



APR-JUNE
2011

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Countering terrorism needs a multi-faceted approach, which focuses not only on confronting it through the coercive apparatus of the state but also through disengagement strategies. Disengaging a militant from violence and extremist tendencies is an uphill task because of his or her ideological and political association with a cause. A number of countries have developed de-radicalization programs to deal with the issue but the extent of their success remains debatable, notwithstanding the claims made by the states. Rehabilitation of detained militants becomes an integral part of any such program as part of the prevention strategy. The prison holds crucial significance in the de-radicalization strategy as many of these programs – including those in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and the United Kingdom – run in prisons. The logic for this approach is twofold: first, prisons offer an atmosphere where the detainees have time to think and interact with many influences; and second, if the inmates are not engaged in constructive activities, they would likely use their time in prison to mobilize outside support, radicalize other prisoners and, given the opportunity, attempt to form an operational command structure.¹

Pakistan Army launched an initiative for rehabilitation of detainees in the conflict-hit Swat region of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in 2009 after a successful military operation against extremist militants there. During the operation, thousands of militants and their active supporters either surrendered or were arrested or turned in by their families. They remain in the army's custody. In 2010, the army decided to screen detainees in order to identify hardcore militants. A de-radicalization program was launched for the detainees other than the hardcore militants. The initiative is in its initial phase still and there is room to learn from best practices and make adjustments where needed to improve its chances of success.

As mentioned earlier, rehabilitation programs for detainees are usually part of a larger de-radicalization strategy. Different states use different strategies but there are four major approaches in practice to rehabilitate individuals and vulnerable communities. These four approaches operate at the security, societal, ideological and political levels, and are based on the concepts of de-radicalization and counter-radicalization.² (See Table 1)

Table 1: De-radicalization Approaches

Approach	Focus	Strategy	Objective
Security	Detainees	Rehabilitation	Reducing security threats
Societal	Vulnerable communities	Engagement	Developing moderate tendencies
Ideological	Clergy	Highlighting religion's emphasis on peace	Developing counter arguments/narratives
Political	Society at large	Winning hearts and minds	Neutralizing security threats

There is a general agreement that the best practices on countering radicalization are a combination of all four approaches. Different states use different strategies ranging from engagement to winning the hearts and minds of the people. But the objective of most of the programs is neutralizing the security threats. Despite sharing common objectives, such programs in Muslim-majority states have some characteristics that differ from the models developed by non-Muslim states with a sizeable Muslim population. Programs by Muslim states focus mainly on prevention and creating an ideological response to radicalization. The Egyptian, Yemeni, Jordanian and Indonesian models essentially developed as ideological responses and the Saudi model emphasized on rehabilitation through psychological and social modules, along with ideological responses.³ (See Table 2)

Table 2: De-radicalization Programs: Models in Muslim Countries

Model	Strategy	Constraints for Pakistan
Saudi Arabian	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prevention • Cure/rehabilitation • Care/support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political • Ideological • Economic cost
Indonesian	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highlighting the conflict as the country's own war • Role of former militants in rehabilitation • Effective policing • Efficient and effective prosecution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Militant landscape is more complex • Failure to gain support of former militants for the process
Egyptian	Revision/ correction of concepts (<i>Tashih Al-Mafahim</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sectarian divide • Inflexible religious discourse
Jordanian	Counter-narratives/ ideological responses dictated by the state	A forcible or aggressive approach would not work in Pakistan
Yemeni	Dialogue through a committee consisting of respected religious scholars	Lack of consensus among the clergy
Algerian	Reconciliation and transformation	Lack of political consensus

Although many Muslim states have borrowed components of their counter-radicalization programs from the Saudi model, but they have failed to prioritize their strategies according to local needs because of a lack of resources, both financial and human. As an assessment notes: "Saudi Arabia has access to a significant amount of rentier income and is able to dedicate a large amount of money to the success of

the program. In addition, Saudi clerics hold an authority enhanced by Saudi Arabia's claim to guardianship of the two holy cities in Islam. Saudi's vast resources, both monetary and religious, allow for program components that are difficult to replicate in other locations".⁴

To overcome these constraints, Indonesia employs a different tack and engages former militants to create an effective response to radicalization.⁵ The Yemeni jihadist rehabilitation program comprises a committee of religious scholars headed by Judge Hamoud al-Hitar for dialogue with Al Qaeda detainees.⁶ The initiatives have yielded mixed results which have been attributed to questions of credibility of former militants in Indonesia and of the Committee for Religious Dialogue headed by Al-Hitar in Yemen, which detainees often consider part of the state apparatus.⁷

But Egypt's 'great debate' among jailed militants, which challenged the militant narrative in that country, has proved effective, mainly because it was an initiative by members of militant group Gamaa Islamiyah themselves and the state encouraged the debate only at a later stage. The debate was initiated among thousands of imprisoned members of Gamaa Islamiyah and questioned the justification for violence in order to achieve their stated objectives. After the discourse, reading and furtive conversations, the detainees came to the conclusion that they had been manipulated into pursuing a violent path. Initiating the debate was obviously difficult as it faced strong initial opposition both inside and outside the prisons; however, eventually imprisoned members of Al Jihad, the most violent group in Egypt which was led by Ayman Al-Zawahiri, also began to express an interest in joining the non-violent initiative. But it was Dr Fadl, one of the architects of Al Qaeda's ideological paradigm, who turned the initiative into the 'great debate'.⁸

None of these initiatives have been adopted in Pakistan and the model being applied in Swat draws its contours from Saudi Arabia. But the challenges confronting Pakistan are complex. Algeria's Charter for Peace and National Reconciliation (CPNR) offers a model that can provide the basic contours for a de-radicalization strategy in Pakistan.⁹ Strategies for rehabilitation of detainees form an indispensable part of a comprehensive approach on de-radicalization. But even more crucial are lessons that Pakistan can learn from de-radicalization models of non-Muslim states, particularly development of accurate threat perceptions at the policy and implementation levels. Non-Muslim states prioritize security threats, as protection is a key element in their strategies. But that protection can be ensured only by analyzing the threats the militants pose both at the security and ideological levels. The Australian de-radicalization model includes analysis as a key component in its strategies. (See Table 3)

Learning from these approaches and models can help evolve better counter-radicalization and de-radicalization strategies, but that would be effective only as part of a comprehensive policy response.

Table 3: De-radicalization Models Developed by Non-Muslim Countries

State	Strategy	Constraints for Pakistan
United Kingdom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pursue • Prepare • Protect • Prevent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dissimilar patterns of radicalization

Singapore	Religious rehabilitation groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political • Such efforts may be perceived as attempts to promote secularism by force
Australia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysis • Protection • Response • Resilience 	Economic cost

Although Pakistan's rehabilitation program in Swat is not part of a comprehensive policy and is a counter-insurgency initiative introduced by Pakistan Army, but if implemented judiciously it can provide the basis for a broader de-radicalization strategy.

The initiative to rehabilitate detainees in Pakistan was taken in September 2009, with an initial cost of Rs 4.4 million, which was provided by the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provincial government.¹⁰ The program has three main components: one called Project Sabaoon, which focuses on juveniles; Project Mishal that concentrates on adult detainees; and Project Sparlay for family members of detained persons. The rehabilitation efforts have been divided into four main modules, including an educational module comprising formal education, especially for juveniles, to enable them to continue their education. Another module includes psychological counseling and therapy for developing independent and logical thinking. The social module includes social issues and family participation and the fourth module includes vocational training, such as repairing home appliances, etc., to equip the detainees with skills that enable them to make a decent living. Through the initiative, over 400 individuals have been reintegrated into society so far.¹¹

Dr. Muhammad Farooq Khan,¹² a leading moderate religious scholar was the key figure in developing the Sabaoon component of the program. Dr. Khan developed counter arguments to confront extremist points of view.¹³ His charismatic personality was the driving force behind the success of the initiative at the initial stage but his assassination by Taliban in 2010 was a setback for the project.

Project Mishal aims at "providing an environment conducive for restoring the self-respect for selected individuals to de-radicalize and remove their psychological burden caused by ideological exploitation and /or coercion so as to make them and their families useful citizens of the society."¹⁴ Mishal Rehabilitation Centre has reintegrated 400 individuals into society.¹⁵ After a screening process, low-cadre militants were identified, who did not have a leadership role and were not directly involved in killings or sabotage activities. According to the Deputy Inspector General (DIG) of police for Malakand Division, of which Swat is a part, this program may have saved many youngsters from gaining a radicalized worldview, but he believed that the phase after their reintegration seems to be the weakest link, because of the community's attitude and the total dependence on the authorities for de-radicalization initiatives.¹⁶ The authorities at the Mishal Rehabilitation Centre stated that only 11 out of the 494 individuals released so far had received financial support to enable them to have access to livelihood opportunities.

As stated earlier, the Swat rehabilitation program is based on the Saudi model. As is obvious from the difficulties faced in the Mishal project, financial constraints were not considered while designing these initiatives. On the other hand, although Sabaoon is not facing any financial constraints, but lack of knowledgeable and devoted scholars, such as Dr. Farooq Khan, has certainly been a challenge. In addition to these constraints, the initiatives focus mainly on low-cadre militants, which come from poor economic backgrounds. The rehabilitation of this rank is important but the program needs to be expanded to the mid-level cadre, which have more political and ideological tendencies for radicalization. If some of them are disengaged from militants and extremism, they can prove valuable assets in the de-radicalization process, as has happened in Indonesia. But disengagement of mid-level cadre is a difficult task, and countering their narratives is a challenge where Egypt has a good record.

The Swat model was developed in a post-insurgency perspective and the counter argument modules focus on defusing anti-state tendencies, but in Pakistan the militant landscape is quite complex and in the presence of other violent actors, who are involved in international and regional terrorism, this narrative cannot prevent them for joining other groups. Complete denunciation of extremism should be the objective of the program and a viable ideological anchor needs to be provided in the framework of nationalism and pluralism.

The Swat model can be replicated in other parts of the country after addressing the framework deficiencies and intellectual and financial constraints. But at the same time the civil administration needs to shoulder the responsibility. In other countries, such initiatives have been taken by the political government and implemented by the civilian administration. Only a representative and accountable political setup would have the credibility, legitimacy and mandate to take on the ideological and political sensitivities involved in the de-radicalization process.

Notes:

- ¹ "Prisons and Terrorism: Radicalization and De-radicalization in 15 Countries," (A policy report published by International Centre for the Study of Radicalization and Political Violence (ICSR), London, 2010).
- ² De-radicalization efforts refers to working with individuals who have committed acts of terrorism. Counter-radicalization refers to preventive measures to work with vulnerable communities.
- ³ A group within the Saudi Ministry of Interior known as the Advisory Committee is responsible for administrating the de-radicalization program. The Advisory Committee consists of four smaller sub-committees: the religious subcommittee, the psychological and social subcommittee, the security subcommittee and the media subcommittee. (Asseri, Awadh, Ali, S, Combating Terrorism, Saudi Arabia's role in the War on Terror, Oxford, 2009).
- ⁴ Amanda K. Johnston, "Assessing the Effectiveness of Deradicalization Programs on Islamist Extremists," December 2009, <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a514433.pdf> (accessed June 26, 2011).
- ⁵ Nasir Abbas and Ali Imron are two former militants, who participate in the de-radicalization program by approaching Gamaa Islamiyah prisoners and challenging their beliefs (Johnston, "Assessing the Effectiveness of De-radicalization Programs on Islamist Extremists").
- ⁶ Naureen Chowdhury Fink and Hamed El-Said, "Transforming Terrorists: Examining International Efforts to Address Violent Extremism," International Peace Council, 2011.
- ⁷ Johnston, "Assessing the Effectiveness of Deradicalization Programs on Islamist Extremists."
- ⁸ Muhammad Amir Rana, "The Great Debate," Dawn, March 28, 2011.
- ⁹ Algeria's policies revolved around three central themes: first, restoring peace, this included grant of amnesty, reductions in sentences, and dropping of charges against all those who surrendered voluntarily, renounced violence and handed in their weapons; second, national reconciliation, solidarity, and reintegration; and finally, implementation of measures aimed at preventing recurrence of violence.
- ¹⁰ Dr. Khadem Hussain, Director Bacha Khan Trust, Peshawar, interview by the author, July 13, 2011.
- ¹¹ Qazi Jamilur Rehman, Deputy Inspector General of Police Malakand, interview by the author, July 4, 2011.
- ¹² He was killed by Taliban on October 02, 2010.
- ¹³ Dr. Muhammad Farooq Khan, "An Overview of Project "Sabaoon"," (Report on 1st Strategic Workshop on Rehabilitation & De-radicalization of Militants and Extremists, FATA Capacity Building Project, FATA Secretariat, May 2010).
- ¹⁴ Qazi Jamilur Rehman, interview.
- ¹⁵ Presentation at Mishal Rehabilitation Centre attended by the author, July 5, 2011.
- ¹⁶ Qazi Jamilur Rehman, interview.

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