organises and manages national security programmes, one example being the Asia-Pacific Programme for Senior National Security Officers, and funds experimental, research or start-up projects that contribute to our national security.

For more information about NSCS, visit http://www.nscs.gov.sg/

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