

# The Way Forward

An Islamic Mentoring Guide to  
Building Identity and Resisting Radicalisation

*BIRR Initiative Research Team*

A decorative pattern of light blue geometric shapes, including stars and polygons, scattered across the bottom half of the page.

The Way Forward is an educational resource intended for youth, mentors, teachers and parents, as well as various service providers such as schools, government departments, police and community organisations.

The Way Forward was produced by the BIRR Initiative Research Team and published by Al Amanah College.

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AYAH<sup>1</sup> 2 OF SURAT<sup>2</sup> AL-MA'IDAH<sup>3</sup> IN THE QUR'AN MEANS –

“**COLLABORATE WITH ONE ANOTHER IN  
*BIRR* (VIRTUE) AND *TAQWA* (PIETY),  
AND DO NOT COLLABORATE IN  
SIN AND AGGRESSION.”**

---

1 VERSE

2 A SURAT IS A COLLECTION OF QURANIC VERSES SUCH AS A CHAPTER

3 NAME OF THE SURAT



# Contents

PREFACE.....	6
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	8
ACADEMIC ENDORSEMENTS .....	10
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....	13
INTRODUCTION.....	15
DEFINITION OF TERMS.....	18
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY .....	20
PARTS SUMMARY .....	22
PART 1 – <i>Vulnerability Factors to Extremism</i> .....	23
PART 2 – <i>The Theology of Extremism</i> .....	37
PART 3 – <i>The Radicalisation Model</i> .....	48
PART 4 – <i>Counter-Narratives to Extremism</i> .....	57
PART 5 – <i>Preventing Radicalisation in Practice</i> .....	83
APPENDIX 1.....	97
APPENDIX 2.....	98
APPENDIX 3.....	103
APPENDIX 4.....	111

# Preface

The *BIRR Initiative* is a pilot community project established in south-west Sydney. Initiated by *Al Amanah College* and funded by the *Department of Immigration and Citizenship*, the project is a response to recommendations proposed by the Muslim Community Reference Group (MCRG) and its subgroups for consideration in the development and implementation of the Australian Government's Nation Action Plan to Build on Social Cohesion, Harmony and Security.

*BIRR* is the acronym for Building Identity and Resisting Radicalisation. The word *birr*, which was mentioned in the verse above, is also the Arabic word for goodwill and virtue. Its choice as the name for this initiative symbolises the energy channelled towards assisting at-risk Muslim youth to discover their identity in an Australian context, and to enhance their capacity to build a positive Australian Muslim identity.

With leadership development being the cornerstone of the *BIRR Initiative*, our objective is to equip youth with the knowledge and skills – as derived from Islamic values and virtues – necessary to resist negative influences and social disengagement, such as extremist standpoints.

Counter-Radicalisation is a new area of government action and community activity, which presents particular challenges and ongoing complexities. It therefore warrants numerous innovative and exploratory approaches such as the groundbreaking *BIRR Initiative*.

The *BIRR Initiative* establishes a model for the ongoing development of whole-of-community approaches to confronting extremism and the radicalisation of young Muslim Australians. This is a very complex and sensitive field of

## Preface (cont.)

preventive intervention that considers the issues of religious identity, religious extremism, terrorism and counter-terrorism, religious and ethnic discrimination and marginalisation, social disadvantage, national citizenship and identity, globalisation, politics and identity, and governmental concerns about security. Given this level of complexity, the guidebook assists us all in navigating a path through this complex issue. It will assist us in more clearly defining our shared responsibilities in response to a multilayered and fluid problem.

The outcomes and ‘lessons learned’ of the *BIRR Initiative* should be used as inspiration for young mentors, community workers and organisations, religious leaders and family members concerned about the vulnerability factors that lead some Muslim youth towards a negative path of extremism and radicalisation in the name of Islam. However, in utilising the research and approach articulated by this book, one must recognise that the *BIRR Initiative* is the first of its kind in Australia and its outcomes are based on the community consulted, which is in south-west Sydney.

It is very clear that this preventive community work is far broader in its scope than simply relying on security-driven measures alone. Given that we are forging an innovative set of practices that transforms the Australian secular conceptions of a preventive approach, it has to be emphasised that it is a work-in-progress. It will continue to be refined by future evaluations for its exacting standards of community consultation and networking for community leadership. It is perhaps worth noting that this kind of initiative requires both a whole-of-community strategy and a whole-of-government approach.

# Acknowledgements

It is with great pride and honour that I embraced the opportunity to oversee the *BIRR Initiative Project* and to guide its committed and qualified team. I am grateful to the Project Team Leader *Mr. Mustapha Kara-Ali* for his dedication and commitment towards ensuring the success of this pioneering community project as well as for the authoring of this significant publication.

The *BIRR Research Team* comprised expert researchers in the field of Islamic Theology, Social Science and Psychology. *Dr Hersi Hilole*, an academic in Theology, directed a study group and helped bring together international and local academics and analysts, who generously commented on draft chapters and contributed their own firsthand observations. *Ms Dominiek Coates*, a counsellor and social researcher, who has previously worked with vulnerable youth using narrative therapy, researched the vulnerability factors related to extremism and ensured that relevant chapters remained procedural and scientific. *Dr Mark Kelly*, from the *University of Sydney*, provided tremendous editing support to validate the coherence of the document's five parts.

Special thanks also go to the steering committee members for the critical role they played in overseeing the review process of the project plans, policies and documentation. Committee member *Associate Professor Barbara Pamphilon* from the *School of Education and Community Studies – University of Canberra* ensured that the project remained focused on capacity building and youth empowerment as a way of undermining social disintegration. *Mr Andrew Singh* from the *Australian Institute of Police Management* helped in setting up the initial project framework and provided the project team leader, *Mr. Kara-Ali*, with the opportunity to attend a management training course at the institute and to deliver a critical presentation at an international policing conference.

My gratitude also goes to the third steering committee member, the *Muslim Community Radio 2mfm (92.1FM)*, for giving in-kind support by providing the volunteers associated with the project on-air time to broadcast BIRR-related community messages.



# Acknowledgements (cont.)

The *BIRR Research Team* is indeed fortunate to have had worked in consultation with a wide range of community leaders and organisations, and to work with a number of passionate young community leaders and volunteers who generously contributed their own time to ensure the success of the project activities. I commend these young leaders and volunteers for their time and effort.

I am confident that this project has, to date, achieved its desired objectives and has met community expectations. Undoubtedly, this significant publication is a great contribution to *the way forward* for Australian Muslims.

In closing, I would like to acknowledge the Department of Immigration and Citizenship for providing funding for this project.

**Mr Mohamed El Dana**  
**Project Executive Director**  
**Principal of Al Amanah College**

# Academic Endorsements

“This guide is an exceptional publication that successfully understands and counters radicalization. Based on extensive field research, it will serve as an exemplary study to train counsellors and mentor Muslims exposed to the extremist narrative. Investing in building an ideological counter weight to extremism is the key to future peace and security. Today, theologians are as important as counter terrorism practitioners. The guide is well researched, well written and well presented. As the head of a specialist centre for the study of terrorism and political violence in Singapore, I work with a range of governmental and non-governmental partners to counter radicalization in our societies. To popularize the concept of countering radicalization, we are working with partners in Jakarta and in Manila. At the invitation of the Iraqi and US governments, we traveled to Iraq and helped the US Detainee Task Force to develop a rehabilitation program in their detention centres. We congratulate the Australians for having produced such an impressive counselling guide.”

**- Dr Rohan Gunaratna Ph.D. FRSA, Head of International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research, Singapore**

“This book makes an important contribution to the national debate on the processes of radicalisation. In Australia, this subject has attracted a great deal of attention since the Operation Pendennis arrests in Sydney and Melbourne in November 2006. It is clear that Federal and State agencies are seeking greater insight into the specific pathways towards radicalisation in this country and are looking to community groups for ideas on appropriate counter-radicalisation policies. The book will make a useful contribution to current policy debates. On the whole, the guidebook is well written. The policy recommendations are sound and supported by the available evidence. The case study on ‘Ahmed’ is interesting and provides critical insights into the thinking and sociological influences on young Muslim men in Australia. One of the BIRR report’s main strengths lies in its analysis of traditional Islamic theology and the way in which extremists such as Abd Al-Wahhab, Sayyid Qutb and others have distorted Quranic teachings. The key policy recommendation concerns the theological refutation of extremism, through the development of a ‘counter-narrative against extremism’. This is an important and critical step in providing greater resilience among the Australian

# Academic Endorsements (cont.)

Muslim community against the kind of radical extremism that has infected other Western metropolitan centres such as London. A counter-narrative will only be one (albeit an important) element in an overall strategy. I strongly support BIRR's ongoing community outreach efforts and I commend the guidebook as an important contribution to the debate.”

**- Dr Carl Ungerer, School of Political Science and International Relations, University of Queensland**

“The BIRR Initiative is the first of its kind in Australia, establishing a model for the ongoing development of whole-of-community approaches for confronting extremism and the radicalisation of young Muslim Australians. The Guidebook's well-developed use of ‘theological counter-narratives to the narratives of extremists’ - in what is usually in Australia a secular approach to preventive work - is an innovation in mentoring programs that responds to the contingencies of the problem at hand. Furthermore, the Guidebook maps out a pragmatic account of the radicalisation process and of the responsibilities of different agencies, even though its emphasis is on whole-of-community networks within the Australian Muslim community. It is clear from the section on Research Methodology that the developmental work of the Initiative has met good practice guidelines for gaining stakeholder input, including the importance of active input from Muslim youth in Southwest Sydney. This seems very important not only from the point of view of inclusiveness but also given the program's emphasis on community-based responses, of which these young people may eventually be enlisted into active citizenship. This practice guidebook is to be commended for its seminal work and for the kind of active citizenship it seeks to facilitate within Australian Muslim communities. It is very clear that this preventive community work is far more far-reaching in its scope than simply relying on security-driven measures. It is perhaps worth noting that this work not only requires a whole-of-community strategy but also a whole-of-government approach.”

**- Dr Craig Osmond, Lecturer in Criminology, School of Social Sciences, University of Western Sydney**

# Academic Endorsements (cont.)

“The book is an excellent initiative and I particularly liked the narrative/counter narrative approach which I thought was very effective, as was the use of ‘Ahmed’ and his struggle. The book will undoubtedly assist the community to counter extremism and I commend the publication. The language used in the book is appropriate for social workers, families, the media and the government. The information contained in the book is first class. It is important that readers understand that the book was written by members of the Muslim community, albeit funded by DIAC.”

**- Associate Professor Nick O’Brien, Australian Graduate School of Policing, Charles Sturt University**

“This document is a unique, carefully researched and constructed, contribution to the aims of counter-radicalisation \_ a new area of governmental action that necessarily requires the collaboration of sympathetic community-based organisations. I find much of its substance very sound and well put. On the whole, it makes a most useful contribution to the wider analysis and understanding of extremism, and overall it achieves its aims well. I would wish to commend the project and the authors of the book for a bold and timely development. A great beginning has been made.”

**- Associate Professor Douglas Pratt, Dept of Philosophy and Religious Studies, University of Waikato, NZ**

# Executive Summary

The *BIRR Initiative* is a project funded by the Australian Federal Government and by the Australian Muslim community. So far, it has conducted exploratory work and research into the possibilities of working with at-risk Muslim youth in south-west Sydney to protect them from the influence of the narratives and propaganda of extremist groups. The initiative is designed to primarily target extremist groups operating within the theological parameters of global extremist networks that claim the name of Islam.

This book is the outcome of this exploratory pilot work and constitutes the foundational stone for the next phase of our work, which is the engagement with at-risk Muslim youth in Australia to build on their strength in preventing their radicalisation.

Our aim is to provide a guide for use by people who will work under the auspices of the *BIRR Initiative* with youth who are at-risk of radicalisation or who have been radicalised. This will include young mentors, community workers, religious leaders and family members.

We begin by explaining what vulnerability factors lead to radicalisation. We draw here both on current academic research and our own research conducted among our target group.

Research from these two sources gives us a coherent picture of the factors that lead to radicalisation. There is no one cause of a movement to extreme postures, and no common feature shared by all youth who are radicalised. Rather, there are a number of risk factors amongst youth-at-risk, which include a perception of injustice, a sense of persecution, a feeling of rejection by the general Australian community and/or the Muslim community, and confusion about how to reconcile being Muslim and being Australian. Our interim findings indicate that these factors are not a shared trait amongst all Muslim youth in

Research from these two sources gives us a coherent picture of the factors that lead to radicalisation...

# Executive Summary (cont.)

south-west Sydney.

Furthermore, the research indicates that these factors do not, by themselves, lead to extremism. Rather, they are factors that make people, particularly youths at-risk whose identities are still in formation, vulnerable to the intervention of extremists and extremist propaganda.

Our *BIRR* strategy in combating this is twofold. Our primary approach is to counter the extremists and their propaganda head-on with theological counter-narratives to their narratives. This methodology is grounded within a counselling framework. These counter-narratives serve to defuse the narratives of extremism, and collectively point towards an alternative way to understand one's Muslim identity – one which sees being Muslim as a positive force in society and that encourages direct participation in Australian community life.

This alternative understanding of Muslim identity is cemented by our second approach, which is found in the direct contact with mentors and other Australian Muslim youth in the setting through which we put forward our counter-narratives. This recognises the powerful role played by peer groups in bringing youth into the path of extremism. So, our overall approach simultaneously offers an alternative way for youths to understand their Muslim identity positively, while also encouraging the formation of social networks with other positively engaged Australian Muslims.

# Introduction

The time since 9/11 has been a period of intense reflection and mixed emotions for Muslim minorities living in the West. In Australia this period has seen new challenges and dangers emerge for the Muslim community, associated both with Western misunderstanding of Islam in respect to Al-Qaeda's terrorism and the active misrepresentation of Islam by extremists endorsing terrorism.

In the last decade, with the advent of the internet, satellite TV channels and the adoption of electronic distribution methods, extremist pamphleteers have been able to spread their worldview. They have cashed in on identity crisis and religious ignorance. Their prime targets have been the Muslim youth. Young Muslim people growing up in Australia are affected by the tumultuous world situation in which Western nations are explicitly at war with Al-Qaeda terrorists and their affiliates. This has produced a fertile ground for extremist propaganda.

The words of the Australian Prime Minister embody the anxiety from the point of view of the wider Australian community towards this problem. "There are a number of people in our community who are a danger to all of us, not many but some, and we have an obligation to try and identify them, to neutralise them, to prevent them from influencing others, particularly the young," the PM stated<sup>1</sup>.

Young Australian Muslims who were interviewed and spoken to in the *BIRR Initiative* were themselves quick to point out their loathing of extremism-based militancy driven by a global Al-Qaeda network claiming the name of their religion. They saw extremism as a real threat in their community, to security and to the true image of Islam. They are simply fed up with their religion being hijacked by fringe extremist groups that receive much media attention.

The problem of extremism finds fertile ground in social and economic marginalisation, but such marginalisation does not spawn extremism or terrorism by itself. Rather, this extremism is a global ideology, motivated by political grievances and justified

1 Muslims' Summit in Canberra, August 23, 2005. The summit was called by the Prime Minister, John Howard, in the wake of the London bombings.

# Introduction (cont.)

by problematic misinterpretations of Islam. Thus, the threat of extremism must primarily be defeated by debunking the narratives and ideologies that underpin it, and channelling the grievances of Muslims to constructive social, economic and political activity to end their problems. The

*BIRR Initiative* is itself an example of an attempt by Australian Muslims to engage constructively with the problems facing Muslims in this country, one which has a fundamental aim to propagate a culture of constructive engagement among Muslim Australians, particularly youth – the most vulnerable and marginalised section of the community.

Effective intellectual and theological counter-narratives to extremism are a spiritual force that can inspire Muslim youth away from subscribing to extremist tendencies and groups. It serves as an ‘antidote’ to the single extremist narrative.

In this book, we examine the key factors that have caused and sustained extremism, as well as the main doctrinal tenets of extremism. The book is a contribution to the ongoing struggle taking place inside the Muslim community, in which the extremists are making claims for legitimacy, authenticity and moral high ground. This struggle of global significance is an ideas battle for hearts and minds.

Our aim is to root out the means by which extremist groups operate in our community. We do this by giving the community a counter-narrative with theological refutations based on the mainstream Muslim perspective, supported by practical radicalisation-resisting strategies. This is designed to protect Australian Muslims against extremism and especially its vulnerable youth who are the extremists’ prime targets. This scheme should over time eradicate extremism from the community. Of course, the success of this mission depends on the dedication of adequate resources by various stakeholders.

... but such marginalisation does not by itself spawn extremism ...



# Introduction (cont.)

In developing the book, we were motivated by the collective duty of protecting the image of Islam from those who cause havoc and ruin its good name. The book is a foundational work for preserving the message and wisdoms of Islam as the critical process of generational handover takes place between the first generation Muslim migrants and those Australian-raised children for whose identity Islam is a primary factor.

The religiosity that dominates the life of many Muslim youth cannot be eliminated and nor should it be. Instead, it has to be steered through education in the right direction, away from misinterpretations and extremism in the name of Islam. The moral and spiritual compass that develops from correct understanding of Islam will then aid them to be better engaged members of society, acting as a positive force. This will help to ease the anxieties of the wider Australian community towards Australian Muslims, contributing towards the national project of building on social coexistence, peace and security.

# Definition of Terms

Historically, the Muslim world has known extremist sects, groups and factions – many like Al-Qaeda – that have claimed to draw upon the resources of Islam to sanction their views and actions. This form of extremism, known in Islamic discourse as *at-taṭarruf*<sup>1</sup> or *al-ghuluww*, can be understood and defined from an Islamic reference point, which consists of Muslim scholarly positions based on traditional and well established Islamic standards of morality, belief and practice. This is known in Islamic discourse as *al-i`tidāl* (moderation).

It was said: The moderate path is described in the Qur'an in Ayah 143 in Surat Al-Baqarah, which means: “*Indeed, Allah has made the Muslim ummah (nation of Islam) a middle just nation.*” Those claiming the name of Islam, who do not follow the Qur'anic true path based on its normative standards as determined by the *ijma`* (Muslim scholarly consensus), are not moderates, but extremists. In fact, Islam is an ideal practice and a path of moderation that does not admit or sanction extremism.

The basis and thrust of our strategy in this book is to counter the phenomenon of extremism claiming the name of Islam. This is through recourse to ideals that are of the Religion's essence and heart.

## Extremism

Extremism claiming the name of Islam is defined from an Islamic reference point as the beliefs, utterances and actions that do not conform to the Muslim scholarly positions of established Islamic practice or standards. In the *BIRR Initiative*, we respond to the subsection of extremism that was founded by the authors and ideologues of Al-Qaeda and its network of affiliates.

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1 Refer to Appendix 4 – *System of Transliteration* for how this document writes Arabic letters with English characters

# Definition of Terms (cont.)

## Radicalisation

Radicalisation in the *BIRR Initiative* is defined as the process of adopting, promoting or acting upon extremist beliefs. It is the process that indoctrinates a vulnerable individual and then activates them from a latent extremist mind-state to an overt extremist action-state. Radicalisation is subdivided into three distinct phases: (1) indoctrination, (2) activation and (3) terrorism (the three phases are described further in Part 3).

# Research Methodology

The strategies and research presented in this book are developed from a twofold research methodology that includes:

- Research conducted with the project's target community of south-west Sydney<sup>1</sup>; and
- Academic research and analysis.

First, empirical data and anecdotal evidence were collected from the contribution of a diverse group of young Muslims and their leaders, totalling about 210 participants. The data collection process was based on 7 focus groups and sessions involving about 160 youth participants (some including parents) and over 50 interviews conducted with Muslim youth leaders, parents, Imams and community leaders in south-west Sydney.

... a diverse group of young Muslims and their leaders totalling about 210 participants.

The 7 focus groups were conducted at the *BIRR Initiative* office to include a wide cross-section of Australian Muslims from within south-west Sydney, ranging from high school students to university students, youth in the workforce to unemployed youth and school dropouts. In total, around 160 young people participated, both young females and males ranging in age from 15 to 26 years. The groups also included youth from migrant Muslim backgrounds as well as some converts to Islam. There was a broad representation of ethnic communities, including Middle-Eastern backgrounds as well as some Africans and South-Asians. Furthermore, about 50 meetings were held at various community locations with leaders and parents from the Muslim community of south-west Sydney. This involved focused discussion, and an opportunity to engage in a collaborative community process.

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<sup>1</sup> For a profile of the Muslim community of south-west Sydney, please refer to *Appendix 1 – Target Community South-west Sydney*.

# Research Methodology (cont.)

Information, anecdotes and perceptions were collated around the theme of extremism and factors that lead to it. The questions the facilitators asked were based on the consultation framework attached to this document in *Appendix 2 – Stakeholder Consultation Framework & Questionnaires*. The framework includes a set of questions for Muslim youth, another for youth leaders and teachers, one for parents, and a last set for leaders from mosques, schools and the general community. These questions were formulated to help us assess whether or not – and how – such community sectors and basic institutions within the Muslim community of south-west Sydney (families, mosques, educational youth centres and schools) contribute to, or neutralise, the spread of extremism in the community. South-west Sydney where the focus group members and community leaders live include a diversity of suburbs ranging from Lakemba to Belmore, Auburn, Granville, Bankstown, Liverpool and as far west as Campbelltown.

Further, the academic research included a literature review on the issue of Muslim youth identity and radicalisation, as well as an analysis of extremist discourse from publicly available literature including pamphlets, websites and books. Local and international academics from Yemen, Malaysia, New Zealand, United States and England were also consulted.

The analysed data assisted the development of a strategy to work with Muslim community groups and leaders to tackle extremism claiming the name of Islam, and to enlist their support in assisting the Initiative to implement some of its initial findings. This strategy will also form an opportunity for future discussion on this critical theme. This requires collective community action.

# Parts Summary

The book is in five parts. In Part 1, we examine what makes Muslim youth vulnerable to the ideology of extremism. In Part 2, we analyse the origins and the theological framework of the ideology to try to understand it. In Part 3, we analyse the Radicalisation Model used for recruiting vulnerable youth. In Part 4, we offer a point-by-point refutation of that ideology, producing counter-narratives to the claims made by extremists, for use in mentoring young people influenced by extremism. In Part 5, we outline the framework for preventing extremism, indicating the various directions in which we are seeking to put our knowledge into practice. This is intended to influence our youth, as well as the entire society of which they are a part.



**Part One**  
**Vulnerability Factors to Extremism**



# Part 1

The vulnerability factors are broad sociopolitical preconditions for a climate that is conducive to extremism, and which serves as the ‘playground’ from which extremists recruit. Through the use of focus groups, consultations and general engagement with youth, we have surveyed the demands for action that the community itself – the youth and the leadership – has voiced and the inadequacies they themselves have identified in this regard.



### Quick Points

*In this section, we are not providing a complete snapshot of the rich and varied lives of Muslim youth in Sydney. That would be a book in itself. Rather, we focus on the weaknesses and the vulnerabilities facing Muslim youth on the streets of south-west Sydney, as seen by the project team; although we also point to some of the strengths in the community that may be channelled into capacity-building and the prevention of extremism.*

1. Among sections of second-generation Muslim youths living in south-west Sydney, there are feelings of victimisation, low self-esteem, discrimination and frustration. These feelings consistently showed in the focus groups and interviews conducted, albeit only from some participants.
2. Some factors contributing to the above are: (a) perceived injustices of government policies; (b) a public debate in which Muslims are sometimes maligned in the media; (c) a sense of disenfranchisement and alienation due to a community inter-generational divide; and (d) a community leadership crisis, especially when it comes to the representation of the Muslim community in public.
3. It was observed that those with low self-esteem, those who are uncertain as to how to behave with non-Muslims and those who have unresolved questions about their place in society are more vulnerable to extremism. They did not exhibit much investment in society, as they are not socially engaged. They are receptive to narratives that seemingly give them a sense of belonging, whether extremist narratives or narratives that explain their place in Australian society.
4. Some community leaders' lack of awareness and proactivity adds to the disillusionment of Muslim youth. There is a perception among some youth that many organisations are pedestrian and ineffective, and that youth lack a 'voice' and a stake in political and civic institutions. The majority of the younger generation

## Part 1 (cont.)

aspires to better, more representative and more effective community leadership.

5. There is a sense among some disengaged Muslim youth that acceptance by society is increasingly premised on 'assimilation' and the assumption that they should lose their Muslim identity. This sense of perceived exclusion and discrimination is of particular relevance in the face of the challenges posed by radicalisation.

6. Many of the discussions during focus groups, and also as gathered through informal discussions and phone conversations, focused on the need for a youth-oriented resource in the form of an anti-extremism counter-narrative to help describe the terrain within which radicalisation operates.

7. Muslim youth in south-west Sydney have many untold positive stories and personal accounts, which means that the community has a great deposit of anecdotes and case studies that could contribute to a guide for driving the positive transition of youth at-risk of radicalisation.

8. A benevolent tendency is prevalent amongst Muslim youth to be charitable towards troubled youth. As a result, it would be easy to find mentors and role models to guide youth at-risk in discovering self-worth, personal value and inner strength.

*This leads us to the following questions: "Who is at risk of radicalisation? Who is vulnerable to the lure of extremists? Is it those gullible who are easily brainwashed? Or perhaps those who suffer from mental illness or personality disorders, or who are criminals or psychopaths?" Three decades of research indicates this is not the case. No profile or personality of what makes a 'typical' terrorist has as yet been identified. If personality and mental illness are not main contributing factors to joining extremist groups and ideologies, what is?*

## Part 1 (cont.)

### Case Study [Ahmed]

**1. Let's consider the case of young Ahmed. He is in some ways a typical Muslim Australian youth, but he is one of the unfortunate ones who, through a combination of negative circumstances, becomes highly vulnerable to extremism:**

*This case is one typical profile for a youth who is vulnerable to extremism. But in fact there is no one profile for such a youth. Signs of vulnerability have been detected among both tertiary trained, middle-class young people and those who are unemployed and disadvantaged. The case of young Ahmed has been depicted to serve as an illustration for the book.*

Ahmed is a 20-year-old Lebanese-Australian Muslim whose parents moved to Australia five years before he was born. Since their arrival in Australia, his parents have experienced difficulties finding work and have relied heavily on support provided by the wider Muslim community and by the federal government's social security service. As a result of their cultural isolation, Ahmed's parents have hardly learned English.

As a child, Ahmed was eager to fit into mainstream society in order to be accepted by his non-Muslim peers. With his obvious Middle Eastern name and appearance and his

ethnic background, he nonetheless comfortably proclaimed himself to be an Australian. But as a result of his desire to be accepted by his peers, he adopted different behaviour at school to that at home. As Ahmed matured and experienced discrimination and prejudice, his feelings started changing. In recent years, Ahmed has started questioning who he really is.

A couple of months before the end of Year 12, Ahmed left school and has since held a number of temporary jobs. However, maintaining a job has been challenging and Ahmed is currently unemployed. Ahmed believes he is treated unfairly by prospective employers and sees his opportunities

## Part 1 (cont.)

for advancement as limited. He feels disillusioned with the options and opportunities available to him.

Overall, the last few years have been very challenging for Ahmed. Since leaving school, he has experienced one struggle after another. Looking for work and experiencing constant rejection by potential employers, worrying about his and his family's future, the building and failing of new relationships, his parents' increasing frailty and dependence on his linguistic support, even the current political climate, have all forced Ahmed to grow up rapidly. All the recent changes and subsequent uncertainty, for Ahmed individually and for the wider Muslim community, weigh heavily on young Ahmed. Over the past few months, he has started wishing his world would be simple, black and white. He feels impatient to move away from all the uncertainty and hopes for his life to take a clear meaningful direction. He wants clarity and answers to his many questions: "*Who am I?*" "*What do I want?*" "*What am I doing?*" etc.

Ahmed feels pressure from sections of the wider community to 'assimilate' and lose his Muslim identity. Ahmed's commitment to Islam (like for other Australian Muslim youth) is very important to him. But his childhood attempt to be accepted as Australian, and his earlier double life at home and at school, have become a source of shame and guilt for him. As he now fears it is unworkable to embrace his Australianness and his Muslimness at the same time, he is feeling less and less Australian. He believes that, considering the current, post-September 11th climate, he needs to be more politically responsive. He is worried by all the injustice and humiliation experienced by Muslims in Australia and overseas. He wonders if it's not his role to fight for his people, then whose role is it? Some of Ahmed's peers believe it is indeed Ahmed's role as a Muslim youth to fight the government and the people who voted for it.

The more he thinks about this issue, the less he sees an alternative. As he will never truly be accepted as an

## Part 1 (cont.)

Australian and as he cannot give up Islam, he starts withdrawing from society. Despite Ahmed's efforts to integrate and associate with non-Muslims, the apparent disregard for his religion has given him little choice but to limit his friendships and associations to his own immediate circle. Ahmed is tired of this uncertainty and wants to belong, to be accepted and understood. He is tired of swinging between different views, and craves clarity and certainty.

During this challenging time, Ahmed does not know who to turn to. As there is a language barrier, he is finding it

increasingly difficult to communicate with his parents.

It is now clearer than ever that Ahmed is struggling and showing signs of an identity crisis. He decides to start a search. He wants to learn more about Islam. He has many unanswered questions in his mind – issues of morality, religious practice and matters of *halal* (permissible) and *haram* (impermissible). Ahmed feels he has a few options – including turning to Google for answers, picking up some books from the bookstore or asking his friend Ali..

### 2. Does Ahmed's story sound familiar? Does Ahmed remind you of a friend, a colleague or a relative?

Our research with Muslim youth from south-west Sydney indicates that Ahmed is not alone. In line with Ahmed's experiences, some Muslim youth reported that they experience feelings of humiliation from racists. These feelings, in turn, lead to depression, a sense of fear, vulnerability, anger and exclusion that may be exploited by extremists. Some of the youth feel they are not accepted as Australians and, as a result, are vulnerable to rigid extreme ideologies. Like Ahmed, these young people reported difficulties in discussing their concerns with parents and expressed uncertainty over who to turn to in the community for quality advice. They are uncertain about the availability and location of the 'safe' centres or community groups. Furthermore,

## Part 1 (cont.)

similarly to Ahmed, they reported many unanswered questions about life in general and Islam in particular. Many questions related to morality and a desire to find clear answers about the nature of good and bad, right and wrong.

Also in line with Ahmed's experience, our research identified a number of needs and desires experienced by south-west Sydney Muslim youth. Many initially reported a lack of access to reliable information, and identified peers and friends as main sources of information. A shortage of adequate support for issues such as identity development, discrimination, employment and belonging seemed to be a great concern. Many believe they have limited employment and training opportunities. Furthermore, they experience a double exclusion: from their immediate community structures, as well as from the Anglo-Australian community.

### **3. Reflecting on Ahmed's story, what choices do you think Ahmed is likely to make? What would your recommendations be?**

Ahmed is vulnerable to radicalisation, but not yet radicalised. Left to himself, he may continue to feel alienated, he might turn to crime, or he may eventually find a rewarding job, start a family, or the many other involvements that naturally end youthful disillusionment. After all, it is quite normal for any young person to have trouble finding a job that suits them or to question their place in society. What happens in Ahmed's life will in a large part be affected by the influences to which he is exposed. With the right family and community support, he can be shown and helped to take the opportunities that do exist to find a happy and meaningful life as a Muslim in Australia. If he is influenced by the theology and teachings of an extremist group, however, he may turn away from the opportunities that exist in Australian society and become alienated from it, and indeed even possibly dangerous to himself and the community.

## Part 1 (cont.)

**4. Let's first look at Ahmed's story more closely. In your opinion, which factors in Ahmed's situation may contribute to Ahmed's vulnerability to extremism? We have identified three main themes here, which recur for others experiencing vulnerabilities. They are (a) psychological identity, (b) belonging and alienation and (c) disadvantage and discrimination.**

### ***4a. Vulnerability Factor: Psychological identity***

*Psychological identity refers to who someone is and what their values, attitudes, and beliefs are. The forming of identity for Muslim youth typically occurs during adolescence or young adulthood, and is tumultuous and emotionally challenging. This theme deals with the inner vulnerabilities, which includes a lack of knowledge about Islam.*

*i.) Ahmed is going through a time of rapid change and uncertainty and feels overwhelmed by the number of choices and decisions he needs to make. As a result, he wishes for his world to be simple, black and white. He wants clarity and certainty. In short, Ahmed experiences low tolerance for ambiguity.* During no other time in life do we assume so much increase in responsibility in so short a time span than during adolescence. This can be overwhelming. When feeling overwhelmed, joining an extremist group can be attractive to some, because such groups claim to offer clarity and solutions to life's problems. Consequently, the unrealistic and oversimplified nature of most extremist ideologies is sometimes seemingly attractive to those who feel overwhelmed by complexities and stress in navigating their world.

*ii.) Ahmed feels overwhelmed by the questions many Muslim adolescents face: "Who am I? What do I want? What am I doing? etc." He hopes for his life to take a clear direction and is searching for a place in society. As the adherence to ideologies affects self-definition, this search for identity may draw some youth to extremist groups. There is a risk for Ahmed to impulsively commit to any ideology and values before having adequately considered empowering perspectives and alternatives. Ahmed's desperate*

## Part 1 (cont.)

quest for personal meaning may push him to adopt roles hastily.

*iii.) Ahmed feels disillusioned with life as he experiences a lack of opportunities that makes him question the adequacy of the perspective that has steered his life thus far.* Those most vulnerable to being recruited into extremist groups are young people who are at a time in their life when they are looking to the future with the hope of engaging in meaningful behaviour, but perceive their opportunities for advancement to be nonexistent or minimal. People who feel dissatisfied with life may be more vulnerable to different perspectives and viewpoints. As a result, during this time of vulnerability, Ahmed may be more susceptible to the influence of unscrupulous leaders and extremists.

*iv.) Ahmed experiences a sense of guilt over his childhood double life at school and at home.* Our research with Muslims has identified religion as an important factor by which they describe themselves as well as their family. In line with Ahmed's experience, research shows that many second-generation Muslims attempted to visibly avoid aspects of their Muslim identity as children so as to 'fit into' mainstream society. As these young Muslims matured and learned more about Islam, maintaining their religious identity became increasingly central to their lives, and they became more likely to reject former aspects of their identity. In short, it appears possible for second-generation Muslims to appear 'assimilated' during childhood and seemingly take on some practices and norms of their peers so as to 'fit in'. During adolescence, a strong resistance to this previous process may be experienced. Again, during the earlier time of identity-confusion, adolescents may be more vulnerable to being attracted to extreme and rigid beliefs.

*v.) Ahmed now fears it is unworkable to embrace his Australianness and his Muslimness at the same time and is feeling less and less Australian.* A shortage of the right Muslim religious leaders and mentors in Australia may contribute to the sense of hopelessness that some young Muslims may experience. Young Muslims living at cultural crossroads,



## Part 1 (cont.)

like Ahmed, often experience a sense of guilt. This guilt may lead some to be vulnerable to the most extreme misinterpretations of Islam. As case studies show, one can have strong Muslim identity and also have sizeable ties to non-contradictory aspects of the dominant culture. The pressure Ahmed feels to exclusively choose between being Australian or Muslim is in fact unfounded. Studies with young Muslims in the United Kingdom, where mass Muslim immigration occurred earlier than it has in Australia, show that most young Muslims are quite comfortable with their multiple identities. A problem, however, arises when young Muslims are externally pressured to belong exclusively to one group or the other.

*vi.) Ahmed lacks knowledge about Islam. He wants to learn, and feels he has a few options including turning to Google for answers, picking up some books from the bookstore or asking his friend.* In the age of mass media and the internet, many Muslim youth's learning about Islam is informal and unstructured from browsing websites and reading books, rather than being based on traditional teachings in a mosque or a formal class with a trustworthy teacher. The effective teaching of Islam to young Australian Muslims provides a framework for their identity in an Australian society. In the absence of such a framework, youth resort to alternative methods to learn about their religion. This includes the internet, with the detrimental effect of providing opportunities for the propagation of extremist ideology. The vulnerability here is with the lack of knowledge about Islam, which could lead a young person to be deceived by extremist teachings and become radicalised. The young person's inquisitive nature, coupled with ignorance, can shed more light on how the radicalisation process recruits, and why it could be a quick process.

### **4b. Vulnerability Factor: Belonging and alienation**

*i.) Ahmed is socially isolated and only associates with a few like-minded friends.* The political climate after September 11th, and the increasingly negative portrayal of Islam following the attack, caused some Muslims to withdraw from society and to sever

## Part 1 (cont.)

their ties with the wider community. Consequently, a number of younger Muslims are becoming more alienated from the Australian societies in which they live by retreating into their own immediate communities. This lack of interaction with those outside their own immediate community can have a negative impact on how they see themselves and how they are seen by others. Alienation and social exclusion can lead to various consequences: apathy, gangs, drugs, extremist groups etc. Many are 'recruited' into bad groups, or join one after a friend gets involved and pressures his/her peers.

*ii.) Ahmed feels a desire to belong.* A need to belong or a yearning for a sense of belonging, connectedness and affiliation motivates youth to join groups. Furthermore, it is possible for an individual to define his or her identity through such group membership such that one's personal identity is merged with a group identity. As may be true for Ahmed, membership in an extremist group provides a sense of perceived identity or belonging for those people whose underlying sense of identity is flawed. Ahmed's impatience to answer identity-related questions and his great need to belong may make him vulnerable to extremist groups and ideologies. These groups may provide a sense of 'family' that offers a claimed shelter from the surrounding world.

*iii.) Ahmed and his parents have a language barrier. His parents have hardly learned English and, as a result, he is finding it increasingly difficult to communicate with them.* Intergenerational gaps between parents and children may be another vulnerability factor. Young Australian Muslims may not be able to speak the only language their parents speak at home. This could hamper effective communication and hence limit the parenting role in passing down imperative values and cultural reference points. In Muslim homes, it is also understood that parents play a great role in passing down to their children traditional Islamic knowledge, the absence of which (due to communication barriers or otherwise) may be exploited by extremist groups who hide under the guise of care and humbleness to 'recruit' into their networks and groups.

## Part 1 (cont.)

*iv.) Ahmed is worried about all the injustice and humiliation experienced by the Muslim community, both overseas and in Australia.* Muslims are influenced by foreign events as a sense of injustice and humiliation appears to animate many Australian Muslims. Furthermore, the Islamic concept of the *ummah* (global community) (i.e. “the pain and suffering that is experienced by one part of the body is shared and felt by the other parts”) provides an empathetic emotional connection to the plight of weaker Muslims. The empathy with the *ummah* and the difficult world situation is central to understanding the levels of frustration felt by many young Muslims in Australia and in the West in general.

### **4c. Vulnerability Factor: Disadvantage and discrimination**

*i.) Ahmed has certainly grown up in a disadvantaged family. Since their arrival in Australia, his parents have experienced difficulties finding work, and have relied heavily on community support and on the government’s social security service.* There is a misconception that poverty and lack of opportunity are automatic drivers into radicalisation. In fact, individuals from comfortable backgrounds have controlled the upper echelons of extremist networks since their inception. While poverty could be a factor in recruitment into these groups, it certainly has not driven their ideological core. Indeed, from recent experience in Europe, it is likely for middle-class, tertiary trained and apparently well-integrated people to lead a path of radicalisation in their own communities.

*ii.) Ahmed’s family is from Lebanon, experiences unemployment and cultural and linguistic isolation.* This is not uncommon amongst many ethnic migrants who are economically disadvantaged, poorly integrated, experience linguistic isolation and tend to cluster in closed communities. The consequent sense of marginality could be a point of vulnerability to extremism in Australia. The history of long-term unemployment among Lebanese and Turkish immigrants in Muslim-concentrated suburbs, as is the case with other emerging communities, has made them the focus

## Part 1 (cont.)

of various research reports and specially tailored employment programs. It has undeservedly also given their communities a 'bad' name as being unwilling to work, thereby negatively affecting some perceptions of Muslim identity. The result is that the public image of an Australian Muslim is associated with being socially marginal. Growing up in Australia, Australian Muslim youth can then take this to be part of their identity – a besieged mentality.

*iii.) Ahmed experiences discrimination based on his name, his appearance and his Islamic religion.* As noted previously, religion is a primary marker of identity for Muslims. Consequently, Ahmed's experiences of discrimination on the grounds of his Islamic religion may also add to a sense of alienation and isolation. Again, this isolation may increase Ahmed's vulnerability to radicalisation. It is believed that discrimination, racism and the clash with police can sometimes result in social alienation and anti-social behaviour among some young Muslims.

*We have established in Part 1 the main vulnerability themes leading to radicalisation – namely identity, belonging, alienation, discrimination and disadvantage. In the following section you will gain an understanding of the origins and the theological framework of extremism, before going on to consider the preventative frameworks and action plan.*

Al-Zawahiri Ayman

Sayyid Qutob

Ibn Abdul-Wahhab

Abu Qatada

Usama bin Laden

Maqdisi Abu-Muhammad

Ibn Taymiyyah

Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya

# Part Two

## The Theology of Extremism



## Part 2

As noted in the introduction, the *BIRR Initiative* is an Australian community project responding from a true Islamic perspective to the extremist beliefs that are doing damage to both the image of Islam and to social coexistence. These beliefs that are driven by a global extremist network of affiliates have been set out by the theology of Al-Qaeda. The initiative deals with this network, its ideologues, its theology and its radicalisation processes.

## Part 2 (cont.)

### 1. What is the general framework for countering extremism and radicalisation?

In order to understand the theological precepts to the radicalisation process, we need to explore the terrain around the extremist movement of Al-Qaeda and its network of affiliates. The first implication from this is a result of the infusion of extremist ideology with radicalisation and its terrorist manifestation. Such an extremist religious imprint on radicalisation means that at the heart of any Counter-Radicalisation response is a religious battle between established Islamic standards and extremism.

Throughout the ages, extremists have always been a minority group in society, without much control over the general Muslim population. But when popular knowledge declined, and many scholars abandoned their theological roles of refuting extremism and the leaders refrained from responding to the threat posed by such elements, internal dissension and rifts grew stronger until the many groups and sects caused a damaging state of affairs.

Challenging and refuting the theology and narratives of radicalisation is the key behind any radicalisation-prevention strategy.

### 2. What is the theological framework that drives the global network of affiliates associated with Al-Qaeda? Which particular authors are characteristic of this movement and its ideologies?

As noted in Part 1, ignorance in traditional Islamic teachings is a critical vulnerability factor leading to extremism amongst at-risk youth. This vulnerability factor is a primary cause for their inability to differentiate between literature that cites Islamic scholars and that which cites unauthentic writers tarred with profanation and historical controversies. It is a huge risk for youth to view Al-Qaeda's doctrines and theological precepts as authentic Islamic principles. As a protective measure, it is important to caution young people against authors identified by the theology of Al-Qaeda and its affiliates.

## Part 2 (cont.)

In our analysis, it would be safe to assume that the authors distinctive of the theology of Al-Qaeda and its affiliates would be frequently cited as ‘authorities’ in texts by Al-Qaeda ideologues, contradicting mainstream Islamic books.

As a result, and in order to measure the frequency of citations made by known extremist ideologues, we followed a study conducted by the US Military Academy-Combating Terrorism Center (USMA-CTC) in a publication titled “Militant Ideology Atlas”<sup>1</sup>. The study uses a technique called ‘citation analysis’, which is frequently employed in the social sciences as an objective way to determine influence among authors (Google uses a similar technique to rank pages for its search engine). Consequently, the study identifies the most frequently cited authors among Al-Qaeda’s ideologues. Naturally, some of these cited authors are respected by mainstream scholars and are not unique to Al-Qaeda. However, here we are only interested in those that are characteristic of it, and that have thus shaped its theology. These authors were divided into two groups: medieval and modern.

According to the study, Ibn Taymiyah/ Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 729 AH<sup>2</sup>, 1328 AD) is the medieval author most influential on the Al-Qaeda movement. The edicts issued by this 13/14th century AD author are the ones cited by far the most frequently in the numerous Al-Qaeda texts analysed.

Ibn Taymiyah has single-handedly drafted the *modus operandi* and the religious operational framework that Al-Qaeda has adopted since their inception late in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

From a historical perspective, back in his time, Ibn Taymiyah clashed with members of the jurisprudence from the Islamic union of the various Islamic schools of thought, who collectively issued an edict against him. They declared his theology and interpretative procedures as contradicting established Islamic standards. Ibn

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1 <http://www.ctc.usma.edu/atlas/Atlas-ResearchCompendium.pdf>

2 After *Hijrah* – immigration of Prophet Muḥammad from Makkah to Al-Madīnah



## Part 2 (cont.)

Taymiyah was incarcerated by the courts for his theological heresies, which posed a further military threat in justifying unsanctioned violent clashes. He ultimately died in prison.

The Ibn Taymiyah chapter of history gives evidence to the unholiness of the theological foundations of Al-Qaeda and a strong assurance to the non-Muslim community that the extremism that drives the Al-Qaeda network of affiliates is unsanctioned by Islamic scholarly standards.

Furthermore, the study found that the modern authors most influential on the extremists are generally the followers of the eighteenth-century author Muḥammad Ibn `Abd Al-Wahḥāb (d. 1206 AH, 1791 AD). In fact, Ibn `Abd Al-Wahḥāb institutionalised the edicts of Ibn Taymiyah four centuries later. This creed came to be known as Wahhabism. From its inception, Wahhabism outrageously attacked many standard Islamic beliefs and values. Prof Khaled Abu El Fadel wrote that “the Wahhabi rebellions of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries were very bloody because they indiscriminately slaughtered and terrorised neighboring Muslims.”<sup>3</sup> It is no coincidence that Wahhabism has theologially given birth to a generation of Al-Qaeda ideologues.

The point here, demonstrated by this citation analysis, is that Al-Qaeda has not been inspired by traditional Islamic teachings, rather by the creed that Ibn Taymiyah and Ibn `Abd Al-Wahḥāb drafted. It was only by primarily quoting this creed that Al-Qaeda ideologues and mentors have claimed legitimacy to their propaganda and narratives.

In addition to the above two authors, according to the same citation analysis, the other popular modern author whom the global extremist movement cites is Sayyid Qutb/ Qutob (d. 1966 AD), the founder of the so-called Al-Jamā`a Al-Islāmiya (JI) faction

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3 Prof Khaled Abu El Fadel in an article titled “Islam and the Theology of Power”, Middle East Report No. 221 (Winter 2001) pp 28-33.

## Part 2 (cont.)

of the Egyptian extremist movement called Al-Ikhwān Al-Muslimīn or in English named as the Muslim Brotherhood. In his political manifesto titled “Milestones Along the Road”, Sayyid Qutb declared all Arab governments and their people to be in a state of *jahiliyyah*, which he described as a state of group blasphemy. By that, Qutb made *takfir*<sup>4</sup> against all Muslims who did not subscribe to his doctrine. He declared them as apostates, rendering their blood, wealth and honour as legitimate targets.

Furthermore, anecdotal reports and our study of extremist outlets in Australia has clearly indicated that these two strands of Wahhabism and Al-Ikhwān (with its faction called Al-Jamā`a Al-Islāmiya) act as a breeding ground for radicalisation into the wider extremist movement, as they are a first point of contact for vulnerable youth.

Similarly, Hizbut-Tahrir/Hizb at-Tahrir<sup>5</sup> is the third general strand that enlists vulnerable youth into the initial pools of radicalisation. Hizbut-Tahrir’s propaganda, which is not accompanied by a traditional Islamic teaching program, does not warn its adherents of the risk associated with the theology of Al-Qaeda and the authors who are identified by this theology. This issue results in a propaganda overlap with Al-Qaeda and a fusion between its members and the members of the other two aforementioned strands. Together these three strands feed the initial pools of youth at high risk of radicalisation. Hizbut-Tahrir recruits into these pools, despite claiming that it does not publicly advocate terrorism. The difference between Al-Qaeda and Hizbut-Tahrir is continuous, rather than discrete. Usually, Hizbut-Tahrir members are dominated by feelings of ideological affinity with their ‘brothers’ from the other two aforementioned strands, hence ideologically warming up members by serving as a feeder-group for radicalisation.

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4 *Takfir* is to declare someone as a blasphemer.

5 Hizbut-Tahrir are the followers of Taqiyyuddin an-Nabahaniy (d. 1977 AD).

## Part 2 (cont.)

### 3. What is the standpoint of the traditional Sunni theology on Al-Qaeda and its affiliates?

The focus here is on traditional Sunni theology given that Al-Qaeda affiliated groups claim to represent the Sunni community. To understand the standpoint of traditional Sunni theology as a counter-force to the theology of Al-Qaeda and its affiliates, we can unravel the terrain around this movement, analysing its failure to gain a foothold in certain societies. For example, looking at the writings of Abu Mus`ab Al-Suri<sup>6</sup> and Abu Baseer Al-Tartousi<sup>7</sup> (two well known Al-Qaeda ideologues), we can see their conclusion that Al-Qaeda and its affiliates have not been able to establish a stronghold in Syria, due to the existence of the competing theological force of the traditional Sunni establishment and its spiritual school of *at-tasawwuf* (Sufism). The ideologues agree that the theological competition coming from their archenemies and doctrinal competitors has prevented their ideology from dominating Syrian society.

It is worthy to note here that Al-Qaeda ideologues inspired by Ibn Taymiyah and Ibn `Abd Al-Wahhab deceptively label themselves as Salafis in reference to the *Salaf*, the righteous Muslims of the first three centuries AH.

*At-tasawwuf* (Sufism) in its true manifestations of Islamic spiritual tradition is an integral and coherent part of the Islamic curriculum, founded upon the theology of the two prominent traditional Sunni theologians Al-Ash`ari (d. 324 AH, 936 AD) and Al-Maturidi (d. 333 AH, 944 AD), and upon the four mainstream Islamic schools of jurisprudence (*madhhabs*) initiated by Imam Abu-Hanifah (d. 150 AH, 767 AD), Imam Malik (d. 179 AH, 795 AD), Imam ash-Shafi`i (d. 204 AH, 820 AD) and Imam Ahmad Ibn Hanbal (d. 241 AH, 855 AD).

Furthermore, a letter from Al-Zawahiri (Al-Qaeda's number two man) to Al-Zarqawi (Al-Qaeda's former number one man in Iraq) intercepted in 2005<sup>8</sup>, before

6 From his book entitled: "Observations on the Jihadi Experience in Syria", which is part of a larger document entitled: "The Islamic Jihadi Revolution in Syria."

7 He has written numerously on this topic including his book entitled: "The reasons for the failure of some Jihadi movements in reform."

8 [www.globalsecurity.org/security/library/report/2005/zawahiri-zarqawi-letter\\_9jul2005.htm](http://www.globalsecurity.org/security/library/report/2005/zawahiri-zarqawi-letter_9jul2005.htm)

## Part 2 (cont.)

Al-Zarqawi's death, sheds more light on the resistance that the Al-Qaeda ideologues feel is exhibited against their movement by the traditional Sunni establishment. In this letter, Al-Zawahiri describes the theological contradictions that exist between Al-Qaeda and the traditional Sunni scholars. Al-Qaeda, which claims to be Sunni and which calls itself Salafi, declares traditional Sunni scholars (i.e. followers of Al-Ash`ari and Al-Maturidi) to be heretics.

In the section entitled "Striving for the *Ulema* [Muslim scholars]," Al-Zawahiri declares the theological parameters for the Al-Qaeda counter-movement by stating: "From the standpoint of not highlighting the doctrinal differences which the masses do not understand, such as this one is Maturidi or this one is Ash`ari, or this one is Salafi... Many of the most learned *ulema* of Islam such as al-`Izz Bin `Abdul Salam (d. 660 AH, 1262 AD), Al-Nawawi (d. 676 AH, 1278 AD), and Ibn Hajar (d. 852 AH, 1449 AD) were Ash`ari... And many of the most eminent military leaders, whom the *ummah* resolved unanimously to praise such as Nur al-Din Bin Zanki (d. 569 AH, 1174 AD) and Salahul-Din al-Ayyubi [Saladin] (d. 589 AH, 1193 AD) – were Ash`ari... Sayf al-Din Qatz, Rukn al-Din Baybars, al-Nasir Muhammad Bin-Qalawun [leaders who fought against the Crusaders], and Muhammad al-Fatih [conqueror of Constantinople], were Ash`ari or Maturidi. They fell into ... heresies".

Al-Zawahiri inadvertently confesses to how he considers the creed of Al-Qaeda (what he calls Salafi) to be on a collision course with the creed of most of the *ummah* (i.e. Ash`ari/Maturidi), whom he considers to be following theological 'heresies'. This again supports the approach of resisting Al-Qaeda's creed with traditional Sunni theology.

The role of Muslim scholars in weakening support for Al-Qaeda's theology is also shown in the writings of Abu Bakr Al-Naji. Naji's work encapsulates the thinking of Al-Qaeda's High Command since the late 1990s. A publication titled "Al-Qa'ida's Playbook"<sup>9</sup> by USMA-CTC quotes Naji, from his book "The Management of Barbarism", as claiming that it would have been better to have killed Shaykh `Abdullah

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9 <http://www.ctc.usma.edu/Stealing%20Al-Qa'ida's%20Playbook%20--%20CTC.pdf>

## Part 2 (cont.)

Al-Harari/Al-Harariy (known as Al-Habashī in reference to his native homeland, Al-Habashah – Ethiopia) early in his career than to have let him become the powerful figure he is today. Naji then says that “deviations like these and Shaykhs like these (traditional Islamic scholars) must have the judgment of slaughter passed against them at the very beginning of their authority, as there will be no fame for them, nor knowledge of or news of them.”

It is worth noting, given this fatwa on Shaykh `Abdullah Al-Harari, that Al-Qaeda acted through their Lebanese offshoot, the so-called Usbat Al-Ansar (an Australian-proscribed terrorist organisation), and in 1995 assassinated a prominent student of Shaykh `Abdullah Al-Harari, Shaykh Nizar Halabi. Shaykh Nizar headed the Lebanese-based Sunni organisation known as the *Association of Islamic Charitable Projects*, whose members are the students of Shaykh `Abdullah Al-Harari – known as Al-Ahbash<sup>10</sup> in reference to the Shaykh's native homeland, Al-Habashah.

#### 4. Why are scholars from the traditional Sunni establishment, such as Shaykh `Abdullah Al-Harari, targeted by Al-Qaeda's ideologues?

The words of Naji (question 3 above) reflect the theological resistance that Shaykhs from the traditional Sunni establishment pose against the global extremist movement.

Shaykh `Abdullah Al-Harari is a highly esteemed Islamic scholar. He is an authority on Sunni Shafi`i jurisprudence and has the title of *Mu*haddith<sup>11</sup> (an authority on Prophetic *H*adith – sayings). Shaykh Al-Harari has authored over 30 books on traditional Sunni theology and jurisprudence, including his commentary on the books of great historic scholars such as Imam Al-Ash`ari, Imam ash-Shafi`i, Imam

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10 In Australia, the students of Shaykh `Abdullah Al-Harari established the *Islamic Charity Projects Association* (ICPA).

11 Critical analysis of two books authored by Sheikh Al-Harari was conducted at Al-Azhar University in Cairo. The books entitled *As-Sirat Al-Mustaqim* (*The Straight Path*) and *Bughyat At-Talib* (*The Quest of the Student of Obligatory Knowledge*) have been perused by a committee of Professors at the Azhar's Faculty of Religious Jurisprudence and have been given the official seal of approval. Among what the committee wrote was: “The author Sheikh `Abdullah Al-Harari is distinguished by his knowledge and reference of authentic and credible sources in matters of belief and rulings”.

## Part 2 (cont.)

at-Tahawī and many others.

The Shaykh is also famous for his work *Al-Maqalat as-Sunniyyah* (*The Sunni Articles*, 520 pages) in which he summarises the position of authorities from the traditional Sunni establishment in his refutational work of Ibn Taymiyah's theology. He does that by citing over 100 scholars. The book summarises in six lengthy articles how Ibn Taymiyah has contradicted the basic precepts of Islam. Shaykh `Abdullah Al-Harari, like other traditional Islamic scholars, strongly warns the Muslim populace and its youth from following the creed of Ibn Taymiyah, and it is for this key message that he and his kind from the traditional Sunni establishment are targeted by Al-Qaeda's ideologues.

### **5. How can we build a Counter-Narrative program to extremism based on the standpoints and remarks of such extremist ideologues?**

To combat the extremism and radicalisation of Al-Qaeda and its affiliate groups, the Australian community should draw attention to precisely the things that its ideologues want to conceal, and rally behind the traditional Islamic establishment, which Al-Qaeda tenaciously labels as 'heretical'. In developing this Counter-Narrative program, we need to use scholarly Sunni authorities to refute the extremists' claims and assert authority over them. This intellectual youth 'armament' program against extremism and radicalisation targets the theological roots by providing competing information and messages that disrupt/interrupt the radicalisation process, its theology and its narratives.

Furthermore, the program needs to be based upon a coherent approach with a complete body of knowledge capable of holistically refuting extremism and its global movement, thus providing an Islamic alternative for Muslim youth. The parameters of this coherent counter-movement have been identified, as noted above, by the extremist ideologues themselves. This positive counter-movement is the Sunni traditional standpoint, which naturally has the support of mainstream Islamic communities, not just in Australia but worldwide.

## Part 2 (cont.)

In Part 4 of this book, we use this analysis to present 16 counter-narratives to the extremist propaganda and theology as part of the action plan to build the resilience of the Muslim community and its youth in countering the fragile narratives of the extremists. But before we do that, let us first describe the Radicalisation Model and its three phases. This will be useful in understanding the recruitment processes and thus better informing the Counter-Radicalisation framework.



**Part Three**  
**The Radicalisation Model**





## Part 3 (cont.)

**As defined earlier:** “Radicalisation in the BIRR Initiative is defined as the process of adopting, promoting or acting upon extremist beliefs. It is the process that indoctrinates a vulnerable individual and then activates them from a latent extremist mind-state to an overt extremist action-state”.

### 1. So how does someone who is going through a vulnerable time become radicalised?

Social marginalisation and cultural and religious differences associated with being a young Muslim Australian, as identified in Part 1, contribute to a general vulnerability and atmosphere of susceptibility to radicalisation, rather than to radicalisation itself.

In line with the many vulnerability factors to extremism, first-hand reports and personal accounts of Muslim youth living in south-west Sydney, identified the following generalised pathway to radicalisation: whether they are underachievers experiencing blocked opportunities, or are, alternatively, middle-class with tertiary qualifications, young Australian Muslims could become at high risk of radicalisation, if they start to ‘associate’ with an extremist group.

The vulnerability factors to extremism, which are triggered in the radicalisation process, generally strengthen to a dangerous level after some form of association with an extremist group, whether virtually on the internet or with peers at a suburban private house.

Association with an extremist group could be deliberate when the youth knows that the group is extremist, or it could be undeliberate when the youth naively associates with the extremist group. Both forms of extremist group association are direct high-risk factors linked to radicalisation. It should be noted here, however, that there is no linear model of social vulnerability – that is, social vulnerability factors do not on their own trigger the radicalisation process without this prime catalyst of group association.

## Part 3 (cont.)

Furthermore, irrespective of whether young Muslims experience disaffection and 'exclusion' first-hand or are in fact 'included' in Western society but empathise with the disaffection of other Muslims locally or abroad, it seems it is the political and social dissatisfaction with Western policies that mainly drives Muslim youth towards action. This, however, does not by itself translate into radicalisation. The passage to radicalisation is contingent upon the type of ideological directives the youth receive. This strongly influences whether their action leads them to a radicalised identity, or whether they direct their energy and frustration towards social and political change through a positively engaged identity.

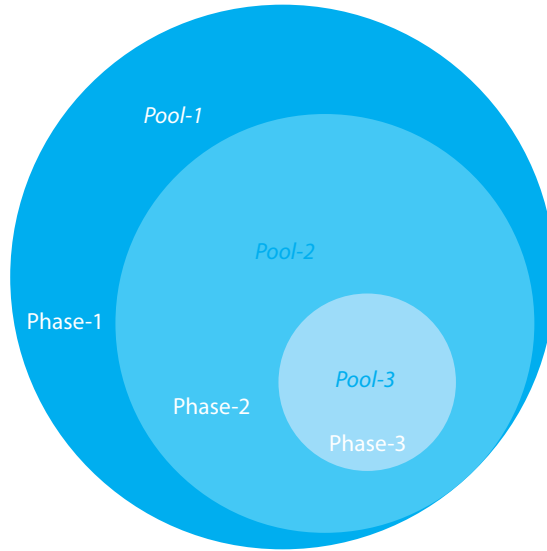
Our overall mission is to provide the education and grounding that leads youth to the latter and away from the former.

### **2. What is the Radicalisation Model? What are the phases of the radicalisation process?**

To further analyse the risk, it seems that a number of steps take place between being vulnerable to radicalisation and becoming an active member of an extremist group. Broadly, there are two stages – one in which young people accept the extremist doctrine (indoctrination), and a second, once they have accepted the doctrine, in which they put it into practice (activation). There is a possible third stage, namely terrorism, which has its own processes and initiators and which goes beyond the activities of the second stage of radicalisation.

*The Radicalisation Model described below fits the observations and the data collated by the project researchers as described in the Research Methodology section.*

## Part 3 (cont.)



**Phase-1: Indoctrination.** *From vulnerability to indoctrination – association with the group, immersion in extremist doctrine.* Covert phase-1 radicalisation forms pool-1. Propaganda books, websites and talks are used for recruitment into pool-1. No clear emphasis on terrorism, but terrorist ideologues are sympathised with, and Al-Qaeda theological authors promoted. Civil society is needed to counter phase-1.

**Phase-2: Activation.** *From indoctrination to activation – carrying out the doctrines.* Overt phase-2 radicalisation forms pool-2. For recruitment into pool-2, intensive one-on-one sessions are used with extremist mentors in person or on the internet. To counter phase-2, civil society is needed with some involvement from government.

**Phase-3: Terrorism.** *From activation to terrorism.* Terrorist recruitment forms pool-3. For recruitment into pool-3, i) terrorist operatives or agents are involved for a typical terrorist act; ii) ring-leaders (alone) for self-styled operations. To counter phase-3, security agencies are needed with some involvement from civil society.

**Diagram 1: Radicalisation Model**

## Part 3 (cont.)

**The Radicalisation Model is composed of three phases:**

### *Phase-1: Indoctrination*

*From vulnerability to indoctrination – introduction to the group, immersion in extremist doctrine*

Phase-1 radicalisation is not a self-contained process that is triggered when the vulnerability factors are present. No matter how numerous they were, the vulnerability factors do not, by themselves, indoctrinate a vulnerable youth. Rather indoctrination is the process of absorbing extremist theology, either by reading certain books or websites, or by listening to certain preachers or mentors. It is this process that gives the vulnerable youth a set of religious beliefs and a sense of belonging, which are cornerstones to any further radicalisation.

Such at-risk youth undergoing indoctrination form pool-1 of the Radicalisation Model. In this pool of at-risk youth, there is no clear support voiced for terrorism, and the indoctrination process could even superficially condemn terrorism. But, significantly enough, the indoctrination sympathises with extremist ideologues and it promotes the authors discussed in Part 2 that are identified by the theology of Al-Qaeda and its affiliates. In fact, these authors are supplied in the indoctrination process as primary authorities and spiritual guides.

Within the three-phased Radicalisation Model, phase-1 begins by exposing the vulnerable to the authors that are characteristic of the theology and creed of Al-Qaeda's ideologues and affiliates (i.e., Ibn Taymiyah, Ibn `Abd Al-Wahhab, Sayyid Qutb, etc.). In fact, these authors are a trademark of phase-1, as they constitute the identifying factor or the ideological identity of this phase. The creed based on these authors defines the bonds and the 'brotherhood' relationships that form within this phase.

The extremist preachers responsible for enlisting youngsters into this phase are

## Part 3 (cont.)

people with public profiles, and it is not a condition for recruitment that they publicly condone terrorism. In fact, many of the public talks provided by these preachers do not openly preach ‘hate’ or openly incite ‘violence’.

In this phase, vulnerable youth start off imbibing the doctrine without undertaking any other activity. It is a covert radicalisation phase of indoctrination involving various propaganda tools. As propaganda, extremists use articles (and sometimes books) that can be easily downloaded, printed off as flyers and circulated on the streets and at certain mosques, or disseminated over the internet (via email or chat forums). Extremists use such propaganda tools to build a popular base for themselves as they play the victim, alleging that they are under the media and government’s spotlight due to their firm position in ‘defence’ of Islam. This support is galvanised through contacts made at businesses run by extremists or their sympathisers, such as cafés, gyms and even tutoring companies. The social support base in which they’re involved acts like a shielded layer making it more difficult for members to abandon its network without seeing themselves as betraying close friends. This is known as the ‘bunch of guys’ recruitment, which emphasises a group identity through the adherence to an ideological orientation (creed). Extremists exploit this form of recruitment, which could otherwise be reversed for driving a positive orientation amongst vulnerable youth.

From pool-1, indoctrinated youth may then become fully radicalised, as they further explore the texts and literature with more specialised mentors within the network. It is the access to these networks and the binding extremist doctrine and internal trust that result in the high risk associated with the vulnerable youth of pool-1 making a transition to pool-2, and thus getting closer to the core of the movement.

Pool-1 of the model, however, remains as a warm-up period that is very critical to the identity formation and the indoctrination. It is unlikely to occur without a human or a social dimension.

## Part 3 (cont.)

### *Phase-2: Activation*

#### *From indoctrination to activation – carrying out the doctrines*

Once they are in pool-1, at-risk youth can be further radicalised by non-preacher mentors. It is this non-preacher layer of extremist mentors, who hardly have a public profile, that issue certain edicts and act as the day-to-day point of contact for youth in pool-1 networks (making the transition into pool-2). These mentors provide further teachings based on the authors promoted through phase-1 recruitment – the aforementioned authors that are characteristic of the theology of Al-Qaeda and its ideologues and affiliates. What the ideologues find in these raw texts is also found by the local mentors, especially those second-generation youth who were trained into the movement at specific overseas seminaries, and who can also speak the young person's language. Because these mentors are not usually public figures, they are more firebrand than the public-profiled extremist preachers, who have recently adapted their public pronouncements around media cameras in order to avoid public controversy. Those preachers have, as pointed out earlier, nevertheless continued to act as instruments for radicalisation by continuously recruiting into pool-1, and by maintaining the keys to the doorway of the extremist movement.

Publicly known extremist leaders see their responsibility as maintaining the indoctrination process and enlisting new vulnerable youth to it. The non-public layer of mentors, on the other hand, are the self-styled roaming mentors who are frustrated by the hypocrisy of the public leaders, who incite others by promoting the extremist theology, but who do not live by their own words. It is this rallying cry that these extremist mentors use to convert extreme doctrine into action. These mentors, who are seen by vulnerable youth as the hands-on figures, are main activators into pool-2 of the Radicalisation Model. To vulnerable youth they appear as if with an aura of wisdom or expertise, deceiving the youth into thinking they have religious-political dominance over them.

## Part 3 (cont.)

Self-radicalisation is also a means by which transition between phases takes place. Self-radicalised individuals are not directly recruited by extremist mentors, but obtain their extensive theological foundations directly from extremist books, websites and private internet chat rooms. Virtual radicalisation is a new trend in which the role of the ‘intermediaries’ is less important in intensive absorption of extremist doctrines via the electronic highway. It is an ‘autonomous’ process of acquiring extremist ideology.

### *Phase-3: Terrorism*

#### *From activation to terrorism*

Phase-3 can be triggered by outsiders who come into a local community and recruit from pool-2, or through the support of existing local figures who have travelled overseas and received training at Al-Qaeda camps, or even by those who have received training on the internet. The internet is replete with extremist websites that are further radicalising a new generation of youth towards extremist activity sanctioned by the theology of Al-Qaeda.

Pool-3 comprises fully radicalised individuals who are ready to carry out a terrorist attack in support of Al-Qaeda and its network of affiliates.

Building and developing trust is a big factor in all of these phases, especially in relation to a transition between phases where the credibility of the preacher, mentor or agent is very critical to the vulnerable youth. This trust within the extremist networks is built on the common creed that binds its members, namely the creed framed by the theological parameters of Al-Qaeda’s ideologies (refer to Part 2).

### **3. How are pool-1 recruits of the Radicalisation Model classified?**

The vulnerable youth in pool-1 are classified according to their level of commitment,

## Part 3 (cont.)

and their capacity. Their individual level of commitment determines whether they are 'active' or 'passive' members. These latter members are the rank and file of extremist groups and irrespective of their level of commitment, the bond that binds them into the group is their common ideological orientation (creed).

*The membership layer is classified into two categories based on the members' level of engagement:*

- The first category is the inarticulate youth, the underachievers with few or no qualifications, who were radicalised through their complacency, lack of self-esteem and confidence and their withdrawal from society. Those are not generally at-risk of radicalisation autonomously, one at a time; but mainly in 'bunches'. In addition, they only play secondary roles in the group. General indicators of this category (some of which are shared by category two) are incitement, unruliness, low culture, disruptiveness, bad manners, excessive zeal, abrupt proclamations on issues of religious law and disregard for Muslim scholars with contrary views, to name just a few.
- The second category generally comprises those with a tertiary training, capable of individually engaging with the radicalisation process. In life, they generally exhibit basic entrepreneurial skills. In pool-1, they usually occupy the roles of mentors and secondary leaders, as well as public relations personnel, propagandists, website designers and managers of the pool-1 rank and file. They have been indoctrinated with extremist narratives, but they are generally more inclined to convert out of the extremist path than are their category one counterparts. They would be the first target of our Counter-Narrative effort (to be described in Part 4).

*Extremists generally exhibit a common pattern of behaviour that has been explored in Parts 2 and 3. However, the specific claims made by extremist groups do vary – we try to cover many of these claims in the following section, Part 4.*





# **Part Four**

## **Counter-Narratives to Extremism**



# Part 4

**In Part 4, we offer a point-by-point refutation of the extremist ideology, producing counter-narratives to the narrative claims made by extremists for use in mentoring young people at risk of being influenced by extremism.**

## Part 4 (cont.)

**H**aving established in parts 2 and 3 the theological foundations of the extremist narrative and its counter-narrative, as well as the contours of the radicalisation process and its recruitment methods, let us now return to young Ahmed. Ahmed has experienced discrimination, alienation, an identity struggle and is currently searching for answers.

During this time of vulnerability, Ahmed is approached by one of his peers, Kamal, a university student who claims to have found answers to all Ahmed's questions and concerns. Ahmed, it seems, was at a critical crossroad, and he has not realised that he could fall prey to an extremist group. Ahmed could set foot on a path that leads to a radicalised identity.

This part describes what we might tell Ahmed to mentor him out of his difficult situation, to put him on an alternative pathway towards building a positively engaged identity. Ahmed has two potential paths: a path to radicalisation – the radicalisation narrative, and his alternative – the counter-narrative.

Below, we have summarised in two categories (Theology and Practice) many of the narratives made by extremists which Ahmed, Kamal, or someone similar, might go through, and what we would say to mentor him or her. But before we discuss the extremist narratives and the counter-narratives, let us first explain some general guidelines that would help in mentoring someone who has become involved with extremist narratives.

(cont.)

## A. Working with Extremist Narratives/Counselling Guidelines

### *A1. A Framework for Building Identity*

Adolescence for young, at-risk Muslims involves forming a stable sense of identity that is integrated with an effective positive stance on existential issues.

Muslim adolescents' identity style is related to the religious domain. We have identified three identity styles: informational, normative, and diffuse/avoidant.

Individuals using an information-oriented style deal with identity issues by actively seeking out, processing and utilising identity-relevant information. In other words, they will try to inform themselves about the consequences of their choices and actions prior to making decisions.

Normative-oriented individuals focus on the normative expectations held by significant others and reference groups. Normative-oriented individuals adhere strictly to their current identity structures, into which they assimilate all identity-relevant information. They resist change.

Diffuse/avoidant-oriented individuals procrastinate about personal problems and their identity.

Muslim adolescents who use an informational identity style tend to understand some religious content in a comprehensive and interpretative way by thinking about the backgrounds of rulings. Adolescents using the diffuse/avoidant identity style take them without much thought/engagement, and adolescents who use a normative identity style are simply more involved in their religious practice.

As there is growing evidence indicating it is possible to direct the identity formation by means of intervention programs, this approach seems appropriate

## Part 4 (cont.)

for an intervention program with Muslim youth at risk of radicalisation. By promoting an informational identity style, Muslim adolescents can be expected to learn to deal with religious issues in a more comprehensive and interpretive way. Processing religious content in a rigid way correlates with lack of moral competence, and leads to prejudice dispositions such as totalitarianism, social dominance, lack of empathy and closed-mindedness. Therefore, intervening in the identity formation process by promoting and stimulating an informational identity style may remove the societal problems that are associated with rigidity and unruliness.

The journey to forging a distinctive Australian Muslim identity will not be easy. Youth who are susceptible often have a strong sense of injustice and need to be engaged in a cause to feel fulfilled. The aim is to utilise their energy in a positive manner and channel it in a direction that is constructive for both themselves and for society. Frustration has the inherent risk of exclusion, which is a negative and destructive force on its practitioners and on society.

The values of Muslims, including strong family bonds, high levels of volunteering and aid donations are a cornerstone to the Muslim identity we seek to forge. So is the Muslim heritage of contributions to human progress, for instance in mathematics, astronomy, architecture and medicine. All such values should be asserted to give Muslim youth a framework for their identity in a Western society, such as Australia.

### *A2. General Counselling Guidelines*

When working with Muslim youth susceptible to extremism, it is important to establish a channel for advice based on trust. A lenient but honest attitude is fundamental to building this trust. A mentor, a teacher, a friend, or a parent who wants to 'get through' to a young Muslim should begin with building trust with that

(cont.)

young person. It is important to be ready to advise and to answer questions. We must understand the young person's past experiences, as a deep understanding of the youngster's worldview can lead to an atmosphere where positive alternatives (counter-narratives) can be presented and explored. This, in turn, can result in positive change through the embracement of a counter-narrative.

In short, it is important to help those being indoctrinated by extremist groups to reframe their views and reshape their perspectives towards healthy and balanced narratives.

*A number of strategies founded in counselling techniques may be useful when working with Muslim youth at risk of radicalisation. Some examples include:*

*i.) Understanding the youth's past experience:* Mentors should endeavour to truly understand the youth's past experience without being influenced by their own upbringing and by any personal filters that might bias their understanding.

*ii.) Helping youth to define the challenges in their narratives:* Encourage the youth at risk to define the challenges in their own narratives and to name the associated conflicts.

*iii.) Engaging in a supported search for meaning:* After providing the opportunity for the youth at-risk to reconsider his/her past experiences, a constructive channel of communication can be established to allow the mentor to provide much needed support. Through active participation, the mentor can help the young person to reconsider their stories, deriving new meanings in their lives. Helping youth at-risk to reconstruct meaning can assist them in moving forward, in discovering more positive perspectives and interpretations. Mentors can challenge and guide youth at-risk to identify and acknowledge other narratives, which they can eventually adopt as more empowering than the problem-saturated narratives they had. This guided search for positive alternative interpretations

## Part 4 (cont.)

and new constructive meanings forms a relationship that centres on advice, which could lead the youngster to new positive perspectives in an environment of collaboration.

*iv.) Helping youth recount personal stories of competence and strengths:* In general, at-risk youth focus on their challenges, inabilities and skills gaps. Instead of reinforcing this, mentors can explore the youth's positive stories of survival to help them on a new path of mobilising themselves and their lives in a positive direction.

*v.) Affirming youth's privilege to constructively reinvigorate their own lives and co-construct positive alternative narratives:* Mentors can help rebuild the youth's sense of self-worth, helping them to constructively reinvigorate their lives or to develop positive alternative solutions.

*vi.) Sharing mentor stories:* The mentor's use of cultural stories, parables, myths and metaphors and other narrative forms can elicit the at-risk youth's own forgotten stories of healing and empowerment.

### ***A3. Islamic Counselling Guidelines***

The Islamic methodology for guidance relies upon the methods of reasoning such as the use of wisdom (*al-hikmah*), fair exhortation (*al-maw'idhah*) and argumentative reasoning (*al-mujadalah*) as is found in the Qur'anic Ayah 125 in Surat An-Nahl, which means:

*“Call to the way of your Lord with wisdom and fair exhortation, and argue (reason) with them in ways that are best and most gracious: for your Lord Knows best of the one who strays from His<sup>1</sup> way, and He Knows best of those who go aright.”*

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1 The words 'He', 'His' & 'Him' when used in reference to God must not be understood to refer to gender. God created males & females. Hence, "He" does not resemble "His" creations & they do not resemble "Him".

(cont.)

Also Ayah 33 of Surat Fussilat means: *“Who [affirmative] speaks better than the one who calls to Allah while they themselves do good.”*

The beauty of the Qur’an is manifested in presenting to mankind three means to reasoning, and it does so in one verse. They are “wisdom”, “fair exhortation” and “argue (reason) with them in ways that are best”. These three means are known to logisticians as: ‘proof’, ‘convincing through speech’ and ‘argumentation’.

## B. Counter-Narratives against Extremism

*Below is a list of sixteen extremist narratives and their counter-narratives in two main categories.*

- **Category 1 [Theology] (8 cases)**
- **Category 2 [Practice] (8 cases)**

### Category 1 [Theology]

**Narrative T1:** Extremist groups claim that they represent ‘true Islam’ and hence promote themselves as such in public.

**Counter-Narrative T1:** Extremists use selective quotations from religious sources, and sometimes outright fabrications, to give the impression that their ideology is ‘true Islam.’ They claim that normative and established views are the result of ‘innovation’



## Part 4 (cont.)

(*bid'ah*), and that they are allegedly going back to the early period of the *Salaf*. In making these allegations, extremists rely on a young Muslim's ignorance of the Arabic language and of the history and culture of Islam. Since most young Australian Muslims are not able to read Classical Arabic well themselves, and may lack knowledge about Islam, they are vulnerable to being misled as to the meaning of Qur'anic passages, for example. They may know little of Islamic history and therefore are vulnerable to a portrayal that downgrades the importance of Muslim scholarship upon the process of transmission of Islamic knowledge and culture. In reality, as we shall see, many of the doctrines propounded by the extremists are the real innovations. The idea that Islam is something that does not require mastering the language for interpretation is itself an innovation that denies the rich history of Islamic scholarship and civilisation.

*Ahmed:* This view is the only correct way to understand Islam.

*Mentor:* How do you know this is true? Have you studied the opinions of Muslim scholars on this issue? Do you know if this view contradicts what most Muslim scholars have always said? I hope you don't think that the people telling you this are capable of understanding the Qur'an better than great Muslim scholars are.

**Narrative T2:** Extremists tend to claim that they are implementing true *jihad*, and hence promote themselves as the authentic carriers of the banner of Islam.

**Counter-Narrative T2:** *Jihad* as referenced in the Qur'an and in the Prophetic traditions should not be automatically and solely taken to mean the concept of *qital* (fighting) or *harb* (war). *Al-jihad al-akbar* (the greater *jihad*) for example, as described by the Prophet in the transmitted traditions, means the inner struggle against evil temptations and wrongdoing. While there is the possibility of a form of *jihad* that is conducted by warfare, the conditions of this are more stringent than those applied by the extremists, for example the killing of innocent children and the random

(cont.)

blowing up of marketplaces are not sanctioned by the rules of *jihad* according to Islamic tradition. Such acts are governed by group-driven ambitions, ego or perhaps misguided intentions based on misinformation and misinterpretation of the sources and traditions of Islam.

*Ahmed:* I want to join a jihadi group.

*Mentor:* Jihad is a noble concept. But some of the clashes that are being fought today are not clear-cut clashes in the name of Islam that can simply be called 'jihad' as some do. Such conflicts are complicated and historical, expressing not just Islam but all kinds of differences between people, and in which the historical methods typically used are condemned by Islam, such as the killing of women and children and the practice of suicide.

*You should moreover ask yourself what is more useful in the current climate: to go fighting in a battle in a country where you are exploited for complicated political ends by local forces you do not understand and who do not apply true Islamic ethics, or to concentrate on becoming a morally righteous person who can educate and strengthen your own community, friends and family here in Australia?*

**Narrative T3:** Extremist groups are known for the practice of passing *takfir* against Muslim scholars and leaders who challenge their authority.

**Counter-Narrative T3:** Declaring someone as a blasphemer or *takfir* is a process governed by strict rules and regulations that have been laid out by mainstream Muslim scholars. In Islam, it is not permissible to pass *takfir* on Muslim leaders or scholars based on political or tactical differences when the rules that govern this process do not apply. The charge of blasphemous disbelief is a serious charge summed up by the

## Part 4 (cont.)

*Hadīth* related by Imam Al-Bukhārī, which means:

*“If a [Muslim] man calls another man a kafir, it will apply to one of the two.”*

This means that anyone who falsely calls a Muslim a *kafir* (blasphemer) is himself not a Muslim anymore. However, this is different from calling a person a blasphemer, when they have in fact committed blasphemy by saying, by action, or by belief. As usual in Islam, one has to exercise great caution in making accusations. Extremists, however, are known for hastily passing such a judgement for mere disagreement. Such behaviour aims to shut down debate against them, and hence to shut down counter-argumentative scholarship, thus reducing Muslims to unthinking obedience, completely against the intellectual spirit of Islam, which recognises the human faculty for reason as a God-given gift to be exercised effectively, and as something that can elevate Muslims to higher levels. Branding a person with opposing viewpoints as a kafir without following the applicable religious rules weakens the Muslim community, while strengthening the extremists’ hold on adherents by shutting out any questioning of their extremist ideology.

**Narrative T4:** Extremists pass *takfir* against the Muslim masses outside their rank and file, thereby sanctioning violence against them.

**Counter-Narrative T4:** In making this dangerous exclusivist claim, the extremists have clearly misinterpreted the Qur’anic *Ayah* number 44 in Surat Al-Ma’idah, which means:

*“Whosoever does not judge according to what Allāh has sent down then those are the kafirun.”*

The interpretation of this verse based on the authority of Ibn `Abbas, the Prophet’s cousin, a great Companion and the Interpreter of the Qur’an, is related in the book *Al-Mustadrak* by Al-Hakim and authenticated by Al-Thahabī and also related in the book

## Part 4 (cont.)

*The Religious Rulings on Women* by Imam Ahmad Ibn Hanbal. This interpretation is as follows: “To merely not judge according to what Allāh has sent down is not the *kufur* which one might think of that separates from Islam. It is a kind of sin below the state of apostasy”.

To say otherwise i.e., to claim that merely not judging according to what Allāh has sent down is blasphemy is to work to divide the Muslim community, rather than to unite it around the correct teachings. This is completely hypocritical for people who absurdly claim to act in the name of the Muslim *ummah*. Again, this extremist practice causes social destructuring within the Muslim community, which makes those youth under their influence more vulnerable to further alienation and radicalisation. The extremists then become the sole reference point to these young people in their control, a strong factor in their brainwashing process.

*Ahmed:*        *These so-called Muslims are kafirs.*

*Mentor:*       *Maybe there are some things in their interpretation which you don't agree with, but that does not automatically qualify them to be outside the fold of Islam. I invite you to verify your interpretation. Are you sure you know Islam so much better than they do? It might be the case that those you are talking to have made this claim, but those outside your group have not; why do you hastily suppose that the views of those you are talking to are right? You would have to know both the majority of scholarly opinions and the beliefs of the people you say are kafirs so well that you can be sure that the two are in clear contradiction. Before that, you are advised not to pass this judgement. Please remember the Hadith which means that he who inexcusably calls a Muslim a kafir is himself a non-Muslim.*

Imam Abu-Hanifah said in his book *Al-Fiqh Al-Akbar*:

## Part 4 (cont.)

*“We do not declare as a blasphemer any Muslim for a sin he or she has committed, even if it were a major sin, as long as they don’t challenge Islam on its impermissibility. We also don’t remove the label of true Belief from them for such a sin. A Muslim could be a transgressor without being a blasphemer.”*

**Narrative T5:** Extremists claim that all those who govern with secular law or who are governed by it are rendered as apostates for merely ruling by secular law. Extremists call for abstention from any form of participation in Australian politics, and they pass *takfir* against any Muslim who runs for parliament or any Muslim who attempts to change the course of the election results by voting.

**Counter-Narrative T5:** Muslim scholars have clarified this matter by indicating that it is not blasphemy to merely govern or be governed by secular law. In a country like Australia, where the vast majority of people are not Muslim, *shari`ah* (Muslim religious ways) cannot be expected to be applied by non-Muslims. There have always been Muslims who lived in countries that are not themselves Muslim and, except in cases of interference in Muslims’ religious beliefs and practices, Muslims have avoided breaching the laws of those countries in order not to inflict harm upon themselves. But this does not mean that Muslims cannot argue for the correctness of Islamic principles of jurisprudence in general society.

Australian Muslims who have an ideal for society and wish to influence the outcomes of an Australian election through the ballot box are not prevented from doing so, according to Muslim mainstream practice. Furthermore, Muslims can have a larger influence upon society if they engage positively in Australian politics. Opting out of the political process prevents Islamic perspectives from being taken into account in the governance of Australia. Muslims should explain Islam to non-Muslims and this explanation will clarify Islam in society – the way of Islam has always been persuasion through reason, which requires communication with non-Muslims, not separation from them.

## Part 4 (cont.)

*Ahmed:* Muslims should not vote in Australian elections. Islamic teaching tells us the right way to run society and this is not open to debate or vote.

*Mentor:* It's right that Islam guides our political principles as Muslims. But Australia is a non-Muslim country, and we live here. If we are concerned about the laws and system of the country in which we live, we should allow ourselves the opportunity to change it. We could participate in Australian politics and put forward the Islamic viewpoint.

**Narrative T6:** Extremists claim that much Muslim scholarship amounts to innovation (bid'ah) and should be discarded, and that everything with no record of having been practiced by the Prophet in person is against Islam.

**Counter-Narrative T6:** Muslim scholars over the centuries have said that innovation can be of two types (good and bad) or several (obligatory, recommended, permissible, disliked and prohibited). Some innovation is necessary, simply to deal with the emergence of new things in the world. Other innovation, while not necessary, is harmless because it does not contradict Islamic principles, just as different Muslim societies can potentially have different customs, while being equally Islamic. Some innovation can even strengthen Islam, as the Prophet himself, peace be upon him, said in a *Hadith* related by Imam Muslim, which means:

*“He who innovates a good tradition in Islam shall have its reward and as much reward as those who do it after him without deducting any of their rewards.”*

A narrow definition of ‘innovation’ has made the proponents of extremism categorise many Muslim scholars, activities, celebrations, habits, customs and ideas as taking a Muslim ‘outside the fold of Islam.’ They ban all new traditions regarding Islam not distinguishing between concepts that are contradictory to Islamic principles and

## Part 4 (cont.)

others that are commendable and approved by Islam.

The followers of such a doctrine consider all that has been introduced anew regarding religion as a deviation, heretical and reprehensible, with no differentiation between what is in accord with Islam and what is not. But is what the second-generation follower (successor) of the Prophet, Yahya bin Ya`mur, did, of introducing dots to the written Arabic letters of the Holy Qur'an, a heretical introduction?! What if all the Muslims reciting the Qur'an today benefit from the dotted copies?! Can we claim that the Muslims are following a heresy?! Of course not! This innovation helps people on the righteous way, even though it did not exist in the time of the Prophet himself, peace be upon him. From this we can see that there are potential innovations to strengthen the Islamic community that still have not been thought of yet, and that this community is stronger if it remains open to new ideas, while of course being careful to guard against true heresy. This is a more profound approach than just being negative and excluding everything new.

**Narrative T7:** Extremists claim that they transmit the correct understanding of the verses of the Qur'an.

**Counter-Narrative T7:** The issue of interpreting the Qur'an is foundational to understanding Islam. The person who comprehensively interprets the Qur'an needs, in some cases, to understand the context of events surrounding the revelation of some of the verses. Furthermore, the process of *ta'wil* (an interpretive methodology that is used in assigning meanings which conform to the Arabic language and the rules of Islam) is also used when interpreting the Qur'an. This is used by scholars to interpret the Attributes of Allah in accordance with the Arabic language and the rules of Islam away from contradictory readings that render these Attributes as physical and human-like. Ayah 11 in Surat Ash-Shura in the Qur'an means:

*“Nothing is like God in any way whatsoever.”*

## Part 4 (cont.)

Ayah 74 in Surat An-Nahl means:

*“Do not attribute to Allah the attributes of His creations.”*

Those extremists who preach anti-*ta'wil* lack the understanding to make the religious and linguistic analysis that keeps them away from wrongly attributing God with a physical hand or a face or wrongly claiming that He is a body that sits on the Throne (ceiling of Paradise) or that He occupies a place. Such false interpretations liken God to the creation (*tashbih*), which Islamically clashes with the above verses.

Hence, it is clear that interpreting the Qur'an is a thorough scholarly process. Without this process, the extremist understanding of some verses from the Qur'an would be rendered superficial and lacking the appropriate framework that keeps the Qur'an a coherent book. There is contradiction and incoherence in the extremists' readings of the Qur'an. Furthermore, the process of following qualified Islamic scholars (*taqlid*) in religious matters is what Muslims do, and have done since the early times of the *Salaf*.

The extremists base their ideologies on unsanctioned concepts that are in effect a misreading and a misinterpretation of the Muslim religion. The Qur'an, which for Muslims is an unadulterated book from God, is written in Classical Arabic, and knowledge of that language is required to correctly understand it. Knowledge of modern Arabic dialects is not sufficient. Classical scholarship in Islam was conducted by people living in times much closer to that of the early Arabs, and speaking a language much closer to them. To disregard this scholarship is to discard a major tool to understanding the Qur'an. It is much easier not to read mountains of books, but it is incredibly arrogant to assume one can do better than thousands of scholars who dedicated their lives over hundreds of years to interpreting the Qur'an.

*Ahmed:*        *This book I've been reading is all true!*

*Mentor:*       *It may be linguistically correct and a glossy book, but before you judge its content to be correct, you should also know what other scholars*



## Part 4 (cont.)

*have to say about its topics. The best way to verify the concepts mentioned in this book is to ask a Shaykh or an Imam trusted by the community. Plus, it's better to learn the personal obligatory Islamic knowledge or what is called *al-fard al-'ayni* before you submerge yourself into any book that you've picked off the shelf. The personal obligatory knowledge is a program established by Muslim scholars to teach Muslim youth and others the basics of their faith. These basics help you develop a religious balance (*mizān shar'i*), by which you're in a better place to judge books and websites.*

A *Hadith* of the Prophet, peace be upon him, from the route of Ibn `Umar has the following meaning:

*“What I fear greatly for my nation is a man who mis-explains the Qur'an and takes it out of context.”*

**Narrative T8:** Extremists say that the use of labels such as ‘moderate’ or ‘extremist’ is in itself a Western conspiracy against Islam and Muslims.

**Counter-Narrative T8:** In fact this is a misconception the extremists have invented and popularised, in order to deceive Muslims and in order to silence their own opponents. Islam is a religion of moderation and Muslims are a middle-path people as mentioned in the Qur'an in *Ayah* 143 in *Surat Al-Baqarah*, which means:

*“Indeed Allāh has made the Muslim ummah a middle (just) nation.”*

To be middle-path is to be moderate. In fact, the Prophet, peace be upon him, warned against *al-ghuluww fiddin* (extremism). When conducted in the name of Islam, extremism gives Muslims a bad name, hence the need to work energetically to eradicate its damaging influence from society.

## Part 4 (cont.)

### Category 2 [Practice]

**Narrative P1:** Extremists claim that it is impermissible for Australian Muslims to interact with non-Muslims, including Christians and Jews (known as the people of the Book). They advocate segregation.

**Counter-Narrative P1:** Islam calls Australian Muslims to justice and mercy and permits their collaboration with others to achieve the common good that benefits humanity with all its members, whether Muslim or non-Muslim. Islam in Arabia emerged through the Prophet in a world surrounded by people who were non-Muslim. The Prophet, peace be upon him, had plenty of dealings with non-Muslims and Islam has throughout its history mostly existed in countries where non-Muslims have been present and where Muslims and non-Muslims lived together peacefully side by side. The notion of refusing to deal with Australian non-Muslims is an innovation against the traditions of Islam. The agenda of segregation is the agenda of the fringe anti-Islamic movements that do exist within Australian society and worldwide.

**Ahmed:** *I've heard it's impermissible to interact with non-Muslims.*

**Mentor:** *You may not want to interact with non-Muslims, but the way of Islam is not to refuse opportunities or to harm your prospects. If dealing with non-Muslims will help you, then it is a good thing. If it helps them too, then so much the better – if it does not harm Muslims, you should have nothing against the wellbeing of non-Muslims, and since Australian Muslims are part of Australian society, the wellbeing of all Australians in some measure aids Australian Muslims. You should certainly beware of corruption when dealing with non-Muslims, but as long as a Muslim remains true to their faith in their dealings with non-Muslims, this may bring benefit to themselves and to their community, which is a good thing.*

## Part 4 (cont.)

Addressing Muslims, Ayah 8 in Surat Al-Mumtahanah in the Qur'an means:

*“Allah does not forbid you to deal justly and kindly with those who fought not against you on account of religion nor drove you out of your homes.”*

**Narrative P2:** Extremists teach youth to confrontationally curse and vilify non-Muslims, their religions and ways, and they openly preach hate against ethnic groups other than theirs.

**Counter-Narrative P2:** Islam prevents Australian Muslims from calling in the community for the cursing and vilifying of non-Muslims and their religions, as this clearly causes retaliatory vilification and cursing of Muslims and their religion thus leading to community backlash. This disrupts social coexistence. Islam prevents Australian Muslims from lying to, betraying or robbing people, including non-Muslims. It is against Islamic morals to do so.

*Ahmed:* Anglo and Muslim people don't get along – just look at Cronulla...

*Mentor:* It's true there are occasional problems between Australian Muslim and non-Muslim youth, but fighting with non-Muslims just makes this worse. Living in a non-Muslim society, such a fight gives a poor reputation to Muslims and increases problems faced by Muslims in society. Islam requires Muslims to spread correct understanding of Islam and to guard the wellbeing of the Muslim community. While this does not mean that Muslims must accept ill-treatment, we should, nevertheless, find ways for making things better by trying to increase contacts with non-Muslims in a way that will lead to more peaceful relations between communities. Cutting ourselves off from other communities and publicly condemning their culture will not make the lives of Muslims better.

## Part 4 (cont.)

Ayah 108 in Surat Al-An`am in the Qur`an means:

*“Insult not those whom they worship other than Allāh (God), so that they don’t insult Allāh wrongfully without knowledge.”*

**Narrative P3:** Extremists justify the rape of a woman who has adorned herself in public.

**Counter-Narrative P3:** It is impermissible, according to Islam, to rape a woman who is seen showing off her body in public, and state that she deserves it. In Islam it is the duty of the male to turn his eye in chastity away from uncovered women – such is the Qur`anic commandment. Rape is impermissible in Islam, a sign of terrible moral weakness in the rapist, regardless of what temptation is placed before him.

*Ahmed:* She was asking for it, showing off her body like that.

*Mentor:* While Islam teaches that women should cover their bodies by wearing the hijab, and not invite sexual attention, Islam also teaches to men that they must avert their eyes from women and control their lust. You cannot use the sin of a woman to justify the sin of a man.

The Prophet, peace be upon him, said in a Hadith related by Imam Al-Bukhari and others, which means:

*“There are seven [given that they have the right belief in Allāh and His Messenger] whom Allāh will shade in the shade of the Throne (ceiling of Paradise) on the Day when there is no other shade: 1- a just ruler; 2- a youth who grew up in the worship of Allāh the Almighty; 3- a man whose heart is attached to the mosques; 4- two men who love each other for Allāh’s sake meeting for that and parting upon that; 5- a man who is called by a woman of beauty and position [for illegal intercourse] but he says: ‘I fear*

## Part 4 (cont.)

*Allāh;’ 6- a man who gives in charity and hides it such that his left hand does not know what his right hand gives in charity; 7- and a man who remembered Allāh in private and so his eyes shed tears.”*

**Narrative P4:** Extremists make it obligatory upon the females to wear a full chador, prohibiting them from uncovering their faces and from Islamically covering their bodies and hair with long shirt/skirt style clothing. Extremists make job opportunities more difficult for women.

**Counter-Narrative P4:** There is no Islamic proof that could be produced which would prevent females from wearing long shirt/skirt style clothing with a headscarf to Islamically cover their bodies and hair. *Hijab* is an issue of covering and modesty and not a statement to cut off females from the workplace or from society. Over Islamic history and between different Islamic countries, there are great variations in dress, while keeping to the prescribed Islamic principles of *hijab* and modesty.

**Narrative P5:** Extremists disallow females from attaining an education, working or any other respectable activity outside her house with their claim that it is not Islamically allowable.

**Counter-Narrative P5:** The claim that Islam disallows females from conducting respectable activity outside her house is in fact not sanctioned by Islam, but only by the unauthorised verdicts of some extremist leaders. It is not the Islamic tradition itself, but only the cultural tradition recently prevalent in some parts of the world. There is nothing in Islam itself that prevents women from going outside or from working when they adhere to Islamic strictures and do not, for example, be alone in an isolated place with a marriageable man (i.e. not a father, uncle, brother etc.) when there is no third individual that would break that privacy (*khalwah*). Few jobs call for women to break such rules. Moreover, the sexual harassment of women in the workplace is illegal in Australia, and is defined in Australian law as relative to what a

## Part 4 (cont.)

woman is comfortable with, meaning that behaviour by men that is unacceptable to Muslim women is not legally allowed, even if it is normal treatment for non-Muslim women. This is not to say that women have to go out and work, but it does mean that women who go out and work are not necessarily doing anything wrong, and nor are their husbands or fathers when they agree for them to work.

A *Hadith* related by Imam Al-Bukhari and Muslim and narrated by `A'ishah states what means:

*“`A'ishah, the Prophet's wife, said: ‘The Prophet, peace be upon him, used to pray the Dawn Prayer, and some women were witnessed praying with the congregation (at the Mosque).’”*

Another *Hadith* related by Al-Hakim in his book *Al-Mustadrak* mentions what means:

*“Al-Ahnaf Ibn Qays said: ‘I heard the *Hadith* from the mouths of Abu Bakr, `Umar, `Uthman and `Ali (male companions of the Prophet), and I did not hear it as pleasing as I heard it from `A'ishah (the Prophet's wife).’”*

This *Hadith* further confirms the notion that it is permissible for woman in Islam to interact with men as long as it is within the strictures of the religion.

**Narrative P6:** Extremists separate those youth under their influence from their Muslim parents, partners and families with the claim that they are not true Muslims.

**Counter-Narrative P6:** To call for separation of Muslim youth from their Muslim families is contrary to Islam itself. If you are practicing Islam more than your family, and your family does not try to prevent you, there is no contradiction between your duties to God and your duty to your family. The attempt to separate Muslim youth from their Muslim families is an attempt to replace the family with the extremist group.

## Part 4 (cont.)

Ayah 23 in Surat Al-Isra' in the Qur'an means:

*“Your Lord has decreed that you worship none but Him, and that parents be treated with virtue. If one of them or both of them attain old age in your life, say not to them a word of disregard, nor shout at them but address them with virtuous words.”*

*Ahmed:* My parents are not good Muslims. I don't want to listen to them.

*Mentor:* You do not get to choose who your parents are; if they are not good Muslims, that is sad, but it does not excuse you from your Islamic duty towards your family. If your Muslim parents do not demand you to do things contrary to Islam, then you are required to obey them. Also keep in mind that your parents are likely to know more than you about certain matters of relevance to you, being older and more experienced, and also that they most probably have your interests at heart, and would like the best outcomes for you. Anyone who tells you to forsake your family does not have your best interests at heart, and is not as good a person as they claim to be.

A Hadith related by At-Tirmidhiy states what means:

*“Some companions asked the Prophet, peace be upon him: ‘What is a way of saving oneself in the Hereafter?’ The Prophet responded: ‘You maintain a relationship with the one who severed the tie with you, you give to the one who deprived you, and you forgive the one who wronged you.’”*

**Narrative P7:** Extremists exploit every opportunity to appoint themselves as prayer leaders and preachers at mosques and congregation halls in order to have direct access to youth.

**Counter-Narrative P7:** Known extremists should not be permitted to act within such

## Part 4 (cont.)

leadership roles inside Islamic religious places, but they sometimes are. Even those who are not known to be extremists may still be extremists and may preach false doctrines and divisiveness, or they may not preach this openly, but still communicate it privately. Rather than simply accepting this as part of the diversity of the community, people should be critical of unorthodox views being propounded and willing to take action to exclude people when it is obvious they are extremists and they have not taken heed of advice. This is necessary to safeguard Muslims against heretical extremists, and also to avoid negative media and other attention that is attracted by extremist preachers, something that is also important, since we do not want Islam to be falsely represented or hijacked.

*Ahmed:* But [a local preacher] says this is true, and he is a preacher in the mosque!

*Mentor:* Just because someone is a preacher in the mosque doesn't mean they have all the right answers. Some mosques do not necessarily closely monitor people to make sure of their qualifications to preach. You should ask whether this guy has any credentials: where has he studied, for example, and whether that is a recognised mainstream institution? You should also ask whether he has evidence from scripture, Prophetic tradition and Islamic scholarship, because such sources are far superior guides to Islam than your local preacher, even if he is charismatic and seemingly well-presented. The value of preachers is in their ability to transmit these sources to people.

The Prophet, peace be upon him, said in a *Hadith* related by Imam Muslim, which means:

*“Allah does not judge your sincerity by your personal adornment or wealth, rather Allah judges that by your hearts and deeds.”*



## Part 4 (cont.)

**Narrative P8:** Amongst Australian Muslim youth, extremists attempt to spread a victim mentality and an exaggerated feeling of being discriminated against.

**Counter-Narrative P8:** There is no point in exaggerating the marginalisation of Muslim youth as that weakens their resolve and strips them of their social capacity to interact positively and find employment, for example. Rather, if and where there is discrimination against Muslims, the only way to deal with this is to tackle it head-on by engaging with the non-Muslim community, whereas segregating ourselves can only increase misunderstandings and discrimination from the wider community. Indeed, segregating ourselves is to surrender to anti-Muslim discrimination. Muslims are not a majority in Australia, so such problems will not go away by ignoring them.

*Ahmed:* I can't get a good job because I am a Muslim. There is no point trying to succeed in Australian society because the Australians won't allow Muslims to take important positions in society.

*Mentor:* It's true that some Muslims may feel they have difficulties succeeding in Australia. They may have lower levels of English than other people, come from more disadvantaged backgrounds, and they may not know the right people to get advice and help. Still, Muslims who have sought an education and a good career can – and have – obtained both of these in Australia. If you want these things, you must strive for them. Giving up because you find it difficult might be easier in the short term, but will not benefit you, your community, or make you happier in the long run. By making the effort to succeed in Australia, you put yourself in a position to help and inspire other Muslims, and to show non-Muslim Australians what Muslims are capable of. In the workplace, most people are fundamentally concerned with what you can do for them and what results you can achieve.

## Part 4 (cont.)

Given these counter-narratives, will Ahmed now follow a path of radicalisation towards extremism? He has at least been given the keys to the path that leads to an empowered alternative to extremism. We will see in the next part, Part 5, how Ahmed's vulnerable situation – and that of others similar to his – could be supported in a whole-of-community approach. The next part will also put the counter-narratives into practice through Counter-Radicalisation prevention strategies.

The image features a blue-tinted photograph of two hands clasped together, with fingers interlaced. The hands are positioned in the upper half of the frame. Below the hands, there is a white horizontal band containing a repeating geometric pattern of interlocking lines. The bottom portion of the image is a solid blue color, also featuring the same repeating geometric pattern. The text is overlaid on the blue background in the upper left quadrant.

**Part Five**  
**Preventing Radicalisation in Practice**

# Part 5

**In Part 5, we outline the framework for a whole-of-community approach to the prevention of radicalisation. We will seek to put our knowledge into practice, bringing in not only the youth we wish to influence, but also the whole society of which they are part.**

## Part 5 (cont.)

In this, the final part of the book, having examined the background to radicalisation, and expounded our counter-narratives to it, we explore how our knowledge and counter-narratives can be put into action through Counter-Radicalisation prevention strategies.

Our prevention strategies are informed by in-depth interviews and focus groups held with Muslim leaders, parents and Muslim youth, as well as the identification of a number of vulnerability factors as identified in Part 1, and the radicalisation and recruitment processes of Part 3.

Our prevention strategies point in two opposite, but mutually necessary, directions: exposing and excluding extremists on the one hand, and educating and helping those vulnerable to extremism, or who may be rescued from extremism on the other, by giving them an alternative theological framework and social support base.

As responsible parents, community leaders, teachers and youth workers in the Muslim community, we have to prevent youth from making the wrong choice by following an extremist path. As a prevention strategy, corrupt leaders and information sources should be kept away from the path of youth at-risk in order to restrict extremist propaganda from penetrating youth circles. This goes hand-in-hand with the educational program set out in this book to prepare young people to think for themselves and to resist social pressures by developing their inner strength. We are backing a 'silent revolution' by the majority of Muslims, including its youth, to marginalise the extremist narratives of those who are abusing the Muslim faith, but who are currently more vocal and who attract more media publicity.

In reaching Muslim youth, their parents, religious leaders, youth workers, teachers and first-line workers play an extremely important part. Therefore, various parts of this action plan focus on providing the support and knowledge some might need in order to recognise the radicalisation phenomena at an early stage and deal with it

## Part 5 (cont.)

adequately. They can lead a discussion with young people and occasionally influence their development patterns.

Muslim communities should work together in partnerships between the community, the government and the business domain to provide support to a much-needed social project. The *BIRR Initiative* is such a partnership to build the capacity of a new emerging community in south-west Sydney to counteract extremism, to respond to the needs of its young people and to support its leaders to challenge and eradicate extremism.

*Next, we will outline the role of various areas used by the BIRR Initiative in a whole-of-community approach to reach out to vulnerable youth and to the wider community in which we all live.*

## Part 5 (cont.)

### B1. The role of mentoring and intervention

We need to guide those who are influenced by extremism by using an empowering narrative to counter the extremist narrative. As previously outlined, our primary tool is mentoring (or active intervention in some cases of youth who are already radicalised). During mentoring, constructive dialogue can take place and an effective two-way communication process can follow. This should be performed by trained mentors who exhibit the patience, wisdom and soft and friendly approach that facilitates a constructive dialogue.

Counselling and educational programs are to include services designed to help young people develop more effective coping skills to manage life challenges, and education on the different types of extremist groups they will encounter in the ideological 'marketplace'. Camps will be used to remove young people from their usual environment and peers who may be a negative influence, and get them into an environment where they are attentive and responsive, to facilitate constructive dialogues and learning.

The core component of the *BIRR Initiative* is mentoring based on counter-narratives that refute the extremist narrative. Youth at risk of radicalisation can thereby be protected from that influence, while those already radicalised could be provided with an exit route and a 'lifeline'. Here, we use messages mixed with counselling techniques (as we saw in Part 4) to mentor young Muslims away from the lures of extremism and radicalisation. The *BIRR Initiative* provides this mentoring program as a resistive mechanism, to progressively immunise people and eventually the whole community, against an extremism hijacking and claiming the name of Islam, by propagating normative Islamic narratives. However, we recognise that this is merely the basic strategy. Success relies on our activation of other community structures, and the cooperation and help of such basic institutions as schools, family and mosques.

Although peer-mentoring for at-risk young Muslims has a relatively short history in a Western context, there is a general framework, which the *BIRR Initiative* has adapted. The BIRR guidelines include: (1) the integration of mentoring projects into a range of other

## Part 5 (cont.)

services; (2) the use of skilled project workers for effective project coordination, strong organisational administration and infrastructure, including adequate financial resources; (3) the articulation of a well-defined mission statement and operating principles; (4) the establishment of strong referral networks for bringing clients/mentees into the program, engaging young people voluntarily and providing needs-based support; (5) involving significant people in the young person's life, including caregivers; (6) the effective screening, training and professional support of mentors, including the documentation of criteria of eligibility; (7) the development of a program plan that has input from stakeholders; (8) incorporation of a strategy for program evaluation and ongoing assessment; and (9) risk management and confidentiality policies.<sup>1 2 3</sup>

*Please refer to Appendix 3 – Designing and Planning the BIRR Mentoring Program for a detailed description of best-practice guidelines and ethical protocols for designing and planning a BIRR peer-mentoring program.*

### **B2. The role of education and schools**

As the form of extremism responded to by *BIRR* only exists if there is ignorance and misunderstanding of Islam, providing a normative understanding of the Religion through well-trained Muslim religious teachers is a major immunisation against it.

This puts the responsibility of teaching Islam as a centrepiece for any prevention strategy to tackle extremism; because once the sources that promote it are inhibited, it seems that young Muslims' understanding will then be communally shaped into something proactive and constructive in today's Australian society.

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1 Australian Institute of Criminology (2006), Mentoring and crime prevention.

2 Du Bois, D et al. (2002), Effectiveness of mentoring programs for youth, *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 30(1): 157-197.

3 National Crime Prevention (2003), *Early intervention: Youth mentoring programs*, Canberra, Attorney-General's Department.



## Part 5 (cont.)

More books explaining such things are needed in English, and *BIRR* endeavours to translate these and make them available. Young Muslim students should be supplied with clear guidelines on how to identify religious books that are authentic and those that are not. Guidelines about how to differentiate between varying sources would help the young Muslim differentiate between legitimate and extremist sources. This will also allow him to distinguish between delinquency and *birr*, and between a misleading mentor and a genuine one.

As we have seen in the counter-narratives, ignorance of Islamic history and scholarly positions, and ignorance of the Arabic language, make youth vulnerable to the misrepresentation of Islam. Positive programs of balanced Islamic education and Arabic language education are a key foundation of *BIRR*'s plan. While tertiary educated Muslim youth also become radicalised, their education is usually unbalanced towards the secular, leaving a gap in their religious knowledge that can be filled by extremists. The primary venues for better religious education include schools, mosques, and of course the family.

*BIRR* seeks to actively engage in the education system to provide education about Islam. *BIRR* will work with groups approved by the *Department of Education and Training* (DET) to provide classes for Muslim students at *NSW Government* schools through what is called "Special Religious Education". This will serve as an extra conduit for teaching normative Islamic principles. It will also inform youth about *BIRR*'s work where it is relevant to them. Moreover, *BIRR* aims to run presentations, forums and assemblies in public and private high schools to inform both Muslim and non-Muslim students about the basics of Islam, and to introduce its own mission. Of course, *BIRR* would particularly target the vulnerabilities of Muslim youth in such exercises, with empowering counter-narratives to extremism. Some of the most at-risk are of course youth who are not at school, because they have dropped out. *BIRR* will particularly focus on working with them.

In addition, *BIRR* seeks to work towards supporting an internationally recognised Australian centre that would articulate authoritatively on matters of Islamic edicts for Australian Muslims.

## Part 5 (cont.)

### B3. The role of the family

Supportive guidance by Muslim families is vital for youth who are exploring their identity, while providing safe boundaries and alternatives to extremism. Parents have the first and foremost role to play in protecting their children from extremism. It is the role of the parent to ensure the moral development of their offspring; it must be emphasised to parents that they cannot rely on the mosque to do this by itself. *BIRR* can help parents by providing Islamic educational materials (pamphlets, booklets, brief books) to be used in the home with children too young for *BIRR*'s mentoring program. We recognise that while South-Asian or second-generation Australian parents may be able to utilise *BIRR*-supplied materials in English, they may need to be made available in Arabic and maybe some other languages for some parents.

It is important for parents to keep emphasising their children's future by drawing from the society they will live in. Migrant mothers and fathers should keep in mind that their children's futures are dependent on how well they adapt to their new country. Parents should try and understand the new society so they can better advise their children. In order to be able to teach young people, parents themselves should also be educated. While parents should consider their children's behaviour within the framework of general society, this does not entail any decline in moral values, but rather an understanding of the complexities of modern times, and that different approaches may be required to put these values into practice in a different context.

It is also important to observe siblings' relationships and their level of information sharing. Sibling relationships should be encouraged to prevent individualistic behavioural patterns that may lead youth to making rash decisions. Within this process of a positive sibling relationship, the chance of a youth making a significant personal decision without first consulting with one of their siblings is reduced. Moreover, it is important for parents to guard against the siblings collectively adopting a bad attitude.

## Part 5 (cont.)

Where problems arise, despite parents' best efforts and due perhaps to inevitable differences of culture and language, contacting *BIRR* to get mentoring or intervention for the children is desirable. To this end, the services of *BIRR* will be advertised to parents through mosques, community associations and community media.

### **B4. The role of the Muslim community**

Australian Muslim neighbourhoods and communities have a genuine responsibility in preventing any form of extremism and terrorism. If the community is intolerant of such things, they cannot take root in its midst. *BIRR* aims to work through the community, building community support and establishing itself as a channel for concerned members of the Australian Muslim community to reach out to vulnerable young people. It is a project by and for the community itself, not something over and above it.

*BIRR* proposes to involve itself in community events, both to make contact with youth in the community, and to bring the youth in its orbit into community life. *BIRR*'s purpose in the community is essentially to advocate for the benefit of young Muslims. This involves getting those young people involved in the community, so that the community can know what young Muslims want and need. *BIRR* proposes to establish and support alternative cultural and recreational facilities in the community to match those provided by extremists. *BIRR* intends to establish its own gym and youth centre, as such places are often used as centres for extremist ideology and also because youth have identified a need in this area.

Research has pointed to the formation of 'fluid networks' of peers in the radicalisation process, which means that counter peer networks are needed in our effort to resist radicalisation. The *BIRR Initiative* plans to utilise the nature of these 'fluid networks' by offering a peer support network within a positive engaged framework. Islam itself offers the answers to the spiritual questions that the narrative of the extremists raises (as we have seen in Part 4). The *BIRR* peer support network encapsulates the positive identity messages and starts with the *BIRR*-trained mentors to build up a whole layer of youth who

## Part 5 (cont.)

can encourage their peers to resist extremism. Through *BIRR*, young Muslims will meet young Muslim peers who have embraced normative Islamic positions on critical issues. We seek to provide alternatives, not only in terms of peer groups but also by providing safe locations to replace those in which extremists recruit, including safe internet sites, safe fitness centres, safe youth centres and safe schools, which provide the geographical base for safe peer groups. This is about ‘cleaning’ out existing locations of extremism, forming partnerships with ‘clean’ locations and also establishing new ones where we see a need.

The peer support network will also extend to such things as sports clubs, scout groups, university/*TAFE* (Technical and Further Education) student associations, school clubs, professional groups, job-specific networks, leadership forums, etc.

*BIRR* has various materials for getting its message out to the community, already having established a website<sup>4</sup> and produced a brochure outlining its mission and activities, and now having produced this guidebook as a follow-up. As *BIRR* takes off as a project, we can begin to engage more fully with community stakeholders such as schools and mosques, which will constitute our primary contact points with youth in trouble. We can also count on further advertising of our services via local community radio.

### **B5. The role of the wider community**

In Australia, the need to tackle extremism has been raised to the national agenda. The onus is on the Muslim community to take part in an alliance between Australian Muslims and non-Muslims in order to work together to prevent any form of extremism that is undermining social coexistence and security.

The suppression of extremists by police force alone is superficial and leaves behind the substantial part of the extremist group. After police action, the extremists’ influence in the community

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4 <http://www.birr.edu.au>

## Part 5 (cont.)

can continue to grow as they use such an action as a rallying cry and a recruiting tool. It is necessary, therefore, that willing Islamic institutions be involved as a main agent in rooting out extremism, which forms the ideological base for those who go on to commit terrorist acts.

Muslim communities are an amalgam of intersecting and competing trends, subcultures and groups. It is important that a partnership is forged from within such trends and groups against Al-Qaeda and any group that orbits around it. Communities must take on these affiliated extremist groups and refute their theology. Activating the 'soft' power of the community in tandem with the 'hard' power of the state will have more impact in preventing extremism in both the short and the long terms.

We intend to collate information on extremist activities, particularly on the internet, via our own monitoring and via information provided from youths in contact with us through the mentoring program. This information, depending on its level of security concern, will then be made publicly available – including to community leaders, the police, the Director of Public Prosecution and other relevant parties.

Furthermore, it is unfortunate but true that, at times, sections of the community have played a role in exacerbating extremist conduct and behaviour by branding mainstream young Muslims as extremists or terrorists. Consequently, it is important for the line between being a Muslim and being an extremist to be clearly drawn, understood and agreed to by both the Muslim and the wider community.

It is now a frequent occurrence for certain outlets to misuse language when discussing extremism and terrorism by labelling all they dislike as a threat or an obstacle to social coexistence. *BIRR* proposes to contact and meet with such outlets directly to persuade them to change their rhetoric, explaining that by labelling Muslim youths as terrorists or extremists, we are inadvertently increasing the risk of converting the youth to extremist attitudes and behaviour. A person who is isolated and then branded as an extremist without strong evidence may be traumatised and further pushed towards radicalisation. Such a person may simply believe that he or she is isolated because of his good and moral character and, as a result, may belligerently resist mainstream society. This could lead the

## Part 5 (cont.)

youth to drawing the following unfortunate conclusion: “*if what I am doing constitutes extremism, then yes I am an extremist and a terrorist!*”

Civil institutions can do much for the *BIRR Initiative*, and so it is important for us to liaise with them. For example, we would look to launch *TAFE NSW* training for mentors in conjunction with this book (as a tailored program), and indeed would seek to recruit potential mentors from those who already study or have studied at *TAFE*. We would liaise with *Centrelink* and *PAGES – Providers of Australian Government Employment Services* – to advertise our service to their clientele. We have already given presentations about the *BIRR Initiative* at *PAGES* meetings – and we aim to sign a service delivery community agreement with other agencies. We seek endorsement for our activities from community stakeholders wherever applicable, and try to develop all initiatives in consultation with all concerned parties.

## Part 5 (cont.)

As with the Muslim community, *BIRR* is a part of civil society and is there to work with it for communal benefit. So, in order to work with society more broadly, *BIRR* will establish the *Alliance against Extremism* specifically to engage with non-Muslim society and involve non-Muslims who wish to support *BIRR*'s mission statement.

Governments should support such endeavours that attempt to help activate a dormant and disadvantaged segment of society whose own passivity, will exacerbate a negative culture unless this trend is addressed. Neglecting to do this will leave its trace on societies and generations to come.

Finally, the prime motivation behind authoring this book has been to declare the methodology and the contours of the struggle over the points of mutual hostility between extremist currents, the Muslim community and the broader public. Through these insights we aim to overcome what tarnishes the name of the Muslim community and its efforts in establishing – together with its neighbours, social coexistence, peace and security.

The *BIRR Initiative* is a unique opportunity that begins to draw the blueprint of the way forward for Australian Muslims with a positive vision for Islam in Australia – a vision that produces a localised Australian Muslim culture based on traditional Islamic virtue (*birr*) interwoven with a local Australian flavour.



# APPENDICES



# APPENDIX 1

## TARGET COMMUNITY – SOUTH-WEST SYDNEY

### *Profile of the Muslim Community of south-west Sydney (ABS 2006)*

- In the 2006 Census of Population and Housing 161,164 people in Sydney identified themselves as being Muslim, representing 3.9% of people in Sydney. Of these, 81,530 lived in south-west Sydney, which includes the Local Government Areas of Bankstown, Canterbury, Auburn, Liverpool and Fairfield.
- Australia's Muslim population is relatively young, with more than half below 25 years of age. A third of Muslims are under 16 and the average age of Muslims is 26 years.

### *Muslim populations – Local Government Area (LGA) – South-west Sydney (SS)*

LGA	Muslim population No.	Total population No.	Muslims/Total population %	Muslims/Total Muslims in SS %
Bankstown (C)	25,997	170,489	15.2	31.9
Canterbury (C)	17,792	129,962	13.7	21.8
Auburn (A)	16,115	64,957	24.8	19.8
Liverpool (C)	13,734	164,602	8.3	16.8
Fairfield (C)	7,892	179,892	4.4	9.7
Total – SS	81,530	709,902	11.5	

# APPENDIX 2

## STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION FRAMEWORK & QUESTIONNAIRES

*The purpose of these questionnaires was to generate information that helped the research to build a case study about the teaching of values and the prevention of extremism as related to the education of Muslim youth in Australia. The interviews conducted took the form of formal/informal discussions grouped in the following areas:*

### A. MOSQUE/SCHOOL LEADERS

#### A1. Mosque/School Context

- i. Location of the establishment
- ii. A brief history of the establishment
- iii. Current congregation/enrolments – number of members and other demographic characteristics
- iv. Recent achievements and future challenges regarding Muslim youth

#### A2. Muslim Youth Education

- i. Does the mosque/school have a particular policy/philosophy in relation to the teaching of true Muslim values and the prevention of extremism?
- ii. How does this translate into practice within the community?
- iii. How do you select your Imams/teachers?
- iv. What factors currently foster/hinder the prevention of extremism in your establishment?
- v. What opportunities do the youth have to demonstrate the values they are

## APPENDIX 2 (cont.)

taught?

vi. How are community/parents involved in the teaching of the young people?

### *A3. Community And Resources*

i. What resources do the Imams/teachers at your mosque/school use for their lessons when teaching values and warning against extremism?

ii. What resources does the establishment use to promote the contribution of Islam to Australian society?

iii. What resources are required but are not available at present to support the teaching of values and the warning against extremist ideology?

### *A4. Teacher Training & Development*

i. What, if any, spiritual/professional training and development have Imams/teachers experienced in relation to teaching values to foster positive identities and to prevent extremism?

ii. What additional spiritual/professional development is required to assist Imams/teachers in their work in this area?

### *A5. Quality Educational Programs*

i. What processes have been established to ensure the quality of education at the establishment and the keeping out of unwanted elements from within your environment?

ii. How does this establishment evaluate its educational program? What action does the establishment take after completion of such an evaluation?

# APPENDIX 2 (cont.)

## **B. RELIGIOUS YOUTH LEADERS/TEACHERS**

### ***B1. Muslim Youth Education***

- i. What do you consider to be the centre's greatest strengths in the education of values and the prevention of extremism?
- ii. How does your centre teach values and warn against extremism?
- iii. What factors currently hinder/foster the prevention of extremism in your centre?
- iv. What opportunities do young people have to demonstrate the values they are taught?
- v. How are community/parents involved in the teaching of youngsters?
- vi. In what ways does the centre promote the contribution of Islam to Australian society? What is your role in that process?

### ***B2. Community And Resources***

- i. What resources do you use for teaching values and preventing extremism?
- ii. What resources does the centre use to promote the contribution of Islam to Australian society?
- iii. What resources are required but are not available at present to support the teaching of values and the warning against extremist ideology?
- iv. What links does the centre have with community leaders and how does this influence the teaching of Muslim youth?

# APPENDIX 2 (cont.)

## *B3. Teacher Training & Development*

- i. What, if any, training and development have you experienced in relation to teaching values and preventing extremism? How was this undertaken?
- ii. What additional professional development is required to assist you in your work in this area?

## *B4. Quality Programs*

- i. What processes have been established to ensure the quality of education at the centre and the keeping out of unwanted elements from within the congregation?
- ii. How does this centre evaluate its educational program? What action does the centre take after completion of such evaluation?

## **C. MUSLIM YOUTHS**

- i. Could you describe what a typical day at your school, mosque or youth centre looks like? – (ice breaker).
- ii. What activities have you participated in that teach about values such as peace, justice and social coexistence?
- iii. Why do you think these are important?
- iv. Can you talk about ways that youth in this school or mosque demonstrate these values in their daily lives?
- v. Have you experienced teachers who promote hate and extremist attitudes? Did you feel intimidated?
- vi. How well do you think the education of true Muslim values helps you to participate in broader Australian society?

# APPENDIX 2 (cont.)

## D. MUSLIM PARENTS

- i. How do you ensure that your kids are taught religious education by trustworthy sources?
- ii. What do you consider to be the best aspects of your child's education that helps them to engage in Australian society?
- iii. In what ways do you think schools and mosques can promote social/community relations and values of coexistence, justice and objectivity?
- iv. How well do you think teaching in this school or mosque helps your children to participate in broader Australian society?
- v. What checks and balances do you have in place to ensure that your kids are not being influenced by extremist books or leaders?

# APPENDIX 3

## DESIGNING AND PLANNING THE *BIRR* MENTORING PROGRAM

*Peer-mentoring* is a structured and trusting relationship that brings young people together with caring individuals who offer guidance, support and encouragement aimed at developing the competence and character of the mentee (youth-at-risk). Mentoring is an endeavour that shapes a young person's aspirations and helps them realise their potential.

*Muslim mentoring* is not a new concept; it has its roots in the early Islamic periods, and also in the Prophet's wisdom and tradition. Throughout the centuries, mentoring provided guidance and counsel to younger individuals, and it has occurred spontaneously as an informal relationship to drive the young person's upward mobility and to provide a shoulder to lean on when they need it.

### A. IDENTIFY THE TYPES OF INDIVIDUALS YOU WILL RECRUIT AS MENTORS

#### 1. Who are the Mentors?

The target mentor community is that of Muslim males and females between the ages of 15 and 25 who are natural leaders able to mentor other youths. They will usually have some kind of vocational training or tertiary education. The recruits will be religious Muslim youths with some traditional Islamic understanding in order to appeal to others who are undergoing a transition phase; discovering aspects of their Islamic faith.

#### 2. Who are the Mentees?

Youth-at-risk are vulnerable to many of society's negative social undercurrents, including radicalisation. Those most at risk are those who are disenfranchised and disconnected from society, either through being unemployed or being caught up with the police. In

## APPENDIX 3 (cont.)

In addition, such young people will lack a good grounding or understanding of true Islamic values and virtues. They are at risk of being exploited by extremist groups. The mentees are mostly identified through referrals from the community (mosques, organisations) as well as from *Centrelink* and the police.

### **3. What Does a Mentor Do?**

- i.) Offers Muslim youth support and guidance, and assists mentees through a time of crisis or clash of identities and help them overcome the alienation and disenfranchisement they might experience in society.
- ii.) Instils youth with a sense of self-esteem and pride as Australian Muslims.
- iii.) Helps young people develop more effective coping skills to manage life challenges.
- iv.) Helps shape a young person's aspirations, helps them accept their responsibilities and realise their potential.
- v.) Educates Muslim youths-at-risk about the reality of extremism and the political propaganda extremists employ.
- vi.) Communicates the goals of the program to outside groups in order to ensure recruitment and retention of mentors and to increase public awareness and support for the program.

### **4. Eligibility Guidelines for Mentors**

- i.) Between 15 and 25 years of age (and preferably located in south-west Sydney).
- ii.) Vocational training or tertiary qualified (preferable).
- iii.) Of ethnic backgrounds (Lebanese or other).



## APPENDIX 3 (cont.)

iv.) Moderate Muslim with enough traditional Islamic understanding to appeal to youths who are undergoing a religious transition. A good grounding in Islamic studies helps counter extremist ideologies and religious misunderstanding.

v.) Good communication skills and ability to establish rapport, including the ability to listen non-judgementally and ask questions to understand how the youngster sees the world (an informed understanding increases the mentor's ability to offer appropriate, well-balanced counter-narratives).

vi.) Mentor screening and ongoing support and supervision will be provided.

### B. MENTOR TRAINING

Training for mentors includes an education about the fallacies of extremism as being an untrue representation of the Islamic ethical system and faith. This training section will utilise the counter-narratives to extremism that were explored in Part 4 as a primary resource tool. Further, as counselling communication is central to the process of behavioural change, resources in counselling and communication skills, including listening skills and mentoring skills, will also be made available. The training program includes protocols for risk management concerning information that has a security concern and which requires action.

*Mentor training is divided into three areas:*

1. [Internal Mentor Training Program](#) centred on extremism counter-narratives
2. [TAFE NSW Mentor Training](#) centred on counselling skills
3. [Mentor Training Camps](#) for building support networks

# APPENDIX 3 (cont.)

## C. DETERMINE THE TYPE OF MENTORING THE PROGRAM WILL OFFER

*The program utilises the following two mentoring approaches:*

### *1. Peer-mentoring*

*Peer-mentoring* provides an opportunity for a caring young person to develop a guiding, teaching relationship with a younger person. The mentoring program specifies activities that are curriculum-based. For example, a university student might mentor a high school student or engage in general skill-building activities. These youth mentors serve as positive role models. They require ongoing support and close supervision. In a peer-mentoring relationship, the mentor and the mentee meet frequently over the course of mentoring period.

### *2. E-mentoring (also known as online mentoring or telementoring)*

*E-mentoring* connects a youth/adult with another. The pair communicates via the internet at least once a week during the mentoring period. Pairs can arrange two or three face-to-face meetings, one of which is a kick-off event. The mentor serves as a guide or advisor – for example, discussing religious issues, future education or career options. E-mentoring can also serve as a bridge or a support tool for mentors and mentees in traditional one-to-one relationships.

## D. DEFINE THE NATURE OF THE MENTORING SESSIONS

A core activity of the mentoring sessions is the development of relationships that will, in turn, enable the pair to achieve other program goals.

*Character, education and leadership development*

## APPENDIX 3 (cont.)

The *BIRR* mentoring model focuses primarily on building a relationship between a young person and a caring peer who can serve as a role model and life coach. In this model, the mentor and the mentee decide the types of activities they will share. They can spend time together, talking or playing games, visiting others, and so on. Some of their activities may be educational in nature (e.g. reading together). There are defined expectations for improving the mentee's awareness, and for acquiring new knowledge regarding the counter-narratives and the extremism prevention strategies. This is best achieved through the focus on building the relationship. It also gives mentors more flexibility to spend time talking with their mentees about both educational and non-educational issues.

The sessions are to focus on helping youth accept their responsibilities and realise their potential. They may take various forms, including tutoring, career exploration, life skills development, game playing and going to sports, entertainment or cultural events.

### **E. DETERMINE WHAT THE PROGRAM WILL ACCOMPLISH AND WHAT OUTCOMES WILL RESULT**

1. Community capacity to resist extremism is enhanced.
2. Youth leaders have increased understanding of Islamic history, theology, culture, values and can advocate and explain its value in shaping an Australian Muslim identity and productive citizens.
3. Youth have a positive experience and perspective of their identity as Australian Muslims based on self-esteem and pride.
4. Participants have gained skills.
5. Youth are empowered to use their relationships to carry positive messages through grassroots networks.
6. Muslim youth attain higher levels of optimism, self-esteem and confidence and a sense

## APPENDIX 3 (cont.)

of direction/purpose is developed/enhanced.

7. Youth becomes less vulnerable/susceptible to extremist ideology/ideas.

8. Youth develop, and feel supported in, an Australian Muslim identity.

9. Participants are inspired to take positive steps in their lives.

10. Mentors guide the transitioning of youth-at-risk through practice – helping them not fall prey to misunderstandings and antisocial behaviour.

### F. DETERMINE WHEN THE MENTORING WILL TAKE PLACE

E-mentoring can take place any time, peer-mentoring will be in times that suit both (e.g. after school or on weekends), as well as through *BIRR*-related activities.

### G. DECIDE WHERE THE MENTORING MATCHES WILL MEET

*BIRR centre, local mosque, community setting and ‘virtual community.’*

Mosques are productive places to develop mentoring programs. Mosques have a long tradition of instilling social and spiritual values and moral strength. They are institutions that can draw freely on the talents and time of committed volunteers. Community-based mentoring may involve a level of risk management, because activities take place in the community.

### H. MENTOR SCREENING/SUPERVISION

There are two committees (Screening Committee and Supervision Committee) to help coordinate the mentoring process.

# APPENDIX 3 (cont.)

## *1. Screening Committee*

The *Screening Committee* oversees the screening process for mentor selection. The process is as follows: an interested youth contacts the project manager. The project manager invites him or her to an interview at the office or on the phone, just to understand the motives and the level of dedication. If they are deemed satisfactory by the project manager, they are then allowed to join the next training sessions. After some level of training (to be determined) he or she is then assessed by the committee. They are tested on their understanding of the narratives, their rationale and the extremism prevention strategies. If they are deemed satisfactory by consensus of the committee, the young person is then a ready mentor who could be matched with a mentee.

## *2. Supervision Committee*

The *Supervision Committee* establishes a “Case Management Protocol” (CMP) to ensure that the program has regular contact with both mentors and mentees, and oversees their relationship. For mentoring relationships in the program to flourish and endure, the supervisors will need to be in touch with mentors and mentees on an ongoing basis. This ensures that they can assess how well each relationship is progressing and offer guidance and advice along the way. Regular contact between supervisors and mentors and mentees can help avoid conflict, get relationships back on track and help the project accomplish program goals.

## **I. WHAT MAKES A GOOD BIRR MENTOR?**

*Many people feel that being a mentor requires special skills, but mentors are simply people who have the qualities of good role models.*

1. **Mentors listen.** They maintain eye contact and give mentees their full attention.
2. **Mentors guide.** Mentors are there to help their mentees find life direction.

## APPENDIX 3 (cont.)

3. **Mentors are practical.** They give insights about keeping on task and setting goals and priorities.
4. **Mentors educate.** Mentors educate about life and their own careers.
5. **Mentors provide insight.** Mentors use their personal experience to help their mentees avoid mistakes and learn from good decisions.
6. **Mentors are accessible.** Mentors are available as a resource and a sounding board.
7. **Mentors criticise constructively.** When necessary, mentors point out areas that need improvement, always focusing on the mentee's behaviour, not his/her character.
8. **Mentors are supportive.** No matter how painful the mentee's experience, mentors continue to encourage them to learn and improve.
9. **Mentors are specific.** Mentors give specific advice on what was done well or could be corrected, what was achieved and the benefits of various actions.
10. **Mentors care.** Mentors care about their mentees' progress and career planning, as well as their personal development.

# APPENDIX 4

## SYSTEM OF TRANSLITERATION

*Writing the Arabic letters with English characters*

Arabic	English	Arabic	English
ء	'	ط	T
ب	B	ظ	<u>Dh</u>
ت	T	ث	`
ث	Th	ج	Gh
ج	J	ح	F
ح	<u>H</u>	خ	Q
خ	Kh	ك	K
د	D	ل	L
ذ	Dh	م	M
ر	R	ن	N
ز	Z	ه	H
س	S	و	W
ش	Sh	ي	Y
ص	<u>S</u>	أ	A
ض	<u>D</u>	آ	<u>A</u>