PROBLEM:
Terrorists using Net to radicalise young

SOLUTION:
Use Net to debunk their lies

How to fight hate websites?

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EIGHT fire with fire when you enter cyberspace. That’s what Muslim leaders are doing to counter terrorist and extremist ideologies on the Net.

They have set up websites that debunk the dangerous views and misinformation that characterise these rogue sites.

The moderate voices range from religious leaders to scholars to research analysts.

One such counter-terrorism website features blog entries, forums, music and even videos.

Another is filled with book reviews, interactive multimedia clips and links to similar sites.

The first site belongs to local terrorism research analyst Ustaz Muhi Harith Hassan, found at counterterrorism.multiply.com.

The second is the work of British Islamic scholar Aftab Malik, whose website is at www.amaipress.com. Though countries apart, their cause binds them — they aim to denounce terrorist ideologies by making their views available on the Internet.

The Islamic Religious Council of Singapore, or MuSI, has also started a forum at www.isak.com.sg to answer and clarify religious questions.

Offline too there have been many efforts to engage youths who may be Net-savvy and mosque-shy.

The reason: Leaders know that youths, who make up one-third of all Muslims here, need to be addressed. Some might be disillusioned and angry and can be targets for terrorist recruiters.

The tragic example of the 2005 London bombings highlights this. The attacks were carried out by four youths who were radicalised by websites preaching extremist ideologies.

The four later carried out the attacks in July 2005 which killed 52 and injured more than 700 people.

BATTLE ON THE NET

Terrorism research analysts have warned that the next battleground in the war against terror is on the Internet.

The recent arrest in Singapore of law-trained academic Abdul Baset; Abdul Kader underscores this view.

Abdul Baset became influenced by extremist ideologies on the Internet and began to study Arabic to understand the language of the jihadist fighters.

He was deported before he could fly to Pakistan, where he intended to fight alongside the Taliban in Afghanistan.

The most powerful tools on the Net are accessibility and interactivity. The extremists know this and are exploiting it.

Terrorism research analyst Rebecca Giner-Forbes, who studies as many as 20 extremist websites daily at the Rajkumar School of International Studies, said those sites provide a sense of community.

Ms Giner-Forbes said: “This sense of community is crucial to completing the jihadi experience.”

“With online forums and instant chats that connect you directly to other radicals, that person no longer feels alone or like an outcast for his strange views in his mainstream community.”

At the same time, the person is bombarded with an audio-visual dose of rhetoric and lies, which have been misinterpreted and manipulated to suck him into an ideology of hate.

Muslim scholars and religious leaders who spoke to The New Paper, rebutted the five most cited extremist ideologies. (See report on facing page.)

MORE WEBSITES

Leader Habib Hassan Al-Attas wanted more counter-terrorist websites to be created.

He suggested having a website that is visited by: any, a local Muslim.

thought

GOT A VIEW?
Tell us
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Please include your full name and contact number
• By SMS:
TNPFeedback
<space> your name
<space> your view.
Send to 77877
**MYTH v FACT**

**Jihad**

Panel says: Wage holy war. In her words, armed combat against anyone who threatens or endangers Islam. They legitimise their call by use of Qur'anic scriptures. 

Panel says: These scriptures, which refer to a specific historical event and context in the Qur'an, have been misinterpreted.

Jihad is an Arabic word meaning "to strive", "to make one's most effort" or "to struggle", and is intended to accomplish a perfect faith or promoting justice.

Islam has several rules of engagement to be met before going to it. Even so, the act of war itself is forbidden a last resort, not justified by being championed at the head of a war.

So, to equate jihad with terrorism sacrificial.

There is no text in the Qur'an which talks of jihad except as Sept 11.

**Non-Muslims**

Panel says: All disbelief in the religion of Islam is a crime.

Injustice in any form against others is unacceptable.

Takia one's life is against the teachings of Islam as life is considered sacred, and suicide operations cause much destruction and death to innocents, which is also wrong in Islam.

4. **Muslim Brotherhood**

Extremists say: That it is the duty of any responsible Muslim to go to the aid of his brother who is being attacked, oppressed or persecuted, and to fight for the Muslim community.

Panel says: The idea is right but the execution is wrong. Scholars agree that Muslims have been able to manipulate this concept of brotherhood.

The concept of ummah is to help a Muslim do good, not to avenge violent ends.

This is another example of how these radicals oppose over 1,000 years of scholarship and a scholarly methodology and applies a literal understanding which is devoid of wisdom and prudence.

Extremists use this literal approach to convince others that they have a religious duty to go and fight.

5. **Aggression in Terrorist Culture**

Extremists say: They use revenge to instigate hate and rally people against their enemies. Beheadings of captors and suicide operations are justified.

Panel says: This concept of an "eye for an eye" is not encouraged by Islam as it is a religion of peace, not war.

"Islam" is derived from the Arabic root word of "salama", which means peace, and "salama", which means "to submit to the will of God". So Islam is a religion which asks its believers to submit themselves to a life of peace and harmony with all of God's creations.

**The Panel**

- Ustaz Mohamed Ali, a research analyst at the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research, Institute of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University.
- Sheik Hassan Al-Atas, imam of Brunei Mosque and member of the Inter-Religious Organisation.
- Mr Aftab Malik, visiting fellow at the Centre for Ethnicity and Culture, University of Birmingham. He has edited four books and authored one.

**SPECIAL REPORT:**

The New Paper team visits the root of terror in the Middle East

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