

# **Towards a General Counterterrorism Strategy**

*Sayed Khatab*

## Abstract

It is well established that radicalism sustains terrorism at its very roots. The impact of terrorism on national and human security has been real enough while the war on terror still rages without a clear end. Almost eight years of the war on terror have passed, without burying this new enemy. This paper seeks to generate new understandings on how to defeat terrorism, by means of counter ideas to radicalism and extremism. It argues that terrorism cannot be successfully challenged purely by security and military means. It outlines the tools and framework of a general counterterrorism strategy. This paper focuses on deradicalisation as a new direction in counterterrorism strategy and as an important subject within the study of violent Islamic radicalism. It outlines the achievement of deradicalisation by shedding light on al-Qa'ida's former Jihadi groups and their ideological 'Revisions', which renounced violence and terrorism and critically analysed al-Qa'ida's ideology and strategy. This paper suggests that terrorism is a transnational phenomenon of ideological dimension and should be challenged with the same weapons and on the same levels, both on a local and global scale.

## **The War on Terror's Military Agenda**

If we were asked to locate where radicalism or terrorism, the answers would certainly be varied, ranging from the Middle East and North Africa to Asia, Europe, Australia and North America. This, at least, confirms that terrorism is global and is not confined to a specific location. Its effect on national and human security has been real enough while the war on terror still rages without a clear end. Almost eight years of the war on terror have passed without burying this new enemy. Al-Qa'ida and similar terrorist networks are still actively at work and dominate the international media, at times, and influence domestic and international relations, at other times. Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri remain free and able enough to produce materials, at the time of their choice, to influence Muslim youths, here and there, and nourish them with lethal ideology. This reality has been substantiated by many conferences and by varying levels of government officials, security intelligence, policy makers, diplomats, scholars and think-tank experts.

The Munich Conference on 'Security Policy', which was held in February 2008, emphasised the threat posed by violent Islamic radicalism in Afghanistan, the Middle East, Europe, Australia and globally, as real and unlikely to go away very soon (Gates, 2008). Likewise, a month later, in March 2008, the Stockholm three day conference on

‘Anti-Terrorism’ concluded that ‘the military success means little if the battle of ideas is being lost’ (Hardy, 2008).

It is true that the terrorist groups may have subsided or declined due to counterterrorism arrangements and the crushing security strikes. However, terrorists always enter a period of hibernation, be it brief or extended depending on the circumstances, and then return stronger with the same ideas and manner of actions, as though nothing had happened.

Currently, extremists are still capable of recruiting and mobilising followers to challenge the authorities through varying forms of symbolic rhetoric and real actions ranging from internet websites and the circulation of inimical leaflets, to the perpetration of acts of extreme violence. Their blueprints have increased, and websites, dedicated to radicalisation and mobilising followers for Jihad against the West and countries deemed anti-Islamic, are always on the rise. In 2007, the “Intelligence Community counted ninety-seven messages from al-Qaeda’s top leadership, an exponential increase over 2005 and 2006” (Allen, 2008: 26). Among these messages are some that discussed al-Qa’ida’s techniques, including the technique of using silenced handguns to kill US and government forces in Iraq (Jamestown Terrorism Focus, 2008).

While there are a great deal of publications about terrorism, the attacks of September 11, along with the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and the tragic events that have followed, they have generated many discussions that have led to Islam being identified with violence. Most publications about Bin Laden and Islamic terrorism, in both Arabic and European languages, frame the problems in terms of personality traits or certain binary opposites such as tradition vs. modernity; resurgence vs. decline; decadence vs. renewal; and stagnation vs. revival. This paradigm has become more complex as elements of secularisation; westernisation and globalisation have joined the play and acted in the same pattern and language of superiority and inferiority (Esposito and Voll, 1996: 14).

This approach itself is problematic and not healthy. It divides nations and civilisations and creates an attitude of them vs. us; our culture vs. their culture; our values vs. their values; believers vs. infidels; our civilisation vs. their civilisation; Islam vs. the West. As a result, there is failure to systematically treat the main issues at hand. The main dynamic

behind these notions swings from resentment to resentment; and from jihad to crusade. In either case, the influence of these notions on domestic and international relations is profoundly critical to security and world peace.

Recent studies have confirmed the growth of organisational structures and tactical radicalism (Paris, 2007). This growth is always coupled with selective religious narrations and radical interpretations. They also indicated that the radical narrations and interpretations of Jihad are gaining ground in many Muslim communities, and falling back even further into patterns of intolerance and violence (Mathew, 2008: 26-7). The waves of radicalism have been characterised by new features that differ from those of the past in terms of not only organisational structure, actions and tactics, but also in religio-political and ideological ideas (Lentini, 2008: 181-2). With these features, the current waves of radicalism profoundly affect not only Australian interests and human security, but also propel the entire human community along unexpected paths (Bakier, 2006: 1).

The jihadist terrorism remains a threat to Australia. In 2007, on the fifth anniversary of the bombings in Bali, Australia's Federal Police Commissioner, Mick Keelty, emphasised terrorism as a real threat to Australian interests and security. While the work that Australia has done on the domestic counterterrorism front is significant, Keelty argues that 'the threat to our country remains real' (Keelty, 2007). Evidence drawn from 2007's Australian and European think-tank publications suggested 'Muslim radicalisation' as a 'credible threat to Australian security' (Henderson, 2007: 4-5; Vincent, 2005). Further evidences from the *Terrorism Monitor* about 'al-Qa'ida in Australia' suggested that 'the terror network is determined to make good on these threats, and several plots to attack Australia at home have been thwarted in their early stages' (Stanley, 2005). Similarly, in 2007, the Commander of London Police's Muslim Contact Unit, Janet Williams, described the greatest threat to human security as being 'Muslim radicalisation' (Yaqoob, 2007: 279).

The National Defence Research Institute (NDRI), which conducts RAND's research for the Office of the Secretary of Defence, published its report on July 28, 2008. This report

classified 648 groups as terrorist groups that were active at some point between 1968 and 2006. A total of 268 terrorist groups ended during that period, and 244 remained actively at work. Out of these active groups, a total of 27 groups renounced violence and stopped its military operations after achieving their political aim. The study considered the Algerian National Liberation Front (ANLF), which represented the Algerian people in their struggle against French occupation, as a terrorist organisation that renounced violence after it achieved its political aim. Here, is one of the problems of the war on terror. It does not distinguish between terrorist groups like the gangs of the Italian Red Brigade and the resistant movements which struggle against colonialism. This problem confirms that there is no global concept of terrorism. The concept of terrorism differs between countries and regions. This problem is certainly influencing the success of the war on terror.

The NDRI's report outlined also a total of 114 organisations that stopped their violence after establishing some sort of agreement with the states in which they operated. There were about 107 groups that were defeated through intelligence penetrations, assassination of leaders, detentions and the like of security arrangements. As for al-Qa'ida, the report pointed out that the aim and objective of al-Qa'ida is bigger than al-Qa'ida's capacity. Its goal is to change the regimes in the Middle East and North Africa, but there is zero chance of them achieving this goal. The report outlined also that the chance of eliminating al-Qa'ida networks by means of military activity is very low (Mathew and Michael, 2008: 2-4, 60-62).

In their Arabic writings, terrorists have outlined that their tactic is to engage in a longer war. Therefore, they do whatever they can to prolong the war and stretch the military forces of their enemy. In their words, they prefer to 'engage in a long war, in order to drain their opponents' military and economic powers' (Naji, n. d.: 15-17). They also emphasise that the longer the war, the more civilian casualties. Their point is that the people's reaction to civilian casualties will facilitate for the Jihadis' propaganda to find audiences among the masses and possibly radicalise and convince them to open new fronts of revenge. This strategy has been outlined in the books of the Jihadis and such

scenarios have been seen and remain the tactics of the Jihadis in both Iraq and Afghanistan.

Considering these scenarios, the Congressional Research Service (CRS)'s 2008 report for the Congress pointed out that the American Congress has approved a total of about \$864 billion Dollars for military operations in what is called the 'war on terror', initiated promptly after the 9/11 attacks (Amy, 2008: 2, tables 2,3,8). As to casualties among American troops, CRS indicates a figure of 4914 (4247 in Iraq, and 667 in Afghanistan) as of April 6, 2009. The civilian casualties in Iraq, as estimated in Lancet Survey from March 2003 to June 2006, are 601,027 violent deaths out of 654,965 excess deaths. However, there is no agreement when it comes to civilian casualties, particularly as many deaths are never reported in the media. As outlined by Agence France Presse (AFP), the "civilian death toll in Iraq may have surpassed 1 million with many casualties not reported" (AFP, March 25 2008). It is therefore, becoming increasingly evident that the 'war on terror' should not be confined to a purely military agenda. If it were a matter of military power, terrorism would have ended a long time ago.

Terrorists were not born terrorists but were transformed by radical ideas. Reversing these ideas might diminish terrorism at its roots of radicalism. This is exactly what happened to al-Qa'ida's largest Jihadi groups, namely, the Egyptian al-Gama'ah al-Islamiyyah (GI) and its sister organization Gama'at al-Jihad or Jihad Group (JG). The behaviour of these groups alarmed the authorities. The authorities realised the large size of these groups was growing even larger with the passage of time. The authorities noticed also that whenever they took action against them, the groups always returned stronger as though nothing had happened. The groups were considered a danger to Egypt's Arabo-Islamic and Christian-Coptic social fabrics. Therefore, the authorities began attempts to contain radicalism and to deradicalise these groups. This was not an easy task as deradicalisation attempts faced some difficulties and setbacks at times, but finally these groups reconciled their ideological position with their society. They even reviewed their earlier works and deradicalised their earlier ideas. In other words, these groups deradicalised their own radical ideas and admitted that their previous understanding was wrong. They produced

jurisprudential revisions that dealt with almost all their previous ideas, including the concept of Jihad and its related issues.

Terrorism cannot survive without its radical ideas and should be challenged with the same weapons. Therefore, any long-term counterterrorism agenda must include a deradicalisation strategy (Keelty, 2007). The military agenda of the war on terror lacks not only a definition of terrorism, but also the geographical contours of the battlefield. There is also not a clear end to this war or a timeframe that stipulates when the war will end. In addition, the war on terror cannot avoid civilian casualties. All of this makes it difficult for the war on terror to be confined to military means, for many reasons, among which are the following:

- a) Terrorism is transnational and has no specific geographical location.
- b) Terrorists can see the military force and know its location, but it is difficult for the military force to see terrorists.
- c) Terrorists are able to avoid military forces by varying means; they may delay their operations, or attack elsewhere to disperse their opponent's power, or at least wait until they find the opportunity to do so.
- d) The tools of conflict are not limited, but rather open to all possible narrations and interpretations.
- e) The military means cannot avoid civilian casualties, and this might open new fronts of revenge.
- f) The military means cannot tell where the terrorists are; their size; their resources; where they have come from; and who stands behind them.

Therefore, any global counterterrorism strategy, should consider the following tools:

### **1) Definition of Global Terrorism**

It is well established that terrorists think globally but act locally. Therefore, this bulk of information we have about terrorism should be utilised to rethink and define a global concept for terrorism and to develop a counterterrorism strategy that is able to successfully work on both local and global levels.

## **2) Regional Difference**

Any counterterrorism strategy should also consider regional difference. Undoubtedly, there are a great deal of publications about terrorism and counterterrorism. They also focused on (i) local and global terrorism, (ii) the causes, and (iii) the motivational force behind terrorist activity. These studies produced a great deal of causes and motives, but also there are differences between them. The difference between these studies is very much related to the difference between regions and the related political issues. Thus, for a global concept of terrorism, one should consider: (a) regional factors, (b) the factors known in non-democratic societies, (c) the economic factors (i.e. unemployment, poverty, and corruption), (d) the cultural factors, and (e) religious and radical beliefs. One should also consider the effects of regional and ethnic conflicts, and world politics more generally, towards them. States may turn a blind eye on terrorist activity, if it is in the interest of those states, but condemn it if not. This is because terrorism has been seen through different prisms by different states. World states each see terrorism through the prism of its own interests. There is no global agreement on what terrorism is.

## **3) Communication Factors**

Any one who is aware of any terrorist group's infrastructure and activity knows also that a communication network is one of the most important principles of the organisational structure. Through their communication network, groups communicate their ideas, recruit and inform their members with news and ordinances. Therefore, terrorism cannot survive without propaganda and communication networks. Although this is well established, there are centres in Western countries that support Jihadis and communicate their ideas to spread them. A number of centres are also, in one way or the other, linked to Jihadi groups while operating in a number of Western capitals. Here, one might refer to the London based al-Maqrizi Centre as an example. Its director, Hani al-Siba'ai is a member of the Egyptian Jihad, which established al-Qa'ida with Bin Laden. He supports al-Qa'ida, Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri and considers Mus'ab al-Zarqawi the master of the

heroes. Similarly, the Islamic Forum for Renewal, a London based centre led by the Saudi national, Muhammad al-Mis'ari, published a few works in Arabic to support al-Qa'ida's terrorist activity. Among his works are these: *The World Trade Centre*; *The Declaration of War by Individuals*; and *The War against the Rejectionist Groups*. The themes and language used in these titles are not clearly indicative of the contents of the books but also confirm its support of al-Qa'ida's ideas and actions. These books are at hand, as we speak, and contain views that may not be expressed in their titles. These and similar centres or organisations are really working against any deradicalisation attempt.

#### **4) The Environment of Transition**

Terrorists were not born terrorists but have been transformed by some factors in their environments. It was in this environment that some ordinary individuals were transformed not only towards radicalism, but also towards becoming suicide bombers. Those who become suicide bombers do so for one of two reasons, either they are mentally ill, or they are people who hate their lives and have been convinced that killing themselves in their cause is a worthy undertaking. Before killing themselves, they know very well from the previous experiences of others, that their goal will not be achieved through their suicide or by the killing of those innocent civilians. They also know that the Islamic religion forbids killing civilians. This type of terrorism also calls for more attention and further understanding of the environment of transition, in order to cool it down by means of appropriate treatment. Further, education and intellectual vaccination from an early age should be considered. This needs funds, experts, and collaboration between world states. Collaboration between world states is important to help the weaker countries overcome their lack of financial and security means. Thus, the more we focus on the environment of transition, the clearer the ingredients of the motive force which make up terrorism become. In effect, the success of counterterrorism will rise, the war on terror will gain more definition and its end will be more visible.

#### **5) International Collaboration**

As hinted above, collaboration between world states is important for a counterterrorism strategy that is able to successfully deal with global terrorism. Such collaboration will be much more effective if it was under the umbrella of the United Nations. It needs something similar to the United Nations Convention of 1949 to pin-down the responsibilities and duties of states. This strategy may branch out regional and sub-regional strategies and programs that consider the differences and the circumstances of each region and the threat facing them.

## **6) Deradicalisation**

Deradicalisation is one of the most important dimensions that any counterterrorism strategy should consider. After years of the war on terror, the Islamic radical movement should not be considered only in terms of resurgence vs. decline, or decadence vs. renewal. We should not take these binary opposites at face value, or as rigid and mutually exclusive classifications of culture and thought. This new enemy cannot also be challenged effectively by a counterterrorism strategy confined purely to security and military means. As Tony Blair outlined shortly after the London attacks of July 7, 2005, 'I see this as a global threat that has to be handled at a number of different levels; including the level of ideas and ideology' (Blair, 2005).

In short, deradicalisation is to focus on the ideas which transform the subjects and motivate them to adopt the methods of violence and terrorism. Reversing these ideas might diminish terrorism at its roots of radicalism. This is exactly what happened to al-Qa'ida's largest Jihadi groups, namely, al-Gama'ah al-Islamiyyah (GI) and its sister organisation Gama'at al-Jihad or the Jihad Group (JG) in Egypt. These groups were large in size and were operating in Egypt, Bosnia, Albania, and Afghanistan, where they established al-Qa'ida with Bin Laden. Al-Qa'ida's physical, ideological and intellectual establishment was certainly not possible without these groups. However, these groups have recently disputed Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri's ideas and ultimately renounced violence and terrorism. They abandoned their old al-Qa'ida colleagues, separated themselves from al-Qa'ida, and stressed wide disagreements with al-Qa'ida's ideas and

practice in about 30 large books thus far. These books are known in Egypt and the Arab media as the ‘Jihadi Revisions’. This literature comprehensively revised al-Qa‘ida’s political, intellectual and theological thought and practice and, ultimately, reversed their extremism and radicalism. Books like *Al-Qa‘ida Strategy: The Errors and Dangers* (Dirbalah, 2005); *Rationalisation of Jihad in Egypt and the World* (Fadl, 2007); and *Unveiling al-Zawahiri’s Deceptions* (Fadl, 2008) are examples illustrating the theme and framework of this type of literature. This literature also illustrates how ideas can be radicalised and how one can reassess and reverse their radical elements.

### **Case-Study: The Egyptian Islamic Groups**

Having outlined some of the tools that should be considered for any counterterrorism strategy, here is an example on counterterrorism in Egypt. In its stand against radicalism, Egypt employed the previously mentioned tools and developed a strategy that suited the country. In addition to security agenda, deradicalisation was at the core of this strategy, which also developed over years. Egypt’s idea of deradicalisation goes back to the mid-1960s, when the leaders of the Brotherhood were in detention. The Six Day War with Israel galvanised the minds of the youth who became attracted to ideas such as Jihad and *takfir* (charging others with atheism). Their charge of *takfir* was extended to charge the regime and society, as a whole, with non-belief. Alarmed by this new wave of radicalism, the authorities appointed a committee of experts to plan ways to contain this development. In addition to security measures, the committee decided to fight radicalism at the level of ideas. The committee produced a few works and distributed them widely inside and outside jails. In this connection, the book *Preachers not Judges (Du‘ah la Qudah)*, which was attributed to al-Hudaybi, the Supreme Guide of the Brotherhood at the time is one of the products of this strategy. However, al-Hudaybi did not write a word of this book. It was written by al-Azhar Academy to contain the radical ideas, including the idea of *takfir*, Jihad and related issues. As a result, a number of the detained Brothers changed their radical views, and were ultimately released from jail. Among these individuals was “Sa‘d al-Din Mutwally Ibrahim”, who is currently a human rights

activist and director of Ibn Khaldun Centre for Sociological Studies in Egypt (Khatab, 2006: 12).

In the aftermath of Sayyid Qutb's execution by Nasser's regime in 1966, the youth groups decided not to follow Qutb's strategy to establish an Islamic order in Egypt. It is difficult to detail Qutb's program and strategy in this limited space. It can be said that in short, his strategy was educational. However, the Jihadis saw the death of Qutb through the prism of their youths and considered that his educational strategy had failed by his execution. They went even further to claim that his strategy killed him. The Jihadis thought that their Jihad would bring them to power sooner than through educating the masses. Therefore, their ideology was to overthrow the government first and then proceed to implement the *Shari'ah*. In this context, when Qutb was informed about the angry Islamists inside and outside jails, Qutb wrote to them all from his detention that

(3) The Islamic movement must begin from the people to educate the people and revive the correct Islamic creed in their hearts and minds. (4) The Islamic movement should not waste its time by engaging in current political affairs, or try to overthrow the government or to establish the Islamic system by force. The people themselves will ask to establish the Islamic system when they understand the correct meaning of the Islamic creed (Khatab, 2001: 467-8).

However, Qutb's execution on the Gallows galvanised the minds of the youth, on the one hand, and confirmed their claim about the failure of the Brotherhood and Qutb's educational strategy, on the other. Many of those youths were undergraduate students who closely watched their pioneers in the Brotherhood. Following the death of Qutb, the youths established their own militant trend in a way that differs from the Brotherhood's infrastructure and tactical ideas. Subsequently, the new trend's security and strength did not lie in one large pyramid structure like that of the Brotherhood. Instead, small groups were established in the universities under one title al-Gama'ah al-Islamiyyah: Islamic Group (GI). Its aim and objective was to establish an Islamic state ruled by *Shari'ah*. However, because the earlier generation's educational strategy failed to establish an

Islamic state, the new militants focused on the militarised *Jihad* as the only right course to overthrow the regime and then proceed to the task of applying the *Shari'ah*.

Al-Gama'ah al-Islamiyyah (GI) was, thus, established as an umbrella group in the mid-1960s and continued, for a few years, to build itself underground in Egypt. Later, some arguments appeared between the top leaders. Some saw the movement was well established and should act immediately. Others opted for a tactical delay because they considered the movement was still weak. The latter opinion considered silence (i.e. sleeping cells) as a key strategy for the preparation and development of their inner strength. On the basis of these opinions, the one umbrella group (GI) divided into four groups, all of them agreeing that a militarised *Jihad* was the only means to overthrow the government and establish their Islamic state. These groups had the same goal, but different approaches to it. There were various differences between militant groups, but this should not obscure their tactical and ideological affinity. These groups agreed that all Muslim states were systems of *kufir* and should be replaced by a caliphate to unite the *ummah*. The four main groups include:

*Islamic Political Party (Hizb al-Tahrir al-Islami)*

Hizb al-Tahrir al-Islami (HT) was a small group, but it opted to act immediately. The leader was a Palestinian Dr Salih Sirriah (1933-1974). He was a member of the HT, which was established in Jerusalem in early 1952, by the Palestinian scholar Taqiyy al-Din al-Nabahani (1909-1989). Salih Sirriah completed his PhD in education; travelled to some Arab countries and finally entered Egypt where he secured a position in the Department of Education at the Arab League. During his stay in Egypt, Sirriah joined the militant groups and started to promote HT's ideas. As outlined on its website, the HT's main idea is to establish a caliphate (*khilafa*) in which the ruler is accepted "on condition that he conveys Islam as a message to the world through *da'wah* and *jihad*...It also aims to bring back the Islamic guidance for mankind and to lead the *ummah* into a struggle with *Kufr*, its systems and its thoughts so that Islam encapsulates the world... The field of

work for it [is] in one country, or a few countries, until it is consolidated there and the Islamic State [caliphate] is established” (Hizb al-Tahrir al-Islami ).

Here, key words such as *da‘wa*, *jihād*, *umma*, struggle, and *kufir* are critical. Accepting the ruler on the condition that he will ‘convey Islam as a message to the world through *da‘wa*’ can be understood, but it is difficult to understand how the ruler will ‘convey Islam as a message to the world through *jihād*’. The tricky relation between the meanings of these key words has been explained by the HT, not only in words but also in deeds. In April 1974, the HT led by the Palestinian Dr Salih Sireyya (1933–1974), obtained some weapons and made an unsuccessful attempt to take control of the Military Technical Academy in Cairo (Khatab, 2006: 470-71).

Some members of this group were killed along with their leader, while others were arrested inside the Academy. Those who escaped arrest joined other groups, but others fled Egypt. This was the end of the HT in Egypt. However, the HT continued to expand in some other places and currently has branches and headquarters in about 72 countries, including America, Indonesia and Australia.

#### *The Society of the Muslims (Gama‘at al-Muslimin)*

Translating the title of this group into English can be problematic. The best translation of this group’s title is The Society of *the* Muslims. Translating this title into either Muslim Group or Islamic Group, which is also accurate, will reduce the force and intent of this title and confuse this group with other groups. This group called itself Gama‘at al-Muslimin to mean that everyone except members and followers of this group are *kafir* and must be fought and killed. This group was promoting *takfir* (charging others with unbelief). Therefore, this group called itself the society of *the* Muslims to distinguish itself from others societies. Led by Shukri Mustafa, this group was larger than Hizb al-Tahrir (HT) but smaller than other groups. This group came to the attention of the authorities in 1977, when the group kidnapped al-Shaykh al-Dhahabi the Professor of Al-Azhar and Minister of Endowments. They announced their responsibility for this terrorist

act and specified some conditions for his release, but then killed him in cold blood. This operation saw the end of this group. The perpetrators, including the leader of the group, were brought to justice. Some of who escaped arrest joined the existing groups but others managed to flee Egypt.

After these two groups, the remaining militants were still working underground. Disputes between the leaders took place about the leadership and fatwa. Some preferred the blind sheikh Dr 'Umar Abd al-Rahman (currently serving a life sentence in the USA), but some others rejected his leadership on the grounds that he was blind. As a result, the militants were divided into two more groups, the Jihad and al-Gama 'ah al-Islamiyyah groups.

*The Jihad Groups (Gama 'at al-Jihad).*

The Jihad Group (JG) is the second largest group after al-Gama 'ah al-Islamiyyah (GI). The infrastructure of this movement consists of small cells with a military mode and orientation. Each cell usually has 10 to 20 members. Ayman al-Zawahiri led a group of 15 Jihadis. Each cell followed its own leader (Amir) and worked on its own. Cells may cooperate with each other to carry out a special operation. The Jihad Groups opted for immediate *Jihad* with the aim of overthrowing the government by force. Among the leaders of the Jihad groups are: Dr Fadl; Dr Ayman al-Zawahiri; Lieutenant Colonel Abbud al-Zumur (still in jail in Egypt); Abd al-Salam Faraj (the author of *al-Faridah al-Gha'iba: The Missing Ordinance*). These individuals are the leaders of Jihadi cells both within Egypt and outside it. The terrorist activity of Jihad groups is well known and does not need further detail here. What should be noted is that this group cooperated with its sister organisation al-Gama 'ah Islamiyyah in many of their armed operations inside and outside Egypt, from the beginning in the 1970s until 1997. In Egypt, they cooperated together in the assassination of Sadat (1981); in the Luxor attacks (November 1997); in the many attempts on Mubarak's life; in the attempts on the Prime Minister Atif Sidqi's life; and in the attempts on the lives of the successive Ministers of Interior since 1974 until 1997.

### *Al-Gama'ah al-Islamiyyah*

This group retained the original title of the movement as its own official name. It was and still is the largest of all groups in Egypt after the Brotherhood. Here, we are speaking of tens of thousands. In an interview this author conducted with some of the top leaders of the organisation, they said that the number of those who were in jail until in 1998 was about twenty thousands (20,000). In addition, there were others outside jail operating inside and outside Egypt. They participated in the Afghan war against the Soviets; they also participated in Bosnia, Chechnya, Albania (Khatab, 2001: 470-73). Among the leaders of this group are Karam Zuhdi, Dr Najeh Ibrahim, Dr 'Isam Dirbalah, Rifa'i Taha; Mustafa Hamzah; and Muhammad Showqi al-Islambulli. In their *Shura* Council, the blind Shaykh Abd al-Rahman was the advisor. The group's infrastructure is similar to that of the Brotherhood, if not the same. It was established as a public movement (mostly students) with a unified leadership, but later, this movement turned to violence. Their violence was bloody and claimed hundreds of innocent lives, not only police officers, tourists, but also, public figures, politicians, media, and intellectuals. They were also involved in the assassination of President Sadat in 1981, and made many attempts on President Mubarak, from both within and outside of Egypt (i.e. Addis Ababa in June 1995). The last of their terrorist attacks was on November 17, 1997 when 58 foreign tourists and 4 Egyptians were gunned-down at Luxor city, south of Cairo (720 km).

### **From the Reality of Egypt's Deradicalisation Effort**

Al-Gama'ah Islamiyyah (GI) and its sister organisation the Jihad Group (JG) both were the regime's nightmare. They were large groups that were consistently growing larger with the passage of time. The authorities noticed also that while these groups occasionally subsided or declined due to crushing security strikes, they tended to enter hibernation periods of varying lengths, depending on the circumstances, but would always return stronger than ever. To contain their radicalism the authorities adopted a strategy that dealt with the ideology, ideas and behaviour inside and outside detentions. It was based on four main elements namely state repression, social interaction, selective

inducements, and the leadership of the groups. I will not attempt to compare those variables with potential others due to space limitations. The strategy was sponsored by the Egyptian State and undertaken by experts in various disciplines. This strategy can be summarised in the following points:

- 1) The security agenda, which was in place, was then developed to flexibly work and interact with elements inside and outside detentions.
- 2) The authorities created special entities of experts to teach and preach the inmates, and to produce and foster counter-radicalism publications, movies, special TV series and programs that dealt with radical ideas inside and outside jails. Those who involved were well informed of the radical literature and ideas. One should note that the radicals have their own *shari'ah* which can be called the *shari'ah* of violence or in their words (fiqh al-'unf: jurisprudence of violence), and (fiqh al-tabrir: jurisprudence of vindication).
- 3) In addition to teaching and preaching, some prepared materials were usually left for the inmates to read. Copies were made to look old, as if these had been used by other inmates. The authorities turned a blind eye on the inmates' gatherings and discussions. From time to time, the securities would pretend to inspect the cells and confiscate those materials. After a period of time, the authorities would infiltrate some other materials and repeat the scenario.
- 4) From time to time, detainees from different ideological backgrounds (i.e. radical Islamist youths and secular liberals of older generation) were detained in the same cell.
- 5) The authorities also entered into dialogue with the radicals in jails, through a special committee called the "committee of mediation". It was the idea of Sheikh al-Sha'rawi who also led the committee. He himself was a former Minister of Endowments, a leading popular scholar and a TV star from al-Azhar. The committee members were mainly from the Muslim Brothers and other independent moderate Islamists. The strategy of this approach was to transform those radical detainees into a positive force, and prevent them from becoming radical or resorting to underground activity and planning acts of violence against the regime and society. The committee also encouraged the radicals to review their ideas such as *takfir*, *Jihad*, *al-tatarrus* (shield)

and rethink their framework and legal rulings, which were used by the radicals to justify their violence and charge others with unbelief or as infidels who must be fought and killed.

- 6) The authorities encouraged the radicals to renounce violence also by means of relaxing the detention regulations; allowing family visits and increasing visit durations; visits could be extended to over night; telephone calls from their families could be received at any time. In addition, special treatment for the inmates who show moderate views was applied.
- 7) The detainees were permitted to complete their degrees and to study in any discipline. Thus, they were not short of references and sources for their studies.
- 8) As for the members who were not in detention and instead were underground; they were in a position where they could see the authorities, but the authorities could not see them. Therefore, the regime focussed on the realm of religion in its widest sense and did not leave religion to the radical groups' monopolisation or to help them extend their social reach, or justify their behaviour. In this connection, mosques and universities received special attention. Teaching in the mosques was restricted to those who had permission from the authorities.
- 9) The authorities also mobilised civil society and public sectors to contain radical groups, refute their criticism and the claims against the regime for being anti-religious or not allowing religion proper weight in the political, social or economic policies.
- 10) The authorities entered into a dialogue with moderate and other Islamist groups who were working above ground and enabled them to integrate into civil political life. The Brotherhood, which was an illegal organisation, was permitted to participate in politics, and in the professional syndicates and civil society organisations. The strategy of dealing with those groups, who operated above ground, was to prevent them from becoming radical or resorting to underground activity and planning for violence against the regime and society.

### **From the Result of Deradicalisation Efforts**

Egypt's deradicalisation efforts did not furnish quick results in the beginning. Members of those radical groups were still quite young in their age and knowledge, the majority of them being undergraduates and a very small number were recent graduates. While in jail, the government helped them to complete their education. Hundreds of them completed not only their higher degrees but also their Masters and PhDs in various disciplines, including economics, political sciences, international relations, Shari'ah law, comparative law, and Islamic studies. Currently, a significant number of them have more than one PhD. Thus, the radicals reached their intellectual maturity while in jails. This facilitated for them to review their ideological position, the crimes they committed in the name of *Jihad*, as well as the failure of their *Jihad* strategy, and their loss of popular sympathy after extending their violence towards the society.

As a result, on the 5th of July 1997, leaders of al-Gama'ah al-Islamiyyah (GI) issued a brief statement renouncing violence and declaring an end to all armed operations inside and outside Egypt. This change is a significant indication of doctrinal changes within the group itself and its way of thinking. As to the group's sincerity, time has confirmed that the statement of "Cease Fire" in 1997 was genuine and the group committed itself to peace. Following the end of armed operations, the GI reviewed all its ideas for which it was established and for which it had operated. In other words, they deradicalised their own radical ideas, including their *Mithaq Al-Amal Al-Islami* (the Charter of Islamic Action). It was published in the early 1980s to explain and to justify their violence and armed operations against the regime and even society. In the beginning, the group's highest legislative body, the *Shurah* Council, produced four revisionist books, in January 2002, delineating the doctrinal bases of the shift in perspective. One of them addressed the practical and the ideological reasons behind their renouncement of violence and emphasised also that they were fighting a wrong battle. The three other books addressed what went "wrong" during what they called "Jihad" or confrontation with the Egyptian regime, and suggested the Jihad should be stopped. These books were followed by sixteen other books, two of which provided a significant and Islamically-based criticism of al-Qa'ida's ideology and al-Qa'ida's jurisprudential ideas. In addition, another book

that criticised the hypothesis of the impending “clash of civilizations” was also written and published.

The authorities permitted and facilitated for al-Gama‘ah leaders to tour prisons in a bid to convince and win more followers; lectures were organised and publicised, allowing the peace initiative and ideological revisions to reach as many of the group’s members as possible. Since then, thousands of al-Gama‘ah members have been released from jail, including the leaders. Indeed, the groups’ detention files are currently closed. Here one should note that no member of this group was released before completing his jail term. Furthermore, al-Gama‘ah al-Islamiyyah (GI) has also shown a remarkable ability to change on both the behavioural and the ideological levels. Behaviourally, it shunned the path of political violence and ideologically it de-legitimised it. It called for reconciliation with state and society as well as for intercultural dialogue. Although the group’s current stance is far from an electoral and liberal democracy, it does not represent the end of transformations. Several sympathisers and former members of the GI participated in the 2005 Egyptian parliamentary elections (Muntasir, 2005: 5). They also entered limited elections in such directorates as the local election of Alexandria in 2009 (Najih, 2009). In an interview, Karam Zuhdi, the leader of the GI outlined that the current position regarding democracy could change in the future, based on the interests of the GI. The group is also thinking of establishing a political party. This indicates that pragmatism has a final say in the behaviour of these formerly violent movements. This can be further confirmed as the GI has recently accepted Camp-David Accords which was signed by Egypt and Israel in September 17, 1978 (Najih, 2009). This is a significant change in the ideology and thought of the GI movement. Currently the files of the GI have been closed (Najih, 2009).

### **The Impact on Other Jihadi Groups**

After al-Gama‘ah’s anti-violence initiative, many questions have been asked about the future of its sister organisation the Jihad Group and Islamic militancy, in general. Ten years after al-Gama‘ah’s “Cease Fire” in 1997, the leader of the Egyptian Jihad

movement, Dr Fadl reviewed the ideology of Jihad and in 2007 announced that the Jihad's armed operations in the world were illegal. He disputed al-Qa'ida, Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri's ideas and ultimately renounced violence and terrorism. Like al-Gama'ah al-Islamiyyah, members of the Jihad Group led by Dr Fadl abandoned their old al-Qa'ida colleagues, separated themselves from al-Qa'ida, and stressed wide disagreements with al-Qa'ida's ideology and strategy in a few books serialised in the Arab media and in the London based Arabic daily. These books are known in Egypt and the Arab media as the 'Jihadi Revisions'. They focused on extremism and comprehensively revised al-Qa'ida's ideas and reversed their extremism and radicalism. Dr Fadl pointed out how al-Qa'ida's jurisprudence of vindication (*fiqh al-tabrir*) which gives permission to kill civilians, is against the *Shari'ah*. He disapproved killing for reasons of nationality, race or religious affiliation, and rejected al-Qa'ida's reasons for the destruction of property. Dr Fadl compiled his revision and rejection of al-Qa'ida's ideology and strategy in two books. These books are: *Rationalisation of Jihad in Egypt and the World* (November 2007); *Unveiling al-Zawahiri's Deceptions* (November 2008).

Dr Fadl is regarded as al-Jihad's most important ideologue. He is widely considered by the Jihads as one who established the first Jihadi cell in Egypt in 1968. Therefore, the Jihadis call him *the Imam of Jihad*. He is the former amir of Jihad in Egypt and Peshawar, and long-time associate of, and higher in rank than, al-Qa'ida's second in command Dr Ayman al-Zawahiri, the second most wanted man on earth, after Bin Laden. Unlike al-Zawahiri, Dr Fadl preferred to keep a low profile, away from the media and cameras. However, he led the Jihad in Egypt and Afghanistan where he compiled a few large books for the training camps there.

Therefore, the transformation was not an easy task, as he admitted. He faced some difficulties in the beginning to lay down the legal and intellectual bases of the new position 'The Peace Initiative'. He also emphasised that his method to overcome the difficulties was to negotiate and discuss with the Jihadis the concept of Jihad and related issues before writing anything. The Peace Initiative of the Jihad Groups is much more difficult than that of the Gama'ah Islamiyyah, because there is difference in the

infrastructure systems, and ideological approaches of the two movements. It was because of this difference that al-Gama'ah's members announced their "Peace Initiative" first in July 1997, and then worked on the "Revisions" of their ideology and ideas which appeared around four years later in January 2002. The leaders of Jihad Group, however, worked on their ideological "Revisions" between themselves first, and announced their "Peace Initiative" later.

Al-Azhar Academy for Islamic Research examined all "Revisions" and approved them. Egyptian Television was then permitted to interview the leaders for the first time. The Security authorities appointed a lawyer to organise for the publications of these "Revisions". The lawyer was able to strike a deal with independent newspapers to publish the Revisions in lieu of some money. The newspapers al-Misri al-Youm (Egypt); al-Sharq al-Awsat and al-Hayat (London); and the Kuwaiti newspapers, serialised the "Revisions".

Currently, the files of al-Gama'ah al-Islamiyyah and the Jihad in Egypt are closed. The "Road to Peace" was a long, bumpy road and the journey was difficult; there was success at times and failure at other times, but finally they have arrived at their peaceful destination.

It is interesting also to note that the GI's "Revisions" also influenced the Salafi Jihadi group, which is known as 'al-Qa'ida in North Africa', especially in Morocco. A number of recent reports have indicated meetings between the Moroccan authorities and the group's ideologues, namely, Sheikh Muhammad al-Fizazi one of the senior spiritual leaders and Hasan al-Khattab the leader of "Ansar al-Mahdi: the Helpers of the Mahdi". These meetings have continued for quite some time. It should also be noted that Hasan al-Khattab was elected by the Salafi Jihadi to represent them in their peace initiative which they called "al-munasahah wa al-musalahah: Reconciliation and Guidance". Currently, al-Khattab began to revise their radical ideas and pin-down their "Revisions", which will be published soon (Usama, 2009).

## **Deradicalisation in Saudi Arabia**

In addition to al-Qa'ida's threat, the Saudi authorities realised that radicalisation was appealing to the young Saudis, to the point that there was about 2,000 to 4,000 Saudi nationals making their way to Iraq for Jihad. The government realised two generations of extremists. The first is the former Mujahidins who fought the Soviets in Afghanistan and enjoyed the support of the Saudi State. Some of this group, who also fought in Bosnia and Chechnya, comprised the leadership of al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). The second is made up of younger Saudis, typically undergraduates in their twenties, motivated by the circumstances that followed the US invasion of Iraq. Most of these young radicals are self-radicalised, often via al-Qa'ida's websites on the internet. Their spiritual inspiration comes from such diverse individuals as Bin Laden, al-Zawahiri, Abu Bakr Naji, al-Maqdisi, al-Mas'ari and others. These radicals are generally lacking a mature and experienced understanding of Islam.

The government began to research the phenomenon of radicalisation and realised that security and military means alone would not contain al-Qa'ida and the growing radicalism in the Kingdom. In 2004, the government began to engage with Egypt and consult its deradicalisation expertise. The Saudis began also to engage with experts from Muslim and Western countries, and developed its own version in a comprehensive program to deradicalise and to rehabilitate the radicals in the Saudi Kingdom.

In their program, the Saudi authorities established a National Ideological Security Unit that coordinated the Kingdom's efforts in the war of ideas against Jihadists. Publications, teaching and preaching moderate Islam were the main feature of this Unit. It focused also on the internet by means of monitoring Jihadist ideas on their websites and developing techniques for countering radical ideology and ideas.

The government also established the "Central Security Project" designed to rehabilitate the detainees in the Kingdom as well as the Guantanamo returnees and offer them a way back into society. For this program, five rehabilitation centres were established

specifically for the purposes of promoting ideological reform. Rooms were fitted with TVs encased behind toughened glass and controlled centrally. They were used to transmit lectures and other deradicalisation segments prepared by a committee of experts. Also, detainees had time to debate and ask questions.

After serving their sentences, detainees were moved to the rehabilitation centres. Here also, the detainees underwent a range of programs covering religious doctrine issues, social and economic issues, and various forms of therapy including arts and sports. Regular family visits and socialising were permitted, and there was also a regular psychological evaluation program.

The Saudi State declared financial support for the inmates' families. After completing the program, participants were released into society against guarantees from both the family and tribes, to jointly provide an informal round-the-clock surveillance capability that offers the State a high degree of assurance against the risk of return to radicalism. After their release the government would also support them and financially help them to find houses, jobs, cars, and even assist with the costs of marriage.

Similar to Egypt and Saudi Arabia, deradicalisation programs have been undertaken in some other countries, including Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, Jordan, Yemen, Britain, and Netherlands, which allocated 40 million dollars for its program.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has shed light on deradicalisation as an important subject within the study of radical Islamist movements. It has outlined general tools which might help in the processes of developing a global counterterrorism strategy. The paper has argued that the chance of the 'war on terror' eliminating the violent and radical groups by means of military activity, is not promising. Both the theme and framework of the 'war on terror' were certainly not without side-effects. To some extent, this 'war' has contributed to the rise of anti-Western sentiment and radicalisation. For a successful counterterrorism

strategy, this study suggested, among other things, the need for a global concept of terrorism; and for a global database in the field of security as well as allowing for the exchange of information, about terrorism activity, between states. It has also suggested that the agenda of the 'war on terror' should not be confined to purely military means, but deradicalisation as a counterterrorism strategy needs to be included. Deradicalisation programs are working and achieving significant success. Indeed, the success rates vary between countries, but this is also dependent on the ingredients of each program, which in turn depends on the financial capacity of each country. It is thus necessary to help those front-line states to develop their counterterrorism strategies to work locally within the global counterterrorism framework.

In terms of deradicalisation achievements, this study has focussed on two large Islamic movements, namely the GI and JG, as examples. These two groups have shown a remarkable ability to change on both the behavioural and the ideological levels. Behaviourally, these movements shunned the path of political violence and ideologically de-legitimised it. They called for reconciliation with state and society, as well as for intercultural dialogue. Although these groups' current stance is far from an electoral and liberal democracy, it does not represent the end of transformations. Several sympathisers and former members of the GI participated in the 2005 Egyptian parliamentary elections and in the local elections of the Alexandria area in 2009. In an interview, Karam Zuhdi, the leader of the GI outlined that the group's current position regarding democracy could change in the future, based on the interests of GI. This indicates that pragmatism has a final say in the behaviour of these former violent movements (GI and JG). This can be further confirmed as the GI has recently accepted Camp-David Accords which was signed by Egypt and Israel in September 17, 1978 (Najih, 2009). This is a significant change in the ideology and thought of the GI. The Jihad followed GI and currently their detention files have been closed (Najih, 2009).

This article has also discussed four possible causal variables behind the initiation and the relative success of that deradicalisation process: state repression, social interaction, selective inducements, and leadership. I did not attempt to compare those variables with

potential others due to space limitations. This attempt, however, could be a subject of future research. Other variables that could be investigated include the international factor and how it affected the de-radicalisation process, as well as the relationship between GI and the Egyptian regime. Another direction for future research could be to investigate the effects of those causal variables on other case-studies, since the proposed framework is not limited to the GI case.

Also, the proposed framework discussed in this article generates several issues that merit investigation for a better understanding of Islamist deradicalisation. One of those issues is the relationship between the leadership and the legitimacy of the ideological de-radicalisation process. The testable hypothesis here would be whether the leadership of a movement is the dominant agent who/which could cast legitimacy on deradicalisation. Another hypothesis has to do with the prospects of deradicalisation reversal: compared to moderation and radicalisation, how likely is it that a deradicalisation process could reverse? Answering these questions and testing these hypotheses would further our understanding of deradicalisation processes within Islamist movements.

Finally, external social interaction aiming at influencing Islamist leaders, coupled with selective inducements, could be key-factors in deradicalising militant groups. Eliminating the spiritual leaders of a militant movement could be perceived as a psychological victory for the authorities and their media, but would make a comprehensive deradicalisation process less likely to succeed. Those leaders are necessary to legitimise deradicalisation and initiate a genuine dialogue with their followers (internal social interaction).

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