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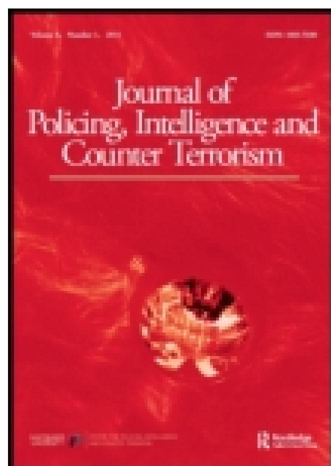

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'Counter-Ideological' Work in Singapore: A Preliminary Assessment

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‘Counter-Ideological’ Work in Singapore: A Preliminary Assessment[1]

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to describe and provide a preliminary assessment of the ‘counter-ideological’ work of Singapore’s all-volunteer Religious Rehabilitation Group (RRG), which was formed by several of Singapore’s leading Muslim community leaders in the wake of the discovery of the Al Qaeda-linked and inspired Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) terrorist network in the city-state at the end of 2001. The paper sheds light on the various challenges faced by the RRG in attempting to neutralise the ability of the virulent JI narrative to influence Singaporean JI members as well as the city-state’s wider Muslim public. In essence, it shows that while the counter-ideological efforts to date of the RRG have not been without effect, scope exists for further enhancing counter-ideological work through the judicious and calibrated employment of specially selected ex-JI detainees.

Introduction

In December 2001, the Singaporean Internal Security Department (ISD) arrested 13 Singaporean Muslim militants of a previously-unknown, Al Qaeda-linked terrorist network called Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) and disrupted a plot to mount six suicide truck bomb attacks on US, British, Australian, and Israeli diplomatic missions, US naval facilities as well as commercial buildings housing US entities (Singapore JI White Paper, 2003, pp. 26-7). A second major ISD swoop in September 2002 resulted in the arrests of 18 more persons, 17 of whom were confirmed to be current or former JI members, as well as one individual who was in fact a member of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in the southern Philippines. The second JI group had been conducting surveillance of Singapore’s Changi Airport as well as key water pipelines (ibid, p. 26). Over the following months more facts emerged: the original aim of JI leaders, who had emerged from the older Darul Islam (DI) separatist movement in Java, was to set up an Islamic State in Indonesia. However, following the participation

1 This article is a revised and expanded version of the author’s (2009). A holistic critique of Singapore’s counter-ideological program, *CTC Sentinel*, 2(1), 8-11.

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of some Indonesian JI fighters in the campaign against the occupying Soviet forces in Afghanistan in the 1980s and the ensuing contact with militants who later formed Al Qaeda, a more global *jihad* orientation was crystallised. Thus senior JI leaders, especially after splitting from the old DI movement in January 1993, began setting their sights higher. They now sought, through armed *jihad*, to create a Southeast Asian Caliphate as part of the wider Al Qaeda vision, however fanciful, of restoring the old global Islamic Caliphate running from Morocco to Mindanao (ibid, p. 6; Hammond, 2006).

This transnational outlook of the Indonesian-based JI leadership led it to set up regional commands, or *mantiqi*, governing the operations of cells in different Southeast Asian countries, including Singapore (Singapore JI White Paper, 2003, p. 10). Following the failed Singapore plot of December 2001, JI regrouped and struck again, this time all too successfully, on the Indonesian tourist island of Bali on October 12, 2002. The JI suicide attack on two popular nightspots frequented by Western tourists, the Sari Club and Paddy's Bar, killed 202 people, mainly Australian tourists. The Bali attack demonstrated JI's resolve in pursuing its deadly agenda (Ramakrishna & Tan, 2003, p. 1). This was not lost on Singaporean authorities and Muslim community leaders, who by 2002 had already understood the need to find ways of neutralising the dangerous JI ideology that seemed so seductive to some Muslims in Singapore and the region.

This paper aims to describe and provide a preliminary assessment of the 'counter-ideological' approach that was ultimately devised by Singaporean Muslim community leaders to challenge the JI narrative - and hence undercut its ability to influence Singaporean JI members as well as the city-state's wider Muslim public. In essence, the paper shows that the counter-ideological efforts to date of Singaporean mainstream Muslim scholars have not been without effect. Nevertheless, scope probably exists for further enhancing counter-ideological work through the judicious and calibrated employment of specially selected ex-JI detainees.

The rest of this paper will be divided into four sections. The next section situates the analysis by sketching out the wider historical, geopolitical and socio-cultural milieu within which Singapore's Muslim community, from which the JI detainees have emerged, is embedded. The following section tightens the analytical focus on what is known publicly about the backgrounds of the Singapore JI detainees to better understand their aims and motivations. Against this backdrop, the origins and evolution of the Singaporean counter-ideological program is then analysed. Finally, a holistic, if admittedly preliminary, assessment of the entire program to date is attempted.

The Singapore Muslim community in perspective

The former British colony of Singapore, a regional financial and manufacturing hub heavily dependent on global trade and open markets, is home to a population of 4.6 million people, one million of whom are expatriates. Ethnic Chinese form more

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than three-quarters of the population. Ethnic Malays, who are virtually all Muslims, comprise 13.7 percent of the population. Ethnic Indians comprise about 8.4 percent of the population. English is the language of administration, while Malay, Chinese, and Tamil are all official languages. In addition, Christianity, Buddhism, Taoism, Hinduism and of course Islam are all officially recognised and constitutionally protected faiths. The practical necessity from the 14th century C.E. onward, of expediting commercial transactions within and beyond the bustling, cosmopolitan Malay trading world, as well as the powerful appeal of the mystical Sufism of south Indian Muslim traders, helped ensure that over the centuries Southeast Asian, including Singaporean, Islam developed a moderate and highly tolerant hue (McAmis, 2002, pp. 41-50 & 63-4). To be sure, the waves of Islamic revivalism that swept through Southeast Asia from the 1980s onward resulted in noticeably increased personal piety levels amongst Muslims throughout the region (Azra, 2003, pp 40-1). Nevertheless, significant numbers of Singaporean Muslims, even if more religiously observant, have nevertheless remained politically and socially moderate in being willing to practice their faith within the multi-cultural, secular democratic political framework in Singapore. In Singapore, as in the rest of the Malay world throughout Southeast Asia, to be ethnic Malay is largely to be of the Muslim faith as well (McAmis, 2002, p. 47). In addition, while most ethnic Indians in Singapore are Hindus, a significant minority are Muslims.

That said, the Singapore government, acutely conscious of Singapore's status as a Chinese-majority city-state located smack in the middle of an at-times unstable Malay/Muslim archipelago, as well as how racial and religious tensions have exploded into domestic violence in the past, has always been interventionist in the religious sphere. In particular, the 1950 religiously-motivated Maria Hertogh riots; the 1955 Communist-inspired Hock Lee riots and the 1964 violence between Malay/Muslims and Chinese, have all been said to have had a profound effect in shaping Singapore leaders' assumptions about the need for a firm hand in dealing with internal matters of race and religion. Hence, apart from introducing legislation aimed at tackling threats to racial and religious harmony, such as the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, 2004), the government has kept an eye on the regulation of Muslim socio-cultural and educational affairs in Singapore, through the Islamic Religious Council or MUIS (Majlis Ulama Islam Singapura), a statutory board formed in 1968. Amongst other things, MUIS oversees the sermons in the 70 Singapore mosques serving Singapore's half a million Muslims (http://www.muis.gov.sg/cms/aboutus/default.aspx; see also Kong, 2007). Balancing somewhat this careful official oversight of Muslim affairs is an independent Muslim civil society presence: the Association of Muslim Professionals (AMP), representing the secular Muslim professional class; the Association of Adult Religious Class Students (Perdaus); and, perhaps most significantly for the purposes of our analysis, Pergas, the Singapore Islamic Scholars and Religious Teachers Association and the religious leaders of the most influential mosque in Singapore, the Khadijah mosque.

To be sure, the Singaporean Muslim community has had to cope, long before the September 11 2001 attacks in the US and the emergence of the JI threat, with a sense

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of generalised angst. Part of this is due to a number of long-running localised factors. First, Singapore's Malay Muslims have always felt a certain natural kinship with their brethren in the wider Malay/Muslim world – particularly Malaysia and Indonesia – and resented the ensuing suspicions toward them of the Chinese majority as well as the government, which has long been keen on promoting an overarching, multi-racial Singaporean national identity (Kahn, 2006, p. 82). Local Muslims feel that such latent official distrust explains a number of policies that have appeared to go against the interests of the community over the years: first, the perceived lack of representation of proportionate numbers of Muslims in sensitive appointments in the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) (see Mamat, 277; Yong, 2009); the decision by the government to introduce compulsory national education for all children of primary school age, thereby impacting Muslim religious school (*madrasah*) education; more recently, the ban of the wearing of headscarves or *tudung* by Muslim schoolgirls attending national schools; and finally, the penchant of a number of employers in Singapore to require Mandarin proficiency as a job requirement, something which some Muslims feel unhappy about (Interview with Muhammad Haniff Bin Hassan, October 25, 2007[2]). Second, the Muslim community has tended to lag behind the Chinese and Indian communities in terms of educational and economic attainment, as well as living standards, although the gap began to close with the setting up with government support of MENDAKI or the Council for the Development of the Singapore Muslim Community in the 1980s (at http://www.mendaki.org.sg/content_files/Milestones.htm). Till today, however, there remain generalised sentiments amongst a number of Muslims that they have to put up with a sort of unwarranted "least favorite child" existence within the country (Suhaimi, 2008), although Chinese-majority Singapore itself represents a minority within a wider Malay/Muslim world.

Reinforcing all this latent resentment are geopolitical factors. While the global Islamic revival since the 1980s did have an impact on the overall piety levels of many local Muslims, this never fully translated into a more pronounced consciousness of the transnational unity of the global Muslim community or *ummah*. There existed, however, a certain long-running muted resentment toward Israel for its occupation of the Palestinian territories and the US for its support of Tel Aviv (Interview with Muhammad Haniff Bin Hassan, October 25, 2007). However, the Bush administration's war on terrorism after the September 11 2001 attacks and in particular, the ill-conceived 2003 Iraq invasion has intensified local Muslim unhappiness with US foreign policy missteps and generated a more acute awareness on the part of the average Singaporean Muslim of his wider, transnational Islamic identity. These factors taken together help explain why the emergence of JI at the end of 2001 was met initially by a sense of skepticism within the Muslim community. There were dark murmurings in some quarters of a Singapore government "conspiracy" to undermine the image of Islam in the country (Interview with Mohamed Bin Ali, October 25, 2007[3]). Government ministers had to meet Muslim community leaders

2 Muhammad Haniff Bin Hassan (2006) is a trained Islamic scholar who is engaged in counter-ideological work in Singapore.

3 Mohamed Bin Ali, a trained Islamic scholar, has been personally involved in counseling JI detainees as part of the Religious Rehabilitation Group (RRG).

behind closed doors to assure them that the Singapore JI "arrests were not targeted against the Singapore Muslim community or Islam" (Tong, 2004). All notions of an official conspiracy were quickly dispelled however, when two respected independent Muslim religious leaders, Ustaz Haji Ali Haji Mohamed, Chairman of the Khadijah Mosque and Ustaz Haji Muhammad Hasbi Hassan, President of Pergas, were invited by ISD to talk face-to-face to the JI detainees in 2002. Both *asatizah* (plural for *ustaz* or religious teacher), on talking to the detainees, came away persuaded that not only was JI an all-too-real entity and not some government invention, they were very worried about the dangerous ideology that had been sketched out for them firsthand by the JI detainees themselves (Ali interview).

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The Singapore Jemaah Islamiyah detainees: A snapshot

It should be noted that in Singapore, access to the JI detainees is heavily restricted. Hence much of the information about them is available mainly from press reports, official government statements and certain religious clerics with access to them as part of the Religious Rehabilitation Group (RRG), to be discussed below. Of particular importance to researchers is the *Singapore Ministry of Home Affairs White Paper* that was released on January 7, 2003 and provides much valuable and authoritative information about the JI network in Singapore and Southeast Asia. At the time the White Paper was being prepared in 2002, 31 JI detainees, largely Malay but including a small number of Indian Muslims as well, were in custody (Singapore JI White Paper, 2003, p. 15). From a close reading of the White Paper, some idea of the typical background of the average JI detainee can be discerned. As the Paper notes, these men were "not ignorant, destitute or disenfranchised outcasts", and held "normal, respectable jobs" (ibid). The range of occupations was very diverse, running the gamut from businessmen, managers, engineers and project coordinators, to more blue-collar jobs such as technicians, delivery men, dispatch clerks, canteen operators, drivers, used-car salesmen, a butcher, and even a part-time foot reflexologist. A number were unemployed at the time of their arrests (Singapore Government Press Statement on ISA Arrests, 2004; Singapore Government Press Statement on Further Arrests under the Internal Security Act, 2002). Most detainees had received a secular education (although one had obtained an Islamic Studies degree in Malaysia) (Singapore JI White Paper, 2003, p. 15).

To be sure, according to knowledgeable religious clerics, some of whom have been in direct contact with the detainees, several of the latter (like some in the wider Muslim community in Singapore) had been unhappy about certain policies and practices that appeared to be discriminatory. These included *inter alia*, the government ban on the wearing of the *tudung* by Muslim schoolgirls in national schools and the compulsory education policy mentioned earlier (Haniff interview; Ali interview). Moreover, perhaps to a much more marked extent than the average Singaporean Muslim, the detainees possessed what one informant considered a "feeling of hatred toward America" and had been upset with the Singapore government for allying too closely with the US (ibid). However, these issues were not decisive elements but

were rather "cumulative" and "links in a chain" of factors leading to the eventual radicalization of the detainees (ibid). On closer analysis, it seems that what held these varied individuals together in a common trajectory toward radicalization was a desire for "spiritual revival". Not particularly well-versed in the fundamentals of Islam, the majority of the JI detainees were seeking to atone for past sins and wished to 'turn over a new leaf'. This led them to seek out religious teachers who would guide them in the right path. This is how they came into contact with the Singapore JI leaders who "presented an extremist interpretation of Islam imbibed from Afghanistan that included a strong, anti-American, jihadist streak" (Ramakrishna, 2002). Moreover, the atrocity propaganda employed by JI ideologues depicting graphic Muslim civilian casualties in the conflicts against non-Muslim forces in Palestine, Bosnia, Chechnya, and Ambon and Poso in eastern Indonesia had a powerful effect as well (Haniff interview; Ali interview). The detainees, given their pre-existing resentment found it a natural step to buy into the compelling JI worldview. They withdrew from the mainstream Singaporean Muslim community and re-construed themselves as members of an exclusive, secret Islamic vanguard, unafraid to wage armed *jihad* against apostate governments and other infidels and establish the 'true' Islam in Singapore and the region (Ramakrishna, 2002; Singapore JI White Paper, 2003, pp. 15-17). Hence on interrogation the detainees articulated the view that they had in fact regarded themselves as "doing good" and engaged in "*jihad*" for the righteous cause of setting up an "Islamic State" (Ali interview).

The Singapore counter-ideological program

Following the realisation by Ustaz Ali, the Chairman of the Khadijah Mosque and Ustaz Hasbi, the President of Pergas, that the JI threat was real, they gathered together other Muslim scholars to discuss ways and means of correcting the virulent, adversarial worldview of the JI detainees through a counter-ideological approach. There was apparently no blueprint at that point to refer to and everything had to be done from scratch (ibid). At any rate, the Religious Rehabilitation Group (RRG), an unpaid, all-volunteer grouping of Islamic scholars and teachers serving in their personal capacities was formed quietly by both *asatizah* by April 2003. RRG counselors possessed formal Islamic educational credentials from both local *madrasahs* as well as respected foreign institutions such as Al Azhar University in Cairo, the Islamic University of Medina in Saudi Arabia and the International Islamic University in Malaysia (Hassan, 2007, p. 157). In addition, the RRG counselors, who were a mix of younger and older scholars and clerics, were put through a seven-month diploma course in counseling skills to supplement their religious knowledge. It was felt that such formal training in counseling skills was essential, as conducting one-to-one counseling with a detainee was quite different from speaking in a mosque with 200 people listening (Ali interview). By January 2004, the RRG boasted 16 male and five female counselors (Hassan, 2007, p. 152). By April, a full year after the formation of the RRG, and armed with a Religious Rehabilitation or so-called "*Jihad* Manual" to alert each RRG counselor to JI ideological deviations

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from Islamic teaching, the actual counseling sessions with the JI detainees began in earnest. Typically, one RRG counselor worked in a three-man team assigned to each detainee. The other two members of the team included an ISD case officer and a Home Affairs Ministry psychologist. The RRG counselor confined himself solely to religious matters, though he was kept informed by the case officer on other issues pertaining to the detainee's state of mind and relevant personal circumstances. JI detainees were never jointly counseled and they were kept apart from one another in detention (ibid; Ali interview).

Initially the RRG counselors were viewed with great suspicion by the JI detainees, who were abusive and called them *munafiq* (hypocrites) and "puppets of the government" (Ali interview). Over time, the RRG counselors confirmed for themselves that most of the JI detainees, despite outward appearances, possessed a very superficial understanding of Islamic jurisprudence, and had a very narrow understanding of *jihad*. Whatever little knowledge of Islam they had came not from a formal Islamic education in a *madrasah* but relatively simple and basic ad hoc part-time classes organised by the likes of Pergas and Perdaus (ibid). This rudimentary, fragmented knowledge had made them easy prey for determined JI ideologues. In fact, it became clear that a number of simplistic and overly literal JI ideological themes needed "extricating" and "negating" from detainee minds, as the RRG likes to put it (Ali, no date). These were: the notion that Muslims must hate and disassociate themselves from non-Muslims and Westerners; that *jihad* only means perpetual warfare against infidels; that the *bai'ah* or oath to the JI leadership was inviolable; that martyrdom through suicide operations was to be sought after and celestial virgins awaited them in the afterlife; and that Muslims can practice an authentic faith only within an Islamic State (ibid; Hassan, 2007, p. 154). Between April 2004 and September 2006, the RRG conducted more than 500 counseling sessions with the JI detainees. While the 'hard core' detainees, such as Singapore JI spiritual leader Ibrahim Maidin and others "deeply involved in the movement for more than a decade", apparently remain unmoved by RRG counseling efforts, other detainees, between six months to a year after the RRG sessions began, evinced discernible changes in beliefs and behavior (Ali, no date). These were, according to RRG assessments, typically the "normal members" who were "not really serious" but had decided to take the *bai'ah* or oath of allegiance to the JI leaders because their friends asked them to. They eventually showed remorse for their involvement with JI, were "receptive" of RRG efforts to instill in them more balanced Islamic teachings and were appreciative of government efforts to rehabilitate rather than prosecute them outright. Some of these detainees were later released on Restriction Orders (ROs) but were still required to attend mandatory counseling with the RRG to prevent theological backsliding (Ali interview). The existence of the RRG was made public by the Singapore government in October 2005 (Hassan, 2007, p. 153). RRG members also began to venture abroad, paying study visits to Saudi Arabia and Egypt to pick up ideas from rehabilitation programs in those countries (Hassan interview).

By 2005, RRG counselors had begun shifting attention to the families of the detainees as it was understood that the spouses of the detainees were likely either

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radicalized themselves, due to exposure to their husbands' ideas, or confused and vulnerable to radicalization. The RRG thus dispatched female counselors to talk to detainee spouses who were willing to voluntarily subject themselves to counseling (Ali, interview; Ali, no date). RRG family counseling efforts in this respect were greatly aided by the formation of the Interagency-After Care Group (ACG), which focused "on the welfare of the families of detainees" (Yong, 2007). The ACG was initiated in 2002 by five groups: the aforementioned MENDAKI and AMP, as well as the voluntary organisation Taman Bacaan, the Khadijah Mosque and En Naeem Mosque (Hassan, 2007, pp. 156-7). The ACG gradually overcame the initial suspicions of detainee spouses in very practical ways, for example, by providing financial assistance as the "detainees were all sole breadwinners and the families" who needed "financial support to stay on their feet" (Nirmala, 2007, pp. 161-65). The ACG helped the wives find work as "clerks, cleaners and other blue-collar jobs", taught them to read "utility bills or pay property taxes", and importantly, ensured that the education of the detainees' children continued uninterrupted, through various means such as enrolling them in tuition programs, securing school fee waivers and providing pocket money. Also since 2005, the RRG has expanded its efforts to mitigate religious extremism in the wider Muslim community through public talks, forums, publications and the setting up of a website. The RRG website serves as a useful tool for public education as it provides readers access to a wide range of scholarly publications, news articles and media interviews that focus on effective responses to extremism (Hassan, 2007, p. 156). The ultimate aim of the RRG website is to help "immunise" the wider Singaporean Muslim community against JI or similarly violent radical Islamist ideologies (Ali interview).

A preliminary assessment

How should one evaluate the relatively novel counter-ideological work in Singapore in general, and the efforts of the RRG in particular? Those involved with the program argue strongly that the RRG is essential, as there is a pressing need for an organised counter-ideological capability to attack the very dangerous Al Qaeda ideology that seduced the JI detainees and threatens to do the same to their families and elements within the wider Singaporean Muslim community (ibid). There is also some empirical evidence of the effectiveness of the RRG approach. Some sources indicate that in the six years since 2002, 73 individuals have been detained for terrorism-related activity (Beyond T0errorism, 2008, p. 8). As of September 2008, however, only 23 detainees remained incarcerated while 41 had been released, albeit on Restriction Orders (Husain, 2008). Other observers point to the lack of "JI activity" in Singapore since the major ISD swoops in 2001 and 2002 (Haniff interview). The renowned terrorism expert Rohan Gunaratna has declared that Singapore's detainee rehabilitation program is "working" and that the rate of recidivism has been exceptionally low" (Husain, 2008). Nevertheless, there remain a number of issues worth flagging. The fact remains that to date the RRG and its government partners have yet to come up with a set of objective, standardised metrics

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to determine with greater rigor the extent to which an individual detainee has been genuinely rehabilitated. The process is still, perhaps unavoidably, largely subjective, and depends on a joint risk assessment by the RRG counselor, ISD case officer and the psychologist in attendance (Haniff interview).

Then there is the complex issue of assessing the extent to which the RRG's counter-ideological work is effective in 'immunising' detainee families and the wider Singaporean Muslim community against the 'us-versus-them' ideological narratives promoted by the likes of Al Qaeda and JI. To be sure, the government has tried to foster closer ties between Muslims and non-Muslims so as to ensure that a sufficiently robust social resilience exists to weather the fall-out of an actual terrorist strike. It has done so through such instruments as the Community Engagement Program (CEP) and Inter-Racial Confidence Circles and Harmony Circles in neighborhoods, the workplace and schools (Hassan & Pereire, 2006, p. 464). Despite these commendable efforts, however, a residual conspiracy mindset still afflicts elements of the Muslim community in Singapore, much like in neighboring Malaysia and Indonesia (Haniff interview). This is because despite all the genuinely innovative work of the RRG, the underlying, generalised angst of the Singaporean Muslim community - the product of both historic grievances and contemporary resentment at US foreign policy and the Singapore government's pro-US stance - remains, forming a restrictive existential envelope within which RRG counter-ideological efforts must operate. This writer himself experienced the reality of this underlying angst manifested in the form of conspiracy mindset, when he was asked by a young Singaporean Muslim mosque leader in 2006 if 4,000 Jews had really escaped the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001 thanks to a tip-off by the Israeli Mossad. Moreover, while some local observers laud the attempts by Muslim community leaders to develop a uniquely "Singapore Muslim Identity" as one possible antidote to foreign extremist ideological appeals (Hassan & Pereire, 2006, p. 465), others question the move, warning that "Singapore Muslims and Islam in Singapore are inextricable from the wider Islamic world", and that if Singapore's Muslim leaders press too hard in redefining local Islam to expedite greater Muslim integration into mainstream Singapore society, "Singapore would likely isolate herself, and the flock, bewildered, might seek an overseas shepherd", including foreign "terrorists" (Alwi, 2008). Dealing with the underlying generalised angst of the Singaporean Muslim community requires generational change, and must involve attitudinal adjustments on the part of Muslims and non-Muslims alike, the Singapore authorities and businesses. Moreover, given that Singapore is highly wired through the Internet to the outside world, a much more politically calibrated US foreign policy toward the Muslim world would somehow have to be part of this change as well (Hassan & Pereire, 2006, pp. 469-70).

While the RRG itself may not be best-placed to deal with the structural challenge of the Singaporean Muslim community's historic generalised angst, all is not lost. Within these constraints, creative ways can be explored to further augment its impact. One potentially important approach in this regard could be to deploy ex-JI detainees to support RRG efforts in convincing the more sceptical elements of the wider Muslim community that the JI threat is real and no government conspiracy is

involved. Put bluntly, the "power to convince the public of the danger of JI ideology is greater if it comes from former JI members", and their participation would "greatly enhance the credibility of the RRG's substantive argument" (ibid, p. 474). This would by no means be a new departure in the Singaporean policy context either: during the Malayan Emergency from 1948-60, surrendered Communist Party of Malaya (CPM) guerrillas were extremely effective in warning the ordinary Chinese public against the dangers of falling prey to Communist propaganda (Ramakrishna, 2002, pp 107-110). Today, moreover, the Indonesian police have been making active use of so-called "reformed" Indonesian JI militants such as Nasir Abbas to undercut the network's recruitment efforts, with some tangible results - though it should be recognised that the ultimate longer term effectiveness of such an approach is still as yet unclear (Mydans, 2008; for a discussion of the limits of the Indonesian approach see Ramakrishna, 2009, pp. 172-9). In the final analysis though, as far as Singapore is concerned, while the RRG has clearly been doing sterling work and rightly deserves the recognition it has been receiving, there may yet be scope for further enhancing its overall impact, through the calibrated co-option of carefully selected ex-JI detainees for counter-ideological work.

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