



**SPECIAL
ISSUE**

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Insights on Community Engagement

Muhammad Haniff Hassan and Zulkifli Mohamed Sultan

This article provides insights from the International Conference on Community Engagement (ICCE) held in Singapore on 21-22 September 2011. The ICCE is Singapore's signature event to mark the 10th anniversary of the 11 September 2001 attacks. The full report on the conference will be released in December 2011.



Singapore Deputy Prime Minister, Teo Chee Hean, who gave the opening remarks at the ICCE 2011 is given a token of appreciation by RSIS Dean Barry Desker. (Inset) 250 delegates from more than a dozen countries participated in this landmark conference. Photo Credits: [ICPVTR](#)

The International Conference on Community Engagement (ICCE) was organized by the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research (ICPVTR), a specialist centre of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies at the Nanyang Technological University in Singapore. The conference was held in Singapore on the 21st and 22nd of September

2011 and was attended by more than 200 delegates from all over the world with more than 20 internationally renowned speakers on the issue of community engagement.

The conference is meant to be a platform to discuss the key points of effective community engagement. The ICCE has the following objectives: (1) Draw from global best practices on community en-

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agement practices to create a working model, (2) Provide a better understanding of the processes and the necessity for community engagement, (3) Create guidelines that will assist governments to put in place community engagement efforts in their home countries, (4) Provide a crucial network for governments and institutions that are presently involved in the process of community engagement.

Insights

Countering ideological radicalism has been the main focus of global counterterrorism efforts and has yielded some success in recent years. Leaders need to create more initiatives that will mobilize communities against extremism and forge national resilience. Community engagement is an important part of counter-extremism strategy. There is a need for more platforms to heighten the awareness on community engagement initiatives, exchange views and increase knowledge and understanding to enhance the effectiveness of such initiatives.

Based on views from the ICCE, there are two levels of community engagement. The first level is engagement on issues related to extremism and terrorism with the understanding that it should involve three important parties- the government, the intelligentsia/academia, and the community. The government, as the party primarily responsible for national security, plays an important role in promoting understanding and awareness of the problem through briefings and public education. The academic community's role is to research on the problem, help to educate the public and offer sound policy recommendations to the government. The community needs to be informed of the issues and be consulted for any engagement program to be successful.

The second level is to get the community involved as an important partner to counter extremism and terrorism at all levels. To achieve this, diverse and multi-faceted approaches are required to have an in-depth understanding of the different segments and target groups in a community and have a calibrated community engagement program. The Singapore cluster

model, which involves the grassroots, education institutions, businesses and other sectors, is an example of effective community engagement. In Singapore, community engagement is geared more towards community-based initiatives and the role of the government is more on facilitation and support. To put it directly, community engagement initiatives should be "community-focused" and not "community-targeted."

There are social and ideological aspects of community engagement in the context of countering extremist beliefs. The social aspect requires the building of trust between communities as that will contribute to national resilience. On the ideological aspect, the radical and extremist beliefs, which promote division and hostility between Muslims and non-Muslims, needs to be addressed. It should be noted that radical/extremist ideology thrives when there is antagonism and mistrust between Muslims and non-Muslims.

Community engagement initiatives can be carried out in two domains- the real world and the virtual world or the Internet. While the value of direct and face-to-face interactions cannot be discounted, the importance of the virtual world for community engagement is now widely recognized. The use of virtual platforms to counter radical/extremist ideologies is gaining ground. An example would be the Al-Sakinah program of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The program involves a group of Islamic scholars who use the Internet to spread moderate Islamic ideology and refute suspicious matters offered by extremists who adopt deviant ideologies. The success of this program provides insight on the importance of active engagement with the radicals who use online platforms.

Community engagement programs to counter extremist ideology should be focused on three groups. First, engagement programs should reach out to the Muslim community. Engagement on the topic of radicalization and religious extremism in the community is an essential part of conveying Islam with utmost clarity and preserving the rights of Muslim and their organizations. They must be empowered with knowledge that will im-

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munize them from any extremists' ideologies. Community engagement will also equip them with skills and tools to enable them to play part against extremist ideology. Second are the non-violent extremists that are exposed to violence and the violent ones that are out there but who remain unknown. It is equally important to look at those who did not join radical movements but still retain extremist beliefs. We need to persuade and bring them back to the right path. Third are the non-Muslims. It is important for community engagement programs to ensure that non-Muslims do not have a wrong understanding and perception of Islam. Mainstream non-Muslims must also be called upon to speak up against extremists and radicals to prevent them from jeopardizing relations amongst all community members.

Conclusion

It is important for communities, whether they are public or private, to work together and create a synergy that will address extremism in the long run. Terrorism may occur in the most cohesive society, but extremist messages are less likely to gain support in this environment. Similarly, a society in which extremism is likely to be reduced is where people have the confidence to build relationships with each other and enhance social cohesion.

Effective community engagement requires a commitment to develop and mobilize organizational resources necessary to support such initiatives. Among other considerations, hard and strenuous work on this issue should be taken into account the diversity that exists in community involvement. Regardless, it is hoped that the observations and insights based on practicality will be tested, refined and that would eventually lead to a better understanding of how one should prepare for the optimal involvement of community engagement in combating radical and extremist ideologies.

GLOBAL PATHFINDER II

The ICPVTR Terrorism Database – Global Pathfinder - is a one-stop repository for information on the current and emerging terrorist threat. The database focuses on terrorism and political violence in the Asia-Pacific region – comprising of Southeast Asia, North Asia, South Asia, Central Asia and Oceania.

Global Pathfinder is an integrated database containing comprehensive profiles of terrorist groups, key terrorist personalities, terrorist and counterterrorist incidents as well as terrorist training camps . It also contains specific details and analyses of significant terrorist attacks in the form of terrorist attack profiles.

In addition to providing the latest information on terrorist attacks and pronouncements, Global Pathfinder also includes over a hundred terrorist training manuals, counterterrorism legislations and conventions, analytical papers on terrorist ideologies, commentaries on terrorist trends and patterns, transcripts of landmark cases, interviews with terrorists as well as photographs from different conflict zones across the world. Further, Global Pathfinder also has a huge collection of jihadi websites, the contents of which are routinely translated and analyzed by our analysts. This analysis helps develop an understanding of the developments in the ideological spectrum and trajectory of the terrorist threat, in both in tactical as well as strategic space.

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Community Fights Terrorism

Professor Rohan Gunaratna

It is important that governments work with the community to raise awareness on the threat of terrorism and radicalization. Robust community engagement efforts help build an environment where extremist ideologies are less likely to thrive and makes for a more resilient society.

With the spread of extremist ideology and terrorist methodology through the internet and other platforms of communication, community engagement and terrorist rehabilitation have emerged as vital pillars in counterterrorism. It is critical to explore a population-centric counterterrorism strategy as opposed to traditional strategies. Governments must take into consideration the individual, the family, the community, and the society it seeks to win over. By preventing, rather than reacting to extremism, government has much more to gain. Through problem-solving, engaging and building partnerships with the community, law enforcement and intelligence agencies can share the responsibility of fighting terrorism with the public.

The Context

The community is the most critical resource base for a terrorist organization. To prevent terrorists from exploiting the community, governments would need to create platforms and strategies to identify and engage a community's vulnerable segments. Community engagement is a community-centered approach that aims to preserve, protect and advance the collective interests and vision of all stakeholders and partners. A collective vision that benefits communities and government can be achieved by raising awareness on each others' interests and concerns.

The advent of the Internet has exponentially increased the capacity and

capability of terrorist and extremist groups to reach out to vulnerable segments of communities. In the absence of a counter narrative, communities are increasingly vulnerable to terrorist and extremist ideologies. It spreads like a virus which enables terrorists to recruit sympathizers, supporters and members. There are also reports that terrorist groups have infiltrated legal organizations. In the guise of operating under the cover of human rights, humanitarian, social, cultural, political, and community organizations, terrorists are able to reach out to the public and impart their ideology.

It is paramount for a government to work together with community leaders to raise awareness on the threat of terrorism and radicalization. More often than not, governments do not understand the importance of community engagement or they lack the will to invest resources in such initiatives. Government leaders must realize that it is important for them to work with grassroots and local organizations to protect the community from harm which can come from ideological extremism taking root and manifesting into violence, including terrorism. The support of the community is essential to proactively counter extremist ideologies and detect signs of radicalization. It is also necessary to orient the community to proactively detect indicators of a terrorist attack. These indicators are activities pertaining to propaganda, recruitment, funding, pro-

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At the ICCE 2011 (From L-R) Singapore DPM Teo Chee Hean, ICPVTR Head Professor Rohan Gunaratna, and Mr. Pranev Gupte, listening to Mr. Sadruddin Hashwani talk about the devastating attacks on the Islamabad Marriot Hotel in Pakistan. Mr. Hashwani is the Head of the Hashoo Group, which owns the Marriot franchise in Pakistan. As a response to the bombings, the Hashoo Group set up a fund that catered to the needs of the families of the victims.

The response of the Hashoo Group is targeted towards building and reinforcing social resilience. Through community engagement activities such as this, the business sector helps build an environment where extremist ideologies are less likely to thrive. Photo Credit: [ICPVTR](#)

curement, safe house, transport, communication, travel, training, multiple identities, surveillance, reconnaissance, rehearsal, and attack. These indicators are best detected by members of the community and frontline officers. However, threat detection is contingent on orientation to the threat, focused alertness and vigilance. The probability of detecting a terrorist attack is increased if both the government and the community work together on looking out for the pre-attack indicators.

Background

Current community engagement initiatives should go beyond crime and terrorism prevention. Such efforts should move a step further and also promote moderation, toleration, and coexistence. Because terrorism was not considered a significant threat until after the 11 September 2001 attacks in the United States, many countries did not rely on community support as part of counterterrorism efforts. Community engagement programs have slowly emerged in the post 9/11 environment to counter terrorism, especially the threat of home-grown terrorism and self-radicalization. In many countries, community engagement strategies to counter extremism are significantly drawn from police-community

relations, especially those related to mobilizing the community against crime. In the United Kingdom, the Muslim Contact Unit (MCU) at New Scotland Yard was the inspiration for most programs in the West. Singapore's Community Engagement Program (CEP), is widely regarded as influential and a "trend-setter" for other countries to emulate. The New York Police Department (NYPD) has a Community Affairs Division but it was poorly funded and there was little success in engaging the Muslim community.

Countering Extremism and Building Social Resilience

There is a need to explain to both the government and the community why community engagement is central to counter extremism. To raise public awareness, there is a need to explain the impact of terrorism and its support mechanisms. Law enforcement should play a direct role in educating the public and must work directly with the government and other stakeholders. For example, the NYPD and the Internal Security Department (ISD) in Singapore were involved in informing the public about the process of radicalization. These are all integral to building social resilience. Awareness of an

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issue empowers people not to be susceptible to the message espoused by terrorist groups even if the message has ethnic or religious undertones.

Many law enforcement authorities, academics, scholars, including Muslim clerics, are now reaching out to the public to educate them about the ideological threat we are faced with today. They seek to explain the difference between extremist and mainstream ideology as well as draw the line between political and religious ideology and hate-filled extremist narrative. Such initiatives have enabled the general public, especially the vulnerable youth population, to know the difference between deviant and heretical thinking versus mainstream discourse.

Aside from religion, terrorist ideologues also exploit issues on ethnicity so they could harness ethnic sentiments to recruit or raise funds for their cause. In cases where ethno-political ideology was the driver, it is necessary to promote values of moderation, tolerance, and coexistence. Leaders and the elite of ethnic communities should work with others to resolve differences that are likely to emerge from time to time. In the spirit of amicable resolution of disputes and building bridges of friendship through reconciliation, harmony centers can be created and managed at local, metropolitan, provincial and federal level.

It is necessary to make use multiple platforms for public awareness and education programs. This can be achieved with the use of mass media to educate and train media personnel, revamp school curricula and train teachers, deliver talks at workplaces, youth organizations, grassroots organizations and other venues. As vote driven politicians are also susceptible to playing the ethnic and religious card, it is important for them to be aware and account for their actions and statements.

In countries where community engagement efforts have seen success, members of the community themselves have realized the need for them to participate and have an active role. They began to report suspicious activities to the authorities. Anyone who sought

to divide communities and disrupt harmony by disseminating hate-filled propaganda, recruit, raise fund, procure supplies, organize safe houses, or train were brought to the attention of the authorities. Some members of the community went out of their way to organize meetings with members of other communities to build greater understanding. Such meetings reduced and removed suspicion of each other and paved the way for friendships. In the event of a terrorist attack, they did not perceive a community responsible for the attack but blamed a few individuals who were obviously misguided. While ethnic and religious sympathies will remain, those enlightened were driven to protect and take care of the community at risk. The terrorist intent was not merely to attack and destroy a target but trigger ethnic and religious riots. The members of the community are aware of this. If members of the community were not educated, the resultant rioting would gravely hurt the social fabric of any society. The community members who were aware of terrorist attempts to disrupt ethnic and religious harmony prevented such incidents by demonstrating national unity.

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Tackling Online Extremism through Counter Ideology and Community Engagement

Nur Azlin Mohamed Yasin

Online extremism is the terrorists' use of the synthetic world of cyber space to expand on their activities and dissemination of ideology that have already existed offline, in reality. It represents a gold mine of information that should be used to our advantage especially in our online and offline counter ideology and community engagement communication strategy in this protracted battle of the hearts and minds.

Online incitation of hatred and intolerance for different groups in the society, and online promotion of the use of violence and terrorism to complement one's ill sentiments on the "other" group is a cause for concern for governments and the security sector. This is especially so with the presence of terrorist groups behind these cyber activities and the sprouting of online radicalization cases across the globe. Terrorist ideologies are spreading beyond geographical boundaries, allowing a global expansion of the terrorist network. This allows for the perpetuation of the terrorist struggle and continuation of fundraising activities despite the weakening of the terrorist groups' physical capacity caused by the hard approach implemented in several countries. Examples of terrorist groups and individuals who have used or are using the internet to reap these benefits are the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), Al Qaeda (AQ), Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), Hutaree, Aryan Nations and Anders Behring Breivik.

Terrorists' Use of the Internet

The terrorist ideology and propaganda disseminated online are driven by powerful advertising tactics that have the potential to lure supporters and sympathizers both intellectually and emotionally. These tactics include the portrayal of the terrorist ideology and teachings of operational terrorism tactics in several different forms such as in news updates,

commentaries and videos framed to uphold the terrorist agenda. Pictures with short and powerful slogans that speak directly to its audience are also shown. Further, the terrorist communication strategy is complemented with a product naturally endowed with characteristics that call for action – real grievances and international issues that are manipulated to present a state of repression inflicted upon a particular group by another particular group of people deemed as the enemy. Such an ideology presents a threatened group survival that calls for defense and action from members of the perceived repressed group. This is one of the many accumulative factors that have allowed the LTTE to garner funds from Tamils away from Sri Lanka, and the Al Qaeda to gather Muslim recruits from non-conflict areas such as Singapore and the United Kingdom.

Individuals trapped into believing the terrorist ideology have been reported to contribute greatly to terrorist groups. While some sympathizers and supporters as proclaimed by the media, become self-radicalized and victims of online radicalization such as in the cases of American Major Abu Nidal and Singaporean Abdul Basheer Abdul Kader, some stayed away from direct terrorist activities and expanded on the indoctrination efforts instead. The latter activity is equally perilous and is observed in the effective, improved and expanded dis-

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Screenshots from extremist websites showing how the Internet is being used to support terrorist ideologies and for propaganda and fund-raising activities. Image Source: [Terrorism Informatics Team, ICPVTR](#)

semination of the terrorist ideology and propaganda in a myriad of online facilities namely in individual blogs, forums and social networking systems. Such observation suggests an unyielding spread of the venomous terrorist ideology, increasing possibility of future radicalization cases.

Taking Advantage of the Gold Mine of Information

However, despite the threats posed by online extremism, banning or restricting it remains futile and counter-productive. The immense space in the World Wide Web allows blocked online sites to maintain and improve its presence in new URLs. Blocking a website would be used against the authorities and interpreted as evidence of the repression of the particular group that terrorists claim to represent by the authorities. Also, observations show online platform as a reflection of offline reality which provides authorities with a gold mine of information on real ideological and operational developments of terrorist groups and the perception and support of the public for them.

First, content of offline extremist propaganda materials are similar to that posted online. For instance, in Indonesia and Pakistan, content of terrorist propaganda seen online are also effectively spread through sale of terrorist publications and gatherings on the ground. Second, offline terrorist activities such as fund-raising and new operational tactics used are revealed online. Fundraising results and updates of Jemaah Islamiyah are religiously updated in the Bahasa Indonesia Islamist extremist online sites. Developments and tactics of LTTE recruitment and training were posted on Tamil extremist sites. Last but not least, ideological clashes and debates among terrorists and its supporters can be detected online, giving analysts insights on the weaknesses within the terrorist group and its structure. Such debates can especially be found in the Arabic and the Bahasa Indonesia Islamist extremist sites. These observations suggest that rather than eliminating the terrorists' and their supporters' presence from the internet and risk pushing them into operating underground in

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real life setting, the online platform should be used intelligently to our advantage. One way is to gather information for better intelligence and counter ideological efforts. The latter should then be exposed and disseminated through engagement with the society as a whole through both extremist and mainstream online and offline mediums.

Counter Ideology and Community Engagement as Communication Package

Looming threats of online and offline extremism and the dissemination of the terrorist ideology present us with the clear understanding that apart from physical violence and fear, terrorism also poses us with yet another long term challenge – the battle of the hearts and minds. The importance of counter ideology and correcting the terrorists' worldview as tactics to triumph in this battle is undeniable. However, such assiduous efforts would be in vain if it was not communicated and packaged to reach out to the public at large. This signifies the importance of both counter ideology and community engagement as a communication package or strategy in this battle we are in. This strategy like any other good advertising or communication strategy needs to use all communication mediums used by the target audience. In this case, whether or not our target audience is online or offline, mediums from these two entities should be used. Ultimately, individuals who dwell in cyber space exist in reality too.

Counter ideological works which contain updates on addressing both real and perceived grievances have to be exposed in both online sites and offline communication mediums. This is the first step that would create awareness of such perspectives and understanding in the target audience. The next complementary step is community engagement. The aim of this step is to persuade and convince the target audience to reject the terrorist ideology. This requires a two-way communication and interactive way of engaging with the target audience. Online, this could be done through social media such as Facebook and in Islamist extremist sites. An example of such efforts is seen in the works of Saudi Arabia through its program, Al-Sakinah which involves

clerics debating and counseling extremist individuals in forums. Offline, such engagements should include seminars, public discussions, conferences and workshops catered to the different levels of the society, from students to the working adults, employed individuals to ones who are less educated. The purpose of community engagement is to provide an open platform for discussion between the public and experts in this area. Clash of views such as that on international policies should not be frowned upon and should be anticipated. However, one message should be made to resonate in all – that violence and hatred is not a solution and is hypocritical to our quest for peace and harmony. Actions that should precipitate from this message are the proactive role that every individual would have to play in his or her own private and public spheres – the rejection of the terrorist ideology; vigilance in the reporting of suspicious behaviors; the continuous spread of the message of peace.

CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The CTTA: Counter Terrorist Trends and Analysis is now open for contributions from researchers and practitioners in the field of terrorism research, security, and other related fields.

Topical areas of interest are terrorism and political violence, terrorism and organized crime, homeland security, religion and violence, internal conflicts and terrorism, and all other areas of security broadly defined.

Article length could be anywhere between 800 to 1500 words. Submissions must be made before the 15th of every month for editing purposes and for inclusion in the next month's edition.

Electronic copies of the articles (MS Word format) may be submitted to the editors at the following address: isdiane@ntu.edu.sg

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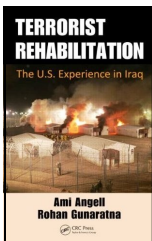
Website: www.pvtr.org

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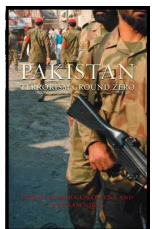
ICPVTR conducts research, training, and outreach programs aimed at reducing the threat of politically motivated violence and at mitigating its effects on the international system. The Centre seeks to integrate academic theory with practical knowledge, which is essential for a complete and comprehensive understanding of threats from politically-motivated groups.

The Centre is staffed by academic specialists, religious scholars, as well as personnel from the law enforcement, military and intelligence agencies, among others. The Centre is culturally and linguistically diverse, comprising of functional and regional analysts as well as Muslim religious scholars from Asia, the Middle East, Africa, Europe and North America.

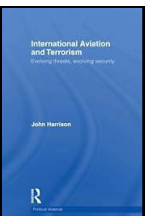
Events and Publications



- Terrorist Rehabilitation: The US Experience in Iraq (CRC Press Taylor and Francis Group, 2011) by Dr. Ami Angell and Dr. Rohan Gunaratna

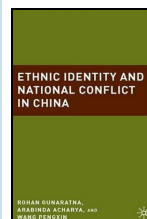


- Pakistan: Terrorism Ground Zero (Reaktion Books, 2011) by Dr. Rohan Gunaratna and Mr. Khuram Iqbal



- International Aviation and Terrorism: Evolving Threats, Evolving Security (Routledge 2009) by Dr. John Harrison

Watch this space for upcoming events at ICPVTR



- Ethnic Identity and National Conflict in China (Palgrave Macmillan 22 June 2010) by Dr. Rohan Gunaratna, Dr. Arabinda Acharya and Mr. Wang Pengxin



- Targeting Terrorist Financing: International Cooperation and New Regimes (Routledge 2009) by Dr. Arabinda Acharya