

THE CARTER CENTER

Countering Daesh Recruitment Propaganda Workshop 2

Mastering the Message: Engaging Our Youth

November 2016

Executive Summary

On November 2–5, 2016, The Carter Center (TCC) convened its second workshop designed to analyze Daesh recruitment tactics, develop counter-messaging strategies, and build capacity among religious-community leaders for engaging communities vulnerable to Daesh recruitment. The workshop was attended by 23 religious-community leaders from four countries, across ideological and political divides, all of whom have credibility and significant social capital within their local communities.

This workshop was designed to inform and train religious-community leaders on the following: a) identifying various recruitment strategies and building a comprehensive media campaign to discredit Daesh and the rise of islamophobia; b) rehabilitation and reintegration of returnees by exploring the profile of Daesh recruits and the challenges and opportunities of working with individuals that have been stigmatized by their association with extremist movements; c) building intra-Muslim cohesion and intercommunity coalitions; and, d)

s. The sense of trust and shared responsibility among participants de Gk TBTF1 12 Tf1 0 0 1 314.45 43(y)folloi6501.fi

our lives, religion is rarely used as a positive force in diplomacy -- one that complements the political process. As religious hostilities continue to rise in nearly every major region around the globe, we can no longer afford to exclude religious leaders from the process of building an integrated framework for peace. Religious and community leaders constitute a major player in advancing conflict mitigation and political reform. Participants recognized the forces arrayed against them from Daesh propaganda to Islamophobia to the lack of political space in their own countries to effect sensible reform around these issues. On the one side, participants discussed the need to confront the use of religion that has been manipulated by groups such as Daesh, and on the other, they have to address the dangerous tides of Islamophobia.

Ambassador Ebrahim Rasool, President of the World for All Foundation and former South African Ambassador to the United States, offered the concept of *maqasid al-shariah* (goals of al-shariah) as an operating concept for intra-Muslim dialogue. The maqasid approach provides an understanding and purpose behind the revelation of Islamic laws, and thus offers a basis for dialogue and coalition-building on the basis of welfare, justice, equity and dignity. Muslims do not have to choose between their religion and universal values. Values such as human rights and democracy are intrinsic to Islam. This approach opens great opportunities to address current challenges for Muslim societies and Muslim minorities living in the west.

Participants discussed the urgent need for the *ummah* (Muslim community) to be firm and

vocabulary of those who want to make us invisible

usage of words like Jihad, moderate Islam, radicalization, and modern Islam. And in the words

At the close of the workshops, multiple participants expressed that the diversity of their colleagues and the opportunity to pursue dialogue within the Muslim community around a shared topic of grave concern to the community as a whole was a vitally important opportunity. Their interactions in the workshops around shared goals has the potential to reduce religious conflict beyond the issue of Daesh; for example, two workshop participants from two different ideological backgrounds have made media appearances together in their home country in the wake of workshop one to discuss ideological extremism. Future workshops will include a more specific focus on intra-Muslim dialogue and coalition building as effective strategies for civic engagement and preventing violent extremism of all kinds.

Belgium After Brussels Attacks: Profiles, Recruitment, and the Need for Rehabilitation

TCC research in the MENA region have foregrounded the problem of returning foreign fighters and effective return and reintegration policy in preventing violent extremism. The workshop

models that offer supportive pathw

further alienated and marginalized entire communities. Approaching the issue entirely from a security lens makes it difficult for civil society organizations to develop effective interventions.

The workshop featured a European legal expert, a specialist in terrorism cases, on the complex profiles of returnees and their prosecution in Belgium. There is no one profile of foreign fighters in terms of religious knowledge, education level, age, or prison record in Belgium; the heterogeneous profiles among Daesh recruits elsewhere was confirmed by participants from France, Tunisia, and Morocco. However, general trends in the prosecution of terrorism cases in Belgium indicate that the rate of terrorism arrests has increased dramatically since 2013, and that suspects are younger and the number of women arrested has increased. Contrary to popular reporting, the reference to a professional network of recruiters as the only source is an exaggeration that helps fuel the fantasy of this dossier. Networks that facilitate recruits to Daesh in Syria, Iraq, or Libya can sometimes be

A distinction was made between the first flow of foreign fighters and those that recently joined. Contrary to popular myth, the first wave of recruits leaving to Syria in late 2012-13, felt compelled to go as a moral obligation they saw Muslims being massacred and went to fight

disillusioned, suffering from what they witnessed in the conflict, and were subsequently arrested and stigmatized for their participation in the conflict. Workshop participants noted that this reflected the history of foreign fighters from Morocco and Tunisia in Afghanistan over the past decades, many of whom left to fight the Soviet army with the backing of their governments, only to be stigmatized upon their return and imprisoned on charges of terrorism. Currently, returnees

the media, they are demonized, they are public but also very hidden, nobody sees them, nobody

This situation too was reflected in other contexts. One Moroccan participant

Another Tunisia participant, a civil society actor, is working through a non-profit to provide psychological service to returnees and attempting to rescue young Tunisians, including children, caught abroad when family members were recruited. Other participants are participating in local workshops and conferences to empower women and families to discourages recruitment, others are working with teachers in at-risk and marginalized communities to combat Daesh recruitment with education. Participants have future plans to build websites to counter extremist ideology; develop summer camp curricula that teach social skills, conflict mediation, and dialogue; produce a series of videos that covey the real meaning of Islam through sports and art; build lobbying campaigns around criminal justice reform and human rights; and working with university students to build social media campaigns in Islam and citizenship.

Conclusions

The Countering Daesh Recruitment Propaganda workshop two built upon the successes of workshop one by enriching the sense of community and collective responsibility that developed among participants. Various themes generated and stimulated genuine discussion amongst participants- even at times tense- that helped them articulate a common vision and initiated a healthy and much needed honest exchange. Based on topic discussed and participant feedback, future workshops will include sessions on women and child soldiers, intra-Muslim dialogue and coalition-building, and elevating technical capacity in video production to branding and communication strategies. Participants will continue to report on their project development and implementation, and will benefit from interactive workshops with experts and peers that aids in the reach of their individual interventions.