The Battle of Ideas: Can the beliefs that feed terrorism be changed?

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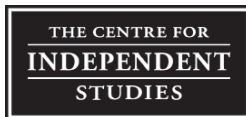# The Battle of Ideas: Can the beliefs that feed terrorism be changed?

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Introduction by
The Reverend Peter Kurti

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Introduction

Security and intelligence forces face an evolving challenge as they work to thwart terror attacks in western countries. Coordinated assaults involving multiple attackers — such as those in Paris in November 2015 and Brussels in March 2016 — succeeded despite efforts to track the behaviour of suspects, and they are unlikely to cease. The task of protecting populations, however, becomes much more difficult in the face of so-called 'lone wolf' attacks such as those perpetrated by a single gunman in Florida in June 2016, and a single truck driver one month later in Nice on Bastille Day. Restrictive gun laws can make it more difficult to obtain weapons, but when an attack is launched using an everyday vehicle such as a commercial truck, it is hard to see what precautions could have been taken.

At some point when poring over the aftermath of these atrocities, scrutiny turns to the mental state of the attacker — or at least to what it might be possible to know about that state. Even when an assailant claims to be acting in the name of a terrorist organisation such as Islamic State, law makers, law enforcers, and commentators are often wary of attributing motive but focus instead on the individual's mental health. A diagnosis of mental ill-health makes the truly appalling more intelligible: if an action doesn't make sense, the perpetrator must be mad. The paradigm of illness is one way we try to come to terms with inexplicable evil.

However, while it can help to make sense of the senseless, using the paradigm of illness to interpret a terrorist's action presents three dangers: it threatens to diminish the impact of both the action and the actor; and it can lull us into feeling that the threat the terrorist presents has somehow abated because it is, apparently, treatable. The third danger presented by use of the paradigm of mental illness is that it can distract us from the task of getting to grips with a much more complex and intractable problem: how to prevent people being drawn to radical Islam in the first place.

This is a testing issue for any open, liberal democracy because, as *The Economist* has noted, "Like all extreme belief-systems, radical Islamism confronts pluralists with a paradox — namely, how do liberal tolerant majorities protect their values while defending the rights of less tolerant minorities, or fractions of minorities?"[1] After all, it is one thing to foil a terror attack; it is quite another to monitor the networks and communications of people whom security services suspect of being involved. This difficulty is compounded by the difficulty of drawing a clear distinction between the mainstream and the radical fringe.

Former UNSW anthropologist Clive Kessler has proposed that between 10–15% of Muslims worldwide are reform-minded and democratic; another 10–15% are radicalised extremist; and between these two minorities lie the 70% who represent the traditional mainstream. Yet, Kessler argues, the mainstream and the radical fringe adhere to the same underlying theological propositions. This means that with no distinctive and independent mainstream moral ground of their own, there is nothing to which the deviant minority can be recalled. For Kessler, this makes the entire approach of deradicalisation programs "an unpromising strategy."[2] Defeating violent Islamic extremism has, nonetheless, been a high priority for all western countries, including Australia, since the 9/11 attacks in 2001. However, the threat we face doesn't so much come from zealots flying planes into buildings as from young people barely out of childhood and who have their entire lives before them.

In May 2016, *The Sydney Morning Herald* stated more than half of ASIO investigations now target people aged 25 and under —three times what it was just three years ago — showing how the average age of terrorism suspects has fallen.[3] The Sydney teenager arrested for trying to buy a gun in order to launch an ANZAC Day attack in April 2016 was just 16; and the Melbourne teenager charged with planning a terror attack, and found with a partially built pipe bomb, was only 17 years old. As the *Sydney Morning Herald* reported: "A security source said the number of younger suspects had forced a rethink in how counter-terrorism work was done by intelligence agencies [which] now have to find ways to tap into the younger

networks." The federal government acknowledges the problem posed by young people at risk of being recruited as terrorists. In its 2016 Budget, the government committed to spend $5 million on initiatives to combat violent extremism. Other expensive attempts to counter the radicalisation of young people have already been attempted. In NSW, the Baird government established a $47 million Countering Violent Extremism program.

Radicalisation within Muslim communities is a complex phenomenon, often inadequately understood by those outside; and because of that, the challenge of devising effective programs to *de-radicalise* people who have been exposed to radical teaching is equally complex. No single program has successfully prevented radicalisation; nor has any single program successfully and invariably reversed the process.

As already noted, critics such as Kessler hold little hope for the viability of deradicalisation programs because of a shared religiously informed historical world view. The underlying attitudes driving radical Islam are present within the Muslim mainstream and are congruent with its basic assumptions and outlook. "So there is no ground within the mainstream for calling back the deviant minority; no distinctive standpoint, authentic and authoritative, to which the radicals may be called to return by abandoning their own identifiable heresies."[4]

Yet governments spend enormous sums of money putting in place schemes and programs to rescue people from the radical fringe and restore them to the mainstream. For whose benefit are these programs being run? Altering any kind of ideological belief — whether religious or political — is very difficult. Once we get into our heads ideas about the difference between good and evil, right and wrong or innocent and guilty, they can be hard to dislodge. To do so requires more than a government program. Could it be that de-radicalisation is little more than a pseudo-science designed more for our own benefit, making us feel we are doing something — however faltering — about a phenomenon most of us simply do not understand?

Whatever we make of them, de-radicalisation programs are unlikely to be completely successful, but they may possibly do some

good. They won't, however, do the trick on their own: they are not some kind of bromide that will magically fix the threat of radicalised youths without us having to do anything more. In an opinion piece in *The Weekend Australian*, Ayaan Hirsi Ali suggested we need to do two things to make de-radicalisation effective:

"First, we need to abandon the familiar distinction between "a tiny minority of violent extremists" and "an enormous majority of moderate Muslims", which is standard fare in politicians' speeches. Second, we need to counter that sustained campaign of radicalisation waged by powerful Muslim organisations such as the Organisation of Islamic Co-operation."[5]

But in addition to these stipulations, what else might be required? Perhaps Muslim families themselves must assume a greater responsibility for imparting to their youth the liberal, democratic values we cherish. Certainly, citizens of a liberal democratic country such as Australia have a duty to shrug off any hint of passive resignation that our society is doomed to defeat. But can the beliefs that feed terrorism — and which obviously threaten our own safety and well-being — be changed?

In May 2016, the Centre for Independent Studies hosted a roundtable discussion to examine this question and a number of invited participants were able to contribute. The discussion was provoked, at the outset, by outstanding contributions from three experts each with considerable experience of the challenge of radicalised Muslims. Their contributions were pivotal to the conversation, and they are now published in this Occasional Paper so that they may have a wider readership.

In his contribution, **Dr Denis Dragovic**, a practitioner and scholar in the field of rebuilding states after conflict, warns that current approaches to deradicalisation are built on weak foundations. Dragovic argues that an effective deradicalisation program needs to understand more carefully the claims that Islamic theology makes about the individual, the faith community, and the state. Best-selling author **Ayaan Hirsi Ali**, a courageous and prominent critic of Islam, spoke of her own experiences of radical Islam and argued for what she calls a 'reformation' of Islam that will liberate the individual

conscience from the constraints of rigid, hierarchical authority. Drawing on his extensive experience as a psychiatrist working both in the community and in prisons, **Dr Tanveer Ahmed** argued that the challenge of deradicalisation stems in part from the many ways an individual can be lead to radicalisation in the first place. "The experiment of deradicalisation remains in its infancy," says Ahmed, "but is just one arm in a much bigger fight against Islamist terrorism."

Each of these papers makes a significant contribution to the de-radicalisation debate and helps bring into focus the concerns of the policy-makers, lawyers, academics, and journalists who participated at the event. Radicalised Islam is now a feature of life in western democracies and likely to remain so for a long time. The Centre for Independent Studies hopes this Occasional Paper will stimulate further responsible discussion and encourage constructive conversations in the wider community about the impact Islam and its civilizational legacy on contemporary Australian society.

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Endnotes

1 'How others do it', *The Economist* (18 June 2016)
2 Clive Kessler, 'Deradicalisation of militant Muslims not a viable option', *The Australian* (30 May 2015)
3 David Wroe, 'Young terror suspects make up bulk of ASIO's work', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, (11 May 2016)
4 Clive Kessler, as above.
5 Ayaan Hirsi Ali, 'Deradicalisation programs must resist Medina militancy', *The Weekend Australian* (7 May 2016)

Religion: A Cause or Effect of Radicalisation

Denis Dragovic

Australian society has embraced a clear separation of church and state, a view that neatly places faith into the private sphere and away from the politics that influence our daily lives and shape our community. But this presumption of a settled consensus between the clergy and community is being challenged by the rise of political Islam and the threat of terrorism.

We accept when a born again Christian embraces Jesus claiming that religion inspired them to change their way lives. We also accept that religion motivates churches to change society to make it better, fairer and more just. In these instances, religion is accepted as being a driver of change with a positive effect. But we shy away from the idea that religion can also drive people to act in ways that would widely be considered against the interests of the Australian community. This is at the core of the challenge faced by de-radicalisation policy and practise in Australia, namely, it is generally devoid of considering religion as a cause, instead it always places it as the effect.

The Attorney-General's departmental website states, "The best way to counter violent extremism is to prevent radicalisation emerging as an issue by addressing the societal drivers that can led to disengagement and isolation."[*] This is a key policy statement and indicative of the broader strategy. The message is that radicalisation is caused by "societal drivers" such as unemployment, disharmony in the community, political disenfranchisement and other social and economic factors.

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[*] Attorney-General's Department. "Countering Violent Extremism." Retrieved 28/5/2016, 2016, from https://www.ag.gov.au/NationalSecurity/Counteringvio-lentextremism/Pages/default.aspx.

Yet, there are many individuals who are afflicted by unemployment or a lack of economic participation and aren't participating in terrorist acts. So why is Islamic fundamentalism different? What is unique about it? This is the key question and yet it is the one question that seems to be off limits, too many people are too afraid of engaging with it.

The implication of the Attorney-General's statement is that radicalisation is the effect while the cause is society's ills. This is wrong. Religion can and often is the cause. Problematically, while we don't hesitate to acknowledge religion as inspiring a positive change, we deny the possibility of religion inspiring people to act in a negative manner. To understand why, we need to first ask the question, what is good and what is bad? How does a society define them?

Having multiple wives in Australia is not 'good', but in other countries its aspired to. In Australia we think that it's acceptable to send the elderly into retirement villages, in other societies they would be ashamed were families unable to support their aging parents. We define what is good and what is bad by judging against our set of higher order values, a set of principles that transcend political parties and generations under which society comes together. Laws are largely subservient to them. Religion is one factor that shapes these transgenerational cultural mores.

While religion doesn't figure prominently as a source of higher order values in Australia, it is in other cultures. As a quarter of Australians are born overseas and virtually all imams are born, raised and trained overseas, many families as well as Muslim leaders have been initiated to a different set of higher order values.

At the same time there is a tendency in Australia to conflate all religions into one. Atheist academics and the media push an idea that all religions have the same values, the same goals the same hopes for humanity. Not coincidentally, this 'universal' religion has characteristics that are remarkably aligned with Western Christianity. That is that religion has no place in the public square, that reason can lead to the same understanding as revelation, that human life is sacrosanct, that the individual is at the core of society and so forth. But not all religions aspire to the same goals nor agree on the same means. As a

society with minimal religious literacy we fail to grasp this distinction between religions. Furthermore, most public commentators are afraid to even begin to discuss the differences between religions for fear of being labelled Islamophobic or racist.

Our religious illiteracy leads policy makers and commentators to two critical mistakes. Firstly, suggesting that all religions are largely the same is highly offensive, in our current case, to Islam. Offensive because the suggestion isn't that Christianity shares a lot of similar characteristics with Islam, but rather that Islam is a shadow of Christianity, in particular, Western Christianity.

The second is that it exacerbates the likelihood of radicalisation. This 'universal religions' view infers that a Muslim's religion isn't special, that Prophet Mohammad and Jesus are the same, that their beliefs are no different to Christianity and to live in our society Muslims need to reinterpret their scriptures in a way that makes it read like the Bible. The outcome, not surprisingly, is that individuals go elsewhere for religious guidance, either online or to those who recognise the uniqueness of Allah's word.

This is what our society and our de-radicalisation programs are in effect doing—offending pious Muslims and driving fundamentalists to radical preachers. If we are to seriously engage with de-radicalisation, then we need to engage with Islam beginning with an analysis of how Islamic theology could lead to critical differences to those of the foundational religion of Western society--Christianity.

1. The role of the state

In the Western tradition, the past century has seen a dramatic shift in the relationship between the Roman Catholic Church and the state. Pope Pius XI in the early twentieth century started the process of distancing the Church from the state, he banned priests from politics and disbanded Catholic political parties. The Second Vatican Council took the next step by promulgating the Declaration on Religious Freedom, *Dignitatis humanae,* which shifted its view away from the state having a responsibility to Catholicism to the state needing to ensure religious freedom. This shift is under appreciated in its importance as most people today presume that the natural relationship

between religion and the state is of mutual exclusion, yet even in the Western tradition this became the norm only recently.

In the Islamic tradition the trend has worked in reverse order whereby the separation of the scholars from the rulers was for centuries the norm, whereas beginning the twentieth century they became co-dependant. In addition, the theology of Christianity which has a predominant narrative of individual salvation, differs from Islam that has a focus upon justice running through its scriptures. Depending upon how you interpret the Islamic texts justice can be limited to leading a just life within your community, but it can also be interpreted as a holistic social structure as we see in Islamic countries. It's the latter that is referred to as political Islam and can open the door to the justification of violent movements in the name of Allah.

2. Revelation over reason

Once you see the state as a means to a theologically inspired goal then the next question is the place of religion in determining the laws that the state will enforce. There has been considerable division throughout Islam's history on the relationship between reason and revelation. The consensus of moderates is that reason adds clarity to revelation. This view allows for religious leaders to advocate positions, but not to dictate. There are others who see any inconsistency between reason and revelation as being the failing of human reason. For them, scripture is the only source of guidance for how to structure society.

3. The life to come over the life we live

Which is more important, the eternal life to come or the incomplete life we live today? During the Cold War the idea of M.A.D. (Mutually Assured Destruction) dissuaded the Soviets or Americans from launching nuclear strikes as they knew that such an act would lead to their own destruction. This mattered as they valued their lives. Alternatively, if you see our life today as a poor cousin to the one we will live in the afterlife then death is welcome. Recent research by the Centre on Religion and Geopolitics found that among Jihadist-Salafists' propaganda, explicit references to the end of days was present

in 42% of their material and 32% referenced martyrdom positively.[§] This type of world view helps to define the acceptable means that groups can adopt in pursuing their goals including justification for suicide bombing and the killing of children.

4. Interpretation of the scriptures

With a view that the state is a tool to achieve Allah's will, that we are dependent upon scriptures for guidance and the means of achieving the necessary outcomes are permissible then it is left to defining the details by referencing the scriptures.

The contention emerges when there are apparent contradictions between verses. A look at a central story within Christianity can provide guidance on how approaches to interpretation matter.

Following Moses receiving the ten commandments on Mount Sinai the Bible reads:

Exodus 32:7 'The Lord said to Moses, "Go down, because your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, have become corrupt. 8 They have been quick to turn away from what I commanded them and have made themselves an idol cast in the shape of a calf."'

So Moses went down and seeing the mayhem said to those who rallied around him:

Exodus 32:27 'This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: "Each man strap a sword to his side. Go back and forth through the camp from one end to the other, each killing his brother and friend and neighbor." 28 The Levites did as Moses commanded, and that day about three thousand of the people died. 29 Then Moses said, "You have been set apart to the Lord today, for you were against your own sons and brothers, and he has blessed you this day."'

This is very clear. Worship idols, stray from the one true God and the response should be death. In other words, the death penalty for apostasy. Which is what Islamic State and eight other Muslim countries (Afghanistan, Brunei, Mauritania, Qatar, Saudi Arabia,

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§ Emman El-Badawy, Milo Comerford and Peter Welby (2015). Inside the Jihadi Mind: Understanding Ideology and Propaganda. London, Centre for Religion and Geopolitics.

Sudan, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen), have on their statutes. How does Christianity manage to ignore this and many other similar verses from the Old Testament?

For the Roman Catholic Church its view is that the Old Testament should be read "in the light of Christ crucified and risen".[†] Or alternatively, St Augustine taught that, "the New Testament lies hidden in the Old and the Old Testament is unveiled in the New."[‡] This creates a role for the Old Testament, but one which is filtered through the lens of the New Testament.

There are similar clashes of messaging in the Quran, but for Islam it is between those verses which were revealed during the Prophet's time in Mecca and those in Medina. Different interpretive traditions adopt different approaches to any contradictions. Literalists such as the Salafists of Islamic State give the most recent verse primacy over earlier revelations. Others suggest that it is about context, namely, does the multiculturalism of Mecca resemble the plight of a particular Muslim community or rather the self-governing situation of Medina? Others again look at the scriptures holistically and seek out consistent and common themes.

Were one or another of these four theological views present in our mosques, none on their own would raise a red flag and be considered as inciting violence. The problem is when they are brought together into a single world-view. In such a case a foundation is established upon which other factors, including those listed on the Attorney-Generals' website, can lead to violence. Without such a world-view all we are left with are disenchanted and disenfranchised individuals.

Next Steps

If it's as the Attorney-General's website states, that "the best way to counter violent extremism is to prevent radicalisation emerging as an issue by addressing the societal drivers that can led to disengagement and isolation", then the current policy of providing $40m across

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† Catholic Church (1994). Catechism of the Catholic Church. London, Geoffrey Chapman.

‡ Ibid.

four years to combat violent extremism is misplaced.[**] Were this causal relationship true then radicalisation that results from social ills could best be responded to by traditional programs that focus on employment pathways, improved social cohesion and better education and health outcomes. These are programs that are already being implemented around the country by groups such as the Salvation Army, Red Cross and the Brotherhood of St Laurence. Best practice in responding to localised social challenges is a place-based approach which acknowledges the intertwined complexities and formulates whole of community responses rather than focusing on single aspects in isolation—mental health, homelessness or radicalisation. As a response to social ills the government's current approach stands on weak foundations.

Alternatively, if you see religion as in part a cause, then what can the government do? Firstly, we must acknowledge that the government can't provide all of the solutions. We have to realise that the community, and I use this term broadly, is at the heart of the problem as well as the source of the solution. Instead, the government should move away from trying to fix the problem and rather support the facilitation of a more open discussion allowing for more light to be shone on the nuanced interpretations of Islam that lead to dangerous world-views. Undoubtedly, a more open discussion will lead to higher tension in the short term. But I suspect it will also lead to better policies and stronger leadership being taken by those who are in a position to influence positive change.

One option would be for a body such as the Human Rights Commission, a respected and independent intermediary, to lead a national discussion on the scope of religious freedom and how it interacts with other human rights. Through the engagement of religious communities and facilitation of background conversations on this topic a foundation can be established from which better

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[**] International research suggests that poverty, lack of education or other structural development factors are not causes of radicalisation. Berger, J. M. (2016). Making CVE Work: A Focused Approach Based on Process Disruption Hague, The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism

understanding and in turn relations can emerge between the government, Islamic communities and the wider population. Only from a clearer understanding of the competing world-views will we able to rally a community based coalition to act against radicalisation.

Attorney-General's Department. "Countering Violent Extremism." Retrieved 28/5/2016, 2016, from https://www.ag.gov.au/NationalSecurity/Counteringviolentextremism/Pages/default.aspx.

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Medina vs Mecca Muslims

Ayaan Hirsi Ali

I think that Denis's presentation is excellent. I am so pleased and pleasantly surprised that there is a social scientist working on this subject who tells us that in the west we do not understand religion. That is true. It obviously doesn't apply to everyone but if you look at the general conversation on Islamic radicalisation, the people who are involved and who inform government policy know very little about their own religion let alone about Islam — and do not recognise religion as a tool of anything other than something that has been left behind. First, I think that is a very important point.

Second, I am also pleasantly surprised that in your research you see that there is a link between Islam and its basic tenets and what we have come to call radical or fundamentalist. These are all western labels, by the way. Muslims do not identify themselves as radicals or fundamentalists and many of them are offended by the distinction moderate versus extremist.

You know the president of Turkey is very explicit in saying there is no such thing as moderates and extremists. You are either a Muslim or you are not a Muslim. I also fully agree with you. It is not just the Attorney General of Australia and his website, it is all across liberal western societies.

In the United States we've even dropped the term 'Islamic' out of it. First we pursued the 'war on terror' which is a tactic, and now we are fighting 'violent extremism' — not violent Islamic extremism, it's violent extremism. So white supremacy, environmentalists who happen to be radical and violent are all put together with radical Islamic extremism.

So thank you very much for creating this framework of

understanding. It helps me because I think we can now start on this basis that religion is important.

The question I have been struggling with is: How do we then classify Muslims, if it's useless to classify Muslims (and it's one fifth of humanity) into moderates and extremists … how do we understand and conceptualise that diversity?

I think the Islamic faith as a doctrine is unreformed politics and religion which have never been separated, and in fact most Muslims will say they should never be separated. How do we understand that distinction? And what I see if I just observe individual Muslims is those who are informed about Islamic doctrine know what they are talking about, they have been to Islamic schools, they have read, they are informed, they are steeped in Islamic doctrine. And in that capacity they make choices.

Remember again, as liberals, individuals are free agents, you make choices. If, as an individual Muslim, well informed, you make the choice of elevating Medina over Mecca then I think it's fair to classify such individuals under the umbrella of Medina, and when I use Medina it's not just a discrete label, it's a kind of spectrum. So you are a Medina Muslim according to me if you are a member of the Muslim Brotherhood and you are engaged only in activities of da'wah.

I ask my audiences "Raise your hand if you've heard the term 'jihad' and you know what it means." Usually 100% of my audiences have heard the term 'jihad'. Raise your hand if you've heard the term 'da'wah'. Usually it is one or two people. Usually people will describe da'wah as proselytisation, very much like Christian missionary work —and it is not that. It is much more than that.

It does contain proselytising, going around and telling people to come to Islam. But is does more than that. It goes as far in fact — and I want to use the president of Turkey as an example — as seeing the displacement or the transfer of human population from one place to another as a tool to Islamise. So it is a process of Islamisation that it goes from persuasion all the way to jihad.

So if you are a member of the Muslim Brotherhood and you engage only in da'wah — and you engage only in educating Muslims who have lapsed into coming back, into praying, into fasting, but also into spreading faith — you fall under that category of Medina. If you

join the Islamic State because you feel that now we are ripe for jihad, you also fall under the category of Medina. It is the understanding that you think Medina abrogates Mecca. So the prophet's activities, the prophet's teachings in Mecca, like an old testament and a new testament, are nullified by everything that happened in Medina.

So a Muslim who comes around and says "unto you your religion and unto me my religion" is invoking Mecca because Muhammed did say that in Mecca in the early days. A Muslim who says "absolutely not, it is my duty to convince you to be a Muslim by fair means or foul" is invoking Muhammed in Medina.

That tells us — in trying to design deradicalisation programs and in trying to understand what this is all about — that Mohammed is in the front and centre of it. We will never be able to address this issue without going to the founder of the faith. You will never be able to understand Marxism or Communism and how that all worked out if you don't study the works of Karl Marx.

So that takes us to Mohammed and his actions and his sayings. To go back to that other classification, for me, Mecca is about a spectrum of people who may or may not be steeped in their faith. The ones who are, and are informed about the Koran and the Hadith and all the scholarship and all the centuries that happened after, and who decide consciously to cite only Mecca and read Medina in context… I describe them as Mecca Muslims.

But I also group with them, within that umbrella what I would just call the normal individual Muslims who are really just going about their daily lives, not really that well informed. I used to take my mother and my grandmother as examples: very pious Muslims, who have taught me never to question the Koran, or Mohammed. But both of them cannot read or write and that applies to millions and millions of Muslims, and they do not use religion as a tool to justify political sympathies, empathies or activities. They just go about their daily lives. They identify as Muslims and I think it would be wise to put them under that umbrella of Mecca.

Now there is an interesting new group that also sees religion as a core and are informed about Mohammed's life, his biography, about the Koran and about the scholarship afterwards. They consciously reject some of Mohammed's conduct, in fact most of it, in Medina.

These are the 'modifiers'. That is a new group. I don't know how big they are. Many of them are in fact ex-Muslims because there always comes that time when you have to ask yourself "do I submit completely to Allah or do I argue with Allah?" And if you find yourself arguing with Allah, if you find yourself arguing with Mohammed's morality, then very quickly you are told you are a heretic, you are a kafir, an infidel and there is this whole apostasy.

So take these three sets of Muslims. Each of them a spectrum, none of them discrete. I know Medina Muslims who have become ex-Muslims. I know of Mecca Muslims who have become Medina Muslims — and in fact that is the largest trend, Mecca Muslims becoming Medina Muslims and that is the most alarming trend that I see.

So taking these three sets of Muslims: who would you engage in programs designed to persuade Medina adherents to abandon or abrogate Medina? Who would you engage? You would engage the modifiers, you would find the modifiers — and the good news is these modifiers are there. Right now they are marginalised and they simply are not seen as important enough or a large enough group to be engaged in change. But more importantly, if you say there is a threat, from which umbrella does the threat come? It comes from that Medina group, the ones engaged in da'wah all the way to the ones engaged in jihad. So if we only focus on the jihad aspects of it, you are not addressing what comes before the process that leads to the violence.

In that Medina category, even more interestingly, what are we talking about? Are we talking about only individuals, loose individuals who are running around radicalising the Mecca Muslims? Are we talking about organisations and movements? Are we talking about nation states? And when I describe the organisation of Islamic cooperation countries what I want to show is that you see all three. You have the Organisation of Islamic Co-operation countries, made up of nation states that are devoting the resources of the state to da'wah. Establishing mosques, Muslim centres, and in fact expressly saying "we are dedicated to the Islamisation first of the societies, and later to the world at large".

The Organisation of Islamic Co-operation was established in 1969 and the heads of state meet once every three years. The ministers of

foreign affairs or the secretaries of state meet once every year and these meetings are about 'how far have we come in our da'wah activities and in our da'wah project, and what should we do next?'

When you hear the term Islamaphobia, it was coined in Saudi Arabia. In trying to establish or practise da'wah in non-Muslim countries, all the da'wah handbooks tell you that before you engage in da'wah you have to understand the culture and the norms of the society that you are trying to Islamise.

So in western society, if I am engaged in a project of da'wah I understand all of their sensibilities. I also understand all of the opportunities, the freedom of speech, the freedom of religion, the freedom of assembly etc. So from a nation state — and in fact in some ways a super nation state because that is the Organisation of Islamic Co-operation — they have penetrated western societies, have understood where the opportunities lie, and the sensibilities that you can take advantage of.

See Islamaphobia in that sense. Islamaphobia is a tool that is not used outside of the west. It is used only in the west because in the west we have declared racism an evil and we actively fight to root it out. We've declared homophobia an evil and we seek to actively root it out. Anti-Semitism is another one.

So if you then bring in any critical review of Islam and you place it under the name or label Islamaphobia you are exploiting the west's sensibilities to race — but instead of race you are now talking about something else. And unfortunately it sticks; they are successful because the resources are there to do it.

That's not only what the states are doing. They are also establishing an infrastructure inside the west of mosques, Islamic centres — what I call channels of socialisation — to first claim those people who identify as Muslim, mostly Mecca because at first their identity is more with their ethnicity or their national heritage than it is with Islam.

They seek them out, draw them to these mosques and other infrastructure and then try and persuade them to understand what Islam really is. And what Islam really is, unreformed, is that Medina abrogates Mecca. So there you go: Medina Muslims as powerful nation states that are using the tools of state.

Then you have independent or semi-independent movements. In Australia you have Hizbut Tahrir, in the United States we have the International Muslim Brotherhood. All over Europe there are other Sunni groups and Shi'ite groups but they are all these non-governmental movements and organisations that are also actively engaged in da'wah.

Then you have the individuals. Not free-floating individuals, but individuals who at some point — because they go to mosque, or because their parents tell them, or maybe because the tide or mood is shifting from secularism to seeking religious faith — who go to these institutions and then adopt the Medina world view. Religion is front and centre, Medina is front and centre. We will not be able to address this problem adequately unless we understand that we are not talking about disenchanted and disenfranchised individuals who fall into a sudden or spontaneous jihad syndrome. It is all tied together. You have to see the state, the non-governmental movements and the individuals.

In my John Bonython Lecture in Melbourne, I discussed with (CIS Executive Director) Greg Lindsay that the problem for us in liberal societies is how we can safeguard these institutions we have — the basic fundamentals of liberty, the freedom of speech, the freedom of religion, the freedom of schools for parents to educate their children as they like, the freedom of assembly. How can we safeguard all these fundamentals and yet address this three-layered process of Islamisation, not just focus on jihad?

Deradicalisation and the community

Tanveer Ahmed

There is very little deradicalisation that occurs in Australia. By that I mean: if we take the meaning of deradicalisation to be the actual changing of a set of ideas, this is not the priority of our security or community services. This is not a controversial position, as it is line with much of the Western world. For example, in Denmark, deradicalisation is sometimes referred to as 'after care' — a euphemism for the treatment of would-be terrorists post incarceration.

The focus of the Danish policy is very much about providing possible education, employment or welfare services in order to provide a possible path to social and occupational integration. Of course, the idea underlying this is that radicalisation is primarily caused by the lack of such integration — which is true in some cases, but not all.

Likewise in France, there are programs resembling Alcoholics Anonymous group therapy classes where former extremists are placed face to face with potential or emerging radicals. The focus, once again, is not necessarily to change their underlying ideological views — such as whether it is appropriate to kill unbelievers or fight for the Caliphate — but more to illustrate the futility of making such attempts through travelling to Syria and taking up arms with Islamic State.

My dealings with deradicalisation have occurred through psychiatrically assessing clients in jail, referred to me via lawyers. They are rarely would be terrorists, but are often referred if their crimes or their potential for violent acts overlap with some kind of religious thinking.

For example, one such client was involved in a brawl that was primarily over money owed from an acquaintance, but during the assault he referred disparagingly to the victim's Shia Muslim

background. Given this had the potential to worsen further to more specifically targeted religious based violence, he was referred to a deradicalisation program.

Another client, who had prior dealings with mental health services, was in jail for drug related crimes tied to bikie gangs, but while incarcerated he identified more and more strongly to a group of men sprouting anti-Christian sentiment. For those of you who have visited jails, you will know that it can be a very primitive environment where inmates disperse into often ethnically based tribes, be it the Arabs, Islanders, Aborigines and the like. Because of this man's history of violence and growing anti-Christian sentiment, he was also referred to a deradicalisation program.

Part of my role is to outline a treatment plan for magistrates, including what might occur in such a deradicalisation plan. The reality is that the only part of the plan that has any overlaps with actual deradicalisation is meeting with imams either based in prisons or within the community. They may then spend some time looking over phrases or passages in the Koran that appear to encourage violence towards other faiths and the imam will hope to give the passages greater context or show him other passages that may contradict or refute such notions. The hope is that the imam will show the person the error of their ways.

More aggressive deradicalisation does occur in others part of the world, particularly the non-Western world in countries like Yemen, Saudi Arabia and Yemen. As outlined in a 2013 paper in the Salus journal by social scientist Jason Leigh Streigher, there is also evidence some programs in such countries have discouraged acts of violence within Muslim countries such as their own, but suggested it may be acceptable elsewhere.

A key tension within deradicalisation debates is whether it is enough to affect disengagement, which is when the person may retain their political ideas — such as the inevitability of an Islamic super state for example — but they no longer believe in violence as the means to make it happen. The experience from groups such as the Guantanamo Bay detainees for example, where many returned to extremist violence after release, suggests there is a significant risk

of returning to radicalisation if there is scant focus on changing the ideological mindset.

However, this view is at odds with what is regarded as one of the most successful deradicalisation programs in history.

In the 1970s, as Yasser Arafat was looking for greater traction as a serious leader of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation and not merely as an activist from the sidelines, he was faced with the challenge of how to defuse his most effective members. The Black September Organisation was the PLO's most violent wing, entrusted to undertake the most vicious, murderous tasks varying from assassinations to torture to hijackings. The members of the group were renowned as unquestioning devotees utterly committed to the cause of Palestine.

With the help of his most trusted deputy, Abu Iyad, Arafat introduced each of the Black Septembers to the most beautiful women they could find and paid them several thousand dollars to marry. He offered further funds to incentivise them to have children and even undertook a real estate search through the prestige properties of Beirut and elsewhere to live. The result was the switching off of some of the most militant terrorists in the world. This is the policy of disengagement, designed to sap would be radicals from desire to undertake violence.

There are unlikely to be any such programs facilitating Islamic State wannabe's access to supermodels or prestige real estate, say in Sydney's Eastern Suburbs for example, but the principles remain an inspiration, although at this stage there is little outcomes measurement taking place, in spite of tens of millions dollars allocated to deradicalisation programs. It is not unreasonable to trial a variety of programs in what is the infancy of an idea, much like fund managers diversify risk, but there must also be an attempt to undertake short and medium term measurement of the results.

The challenge of deradicalisation stems in part from the wide variety of paths to radicalization, varying from the anti-social criminal who either converts or rediscovers a lust for Islam or the socially awkward adolescent who channels his need for identity and belonging through intense religiosity before becoming radicalized.

Notably, the first category is far and away the dominant category in Australia. There have been virtually no terrorists in Australia derived from a 'skilled migrant' Muslim background — a marker of Australia's success in integrating new arrivals. In particular, when you consider that terrorism is primarily a conflation of psychological resentment with a political one, Australia's success is evidence that once people have the skills to participate in the economy and rise up the social ladder, any psychological resentment in being an outsider is rapidly snuffed out. This is not necessarily the case in other Western countries, where highly educated migrants such as computer programmer Jihadi John or university students the Tsarnaev brothers, undertook attacks. Australia's recruits have largely been from refugee derived populations.

The initial trends from skilled Muslim families mirror those of other Western countries in that within adolescence — fuelled by a sense of unbelonging and inability to participate in mainstream social life — they assert identity through a version of Islam stronger in outward markers such as beards and hijabs. Their parents don't understand that their children are in fact rebelling from the Islamic practice of their ancestral lands, believing them to be stained from traditional cultural practices.

Instead they dissect the scripture in search of a perceived authenticity free of any cultural stain. This also makes Western-raised Muslims feel stronger ties to the notion of the 'ummah' or global community of Muslims and trends of grievance politics — a trait that may also sensitise them to stronger emotions or connections to say Palestinian suffering for example.

Nor is deradicalisation the same as radicalisation backwards. As a 2011 Rand Corporation paper "Deradicalising Islamic Extremists" clearly outlines, the path to radicalisation is better understood than its untangling. There is an emotional component in combination with an ideological one, and the targeting of any unwinding can occur through either domain. For example, if a sense of tribal identity is the key need being met for a would-be terrorist, authorities may work towards helping them form a new such outlet. Likewise the romanticized notion of an Islamic caliphate can be challenged by

former fighters who are able to give a more realistic appraisal based one experience.

The current focus on deradicalisation is still based on a 'bad apple' hypothesis of terrorism in that it understates the importance of non-violent extremism present in Muslim communities. Those with radical views are able to swim freely within such a community and is why activists such as Britain's Maajid Nawaz have often called the fight against Islamic terrorism more of a counterinsurgency operation — in that the perpetrators live in communities where there is considerable sympathy for the ideological beliefs, if not the methods. Attempts to counter this non-violent extremism, illustrated by groups such as Hizb-ut-Tahrir for example, have been difficult politically, for they open any government to widespread criticism and accusations of Islamophobia.

A case in point are the relatively mild attempts by former leader Tony Abbott to suggest the Muslim community needed to take some responsibility for extremists in their midst, an assertion that was met with aggressive derision from both the Muslim community and their supporters in the press and academia.

This kind of defensiveness aims to foster what my fellow speaker has derisively called "sudden jihadi syndrome" which is patently false and imagines the marketing of groups like Islamic State as among the most sophisticated in marketing history. The truth is that many of those who are radicalised are like low hanging fruit who have been exposed to ideas not dissimilar to Islamist ideology all their lives.

The foundation that makes many Muslims ripe for radicalisation occurs within families and communities amid self segregation, denigration of Western social freedoms, anti-Semitism and acute sensitivity to criticism. The defensiveness encourages community leaders to project any criticism, however constructive, into accusations of racism and discrimination.

However, I think there have been some areas of genuine progress within the Muslim community. For example, the most recent arrest of the Lebanese teenager for suspected planning of attacks on Anzac Day involved close involvement of family members with security services.

Now, the complete failure of deradicalisation services to modify the man's behavior is worrying — but the greater suspicion of family members is reassuring.

In my own experience, there is a greater scrutiny and sometimes concern if members of the community become unusually religious, particularly if this occurs rapidly. This is appropriate, as it can be a marker of emerging radicalisation and also underlying psychic distress transmitted in a certain cultural environment. It is the equivalent of a public health message within the Muslim community. In the past, this kind of religiosity would have been seen as entirely positive and as a way to protect oneself from the potential corruption of Western social freedoms.

The experiment of deradicalisation remains in its infancy and is but just one arm in a much bigger fight against Islamist terrorism. The success of programs is so far limited, and measurement of outcomes is virtually non-existent. With terrorism recruits and potential attackers continuing to emerge regularly, the need to find effective strategies is urgent.

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Defeating violent Islamic extremism has been a high priority for all western countries, including Australia, since the 9/11 attacks in 2001. However, the threat we face doesn't so much come from zealots flying planes into buildings as from young people barely out of childhood and who have their entire lives before them. Altering any kind of ideological belief—whether religious or political—is very difficult. Once we get into our heads ideas about the difference between good and evil, right and wrong or innocent and guilty, they can be hard to dislodge. To do so requires more than a government program. De-radicalisation has been dismissed by some as a pseudo-science—designed more for our own benefit to help us deal with a phenomenon most of us simply do not understand. De-radicalisation programs are unlikely to be completely successful. They may well do some good although they will not magically fix the threat of radicalised youths without us having to do anything more. The threat of radicalised youths is likely to confront our society for some time to come. This collection of essays looks at what more we must do and asks whether the beliefs that feed terrorism can be changed.