

Washington Network on Children and Armed Conflict
Positive Alternatives to Youth Radicalization in the Middle East
Meeting Notes, June 19, 2009

The June meeting of the Washington Network on Children and Armed Conflict explored different theoretical frameworks related to youth radicalization and highlighted a USIP project in Pakistan as one way to counteract this radicalization through peacemaking education in local madrassas. This WNCAC session was prompted by recent attention to the complex issues facing the Middle East, including President Obama's speech in Cairo on June 4th when he acknowledged the need to confront radical groups in the region.

The discussion was framed by Dr. Peter Mandaville, Director of the George Mason Global Policy Center, and Dr. Qamar-ul Huda, of the US Institute of Peace. The two speakers drew from their respective experiences in Indonesia, the U.K., Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan to provide examples of different theories and methods that have been applied to the goal of promoting positive alternatives to youth radicalization in the Middle East.

Presentations

Dr. Mandaville began by pointing out problems associated with using the terms "radicalization" and "de-radicalization." One problem is the binary nature of the terms, as if radicalism is a button that can be turned off and on. He asked how does one define radical? He also expressed concern about the lack of analysis surrounding the definitions of radicalization and de-radicalization. Dr. Mandaville pointed out that radicals are doing an effective job of framing their groups as providing a sense of inclusion, societal identity, etc. Dr. Huda, in the beginning of his presentation, listed the values characteristics of Islamic radicals: anti-Western, anti-establishment, and maintaining that the current religious and political leadership and institutions have failed..

Approaches to considering "radicalism"

Dr. Mandaville referred first to the first is the hearts and minds approach, which assumes that youth become radicalized through embracing particular ideas. The strategy to counteract these radical ideas that stimulate radical actions is to promote ideas that provide positive messages to these youth. One problem with this approach as pointed out by Dr. Huda, based on resistance he's faced in Pakistan, is that radical leaders use these new ideas meant to counteract the negative messages as evidence of the Western world trying to further undermine Islamic teachings.

A second approach mentioned by Dr. Mandaville is to focus on personal and family needs and safety, by addressing socio-economic issues. A third approach is one in which the aim is to reconfigure the environment by bolstering moderate institutions so as to force radical groups further outside of the society. He suggested that effective approaches are those that address the drivers of radicalism in the social and political environment.

Dr. Huda described another approach as deflating radical groups by bringing them into the political fold. The thought behind this approach is if top leaders are co-opted into politics, then role models for the radical group would no longer exist.

Program case studies

According to Dr. Mandaville, successful programs aimed at de-radicalization deal with political issues and policy changes. He cited an example from Saudi Arabia, where conservative Islamic scholars have been brought in to essentially de-program radicals by challenging the theological justifications for their violent action. There have been both apparent successes as well as cases of

recidivism. One concern with this approach is that radicals leave this program and re-enter the same context from which they joined the radical group in the first place. Public recantations of former radicals in Egypt have been another approach. Dr. Mandville described an approach in Indonesia, where the focus has been not so much to discount Jihadist programs, but rather to focus on the corruption of certain leaders of these groups. The argument is made that these leaders are not aligned with Islamic teachings, but are pursuing personal political interests. While tactically successful, he said the longer term strategic impact is an open question. Another approach that has been used with apparent success on one island in Indonesia has been for the Government to provide adequate security to a Muslim population that felt threatened by local Christians, thereby reducing the fear that encouraged their previous receptiveness to a radical Islamic group.

Dr. Huda described another approach that is being used by a USIP project in Pakistan that he heads. It began with dialogue with administrators and teachers of madrasses (private religious schools) about their priorities and concerns. A workshop on Islamic peacemaking helped them reflect on themselves as role models to their students and assess the influences of their rather severe methods. These administrators and teachers have participated in developing a peacemaking textbook, which includes basic definitions of such terms as “peace” and “justice”, approaches to conflict resolution, and specific methods for preventing and mitigating conflict. Currently the project is training teachers how to use the text in the classroom.

Question and Answer Session:

Question: How can the U.S. government fund educational program assistance in Pakistan since the U.S. cannot support religious teaching institutions?

Answer: It is the “kiss of death” to use U.S. government funds to build madrassas as exemplified by the many U.S. funded madrassas built by Musharaf which now sit largely unused. It is better to have the money come from within the local communities and community relatives living outside the country.

Question: Is the same parent/child divide seen in relationships between Muslim youth and their parents living in the UK the same in predominately Muslim countries?

Answer: The disconnect created in the UK from the children growing up in a very different cultural context from their parents would not be as pronounced with children living the predominately Muslim countries.

Question: Is there an organization like the US Institute of Peace in the Islamic world?

Answer: Funding from USIP goes to workshops and programs. This peacemaking course is supplemental so there is no funding going to religious curriculum directly. Currently there is no center for peace in Pakistan. If any type of center were to be introduced it would most likely need to be community-based.

Question: How will peace education permeate the larger culture?

Answer: The workshops, text, and trainings will cultivate discussions around peacemaking. In this response Dr. Huda discussed the potential of connecting youth to the job market to give them a positive alternative to radical groups.

Resources:

Children and Youth Programming Toolkit

The Search for Common Ground Children and Youth Toolkit was handed out to WNCAC meeting attendees. The toolkit provides practical guidelines for children and youth conflict resolution programming including case studies drawn from Search for Common Ground's programming. This valuable resource will be released for wide spread distribution soon.

CYES Livelihood Initiative

Taking a cue from the February WNCAC meeting on alternative approaches to youth employment programming in crisis-affected countries, the Children, Youth and Economic Strengthening (CYES) Network has announced a new initiative that invites researchers and practitioners to participate in an open process of developing an book on economic strengthening approaches for youth in conflict. For more information and to participate visit:

<http://www.cyesnetwork.org/openpaper/blog/post01>

DDR Bibliography

The Coalition to Stop the Use of Childhood Soldiers has recently released its 2009 bibliography of literature related to disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR). The citations and abstracts are divided into categories: DDR, gender, international law and juvenile justice, and recruitment use of child soldiers. It is available at: www.child-soldiers.org/childsoldiers/Final_June_2009_DDR_Bibliography.pdf

Arabic-Language Blogosphere Report

On June 17th USIP hosted an event titled 'Online Discourse in the Arab World: Dispelling the Myths,' to discuss findings of a project, which mapped the Arabic-language blogosphere analyzing over 35,000 blogs from 18 countries. The event moderated by Sheldon Himmelfarb of USIP included both academicians and Arabic language bloggers. More than 150 participants from 26 countries participated through online chat and Twitter. To see a video of the event [click](#) here.

Cease Fire

This Chicago-based organization relies on a public health approach to reducing gun violence using highly trained street violence interrupters and outreach staff along with public education campaigns and community mobilization. See: <http://www.ceasefirechicago.org/>