

COMBATING TERRORISM IN YEMEN THROUGH THE COMMITTEE FOR RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

ICPVTR VISIT TO YEMEN



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This report summarises the proceedings of the discussion sessions in the programme as interpreted by the assigned rapporteurs. Participants neither reviewed nor approved this report.

This programme adheres to a variation of the Chatham House Rule. Accordingly, beyond the speakers and papers presenters cited, no other attributions have been included in this report.

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The unwavering work of Judge Al-Hitar has gone a long way in initiating the pathways of peace in Yemen. The lessons gleaned from our interactions are priceless. They will go a long way in understanding the efforts made to combat terrorism and extremism in Yemen.

With sincere thanks and deepest appreciation,

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Executive Summary

Yemen's Committee for Religious Dialogue was established in September 2002. It was an innovative and timely step undertaken by the Yemeni Government towards terrorist rehabilitation. This report seeks to document the lessons learnt from the ICPVTR delegation's visit to Yemen from 17 to 21 July 2010. The visit sought to get an in-depth understanding of the rehabilitation efforts by the Religious Dialogue Committee that was founded by the Minister of Endowment and Guidance of Yemen, Judge Hamoud Al-Hitar. In addition, the visit also aimed at understanding the role of other Yemeni agencies in their efforts to combating terrorism.

The Religious Dialogue as a means of counter-terrorism received positive attention from the international community for its pioneering efforts. It was the first country in the region to undertake de-radicalization efforts in its prisons.

The programme was grounded in a religious dialogue that aimed to correct the detainees' distorted beliefs. Despite the dialogue being a government-run de-radicalization initiative, it was largely the work of Judge Hamoud Al-Hitar and his three fellow clerics. The programme however, faced many challenges and was often at the centre of political disputes and struggles. As a result, the programme was discontinued in 2005. The programme had great potential but needed the necessary support from the various agencies in Yemen.

The visits to the government agencies in Yemen also suggest that they are at the beginning stages of formulating a proper structure and system to counter extremist and violent ideologies. They acknowledged the importance of the agencies coming together to work with the community to combat violent extremism.

SESSION 1

Meeting with Judge Hamoud Abdulhameed Al-Hitar, Minister for Endowment and Guidance



Judge Hamoud Abdulhameed Al-Hitar, Minister for Endowment and Guidance

Judge Hamoud Abdulhameed Al-Hitar is the current Minister for Endowment and Guidance. Judge Al-Hitar was the founder who headed the Intellectual Dialogue Committee (Lajnah al-Hiwar al-Fikri) when it was first established in 2002. This committee is also known as the Religious Dialogue Committee. As a former Head of Yemen Supreme Court, he has extensive experience in the country's legislation, judiciary and politics.

Judge Al-Hitar acknowledged the delegation's experience in terrorist rehabilitation efforts and research. He remarked that every act of terrorist activity is borne out of a distorted ideology. This ideology can be addressed through dialogue. According to Judge Al-Hitar, dialogue provides a platform for exchanging ideas, experiences, and changing behaviours. It is a form of communication between two parties where each party will try to convince the other with arguments based on the Quran and Sunnah. For a successful dialogue to take place, the participants must abide by the rules

and principles set. The set of rules and principles are discussed first before each dialogue can take place.

The idea for a religious dialogue was first mooted on 30 August 2002. A special meeting was convened by the President of Yemen to inform the religious scholars of a detention order made by the government. The detention involved a group of youth who was propagating a distorted ideology of the religion. The President warned that the group, if left unchecked, could cause more harm not only to themselves but also to the country. The members at the meeting unanimously decided to embark on the concept of 'hiwar' or dialogue to counter the distorted ideology on 05 September 2002.

Yemen took a political step in countering terrorism based on a four-pronged approach covering aspects of intellectual dialogue, security, economic, as well as regional and international cooperation. Intellectual or religious dialogue is a necessary action to stop the extreme ideology from growing any further. Secondly, the country needed to step up measures at the security level by enhancing crime prevention and justice. Thirdly, issues related to the economy must be addressed too. Jobs and work opportunities must be created so that the youth can be gainfully employed. They should not be distracted and get recruited into radical groups to serve causes contrary to the teachings of Islam. The country needed to establish structures to dismantle the financial capability of the terrorist groups. Finally, Yemen also realised the importance of forging cooperation at both the regional and the international level to combat terrorism effectively.

Judge Al-Hitar emphasised the importance of setting goals and parameters for a dialogue to be conducted successfully. For each successful dialogue to take place, there must be clarity in the objectives, the selected topics for discussion

and their references. All arguments must be substantiated with accurate referencing to the Quran, Sunnah and opinions of authenticated religious scholars.

Participants of the dialogue were given ample time to do their research. During the dialogue, respect, equality, humility and ethics were to be observed. According to Judge Al-Hitar, true dialogue requires three important factors:

1. the art of dialogue itself
2. topics for dialogue and
3. the sharing of information to the relevant authorities

Judge Al Hitar explained that a dialogue should never be confrontational as both parties rationalise for truth. He also explained that the topics for dialogue were based on studies of books and references that the detainees had used. The committee also looked into summary reports detailing the detainees' ideology by the security department.

He further explained that the Committee did not have access to the full report of the detainees. The Committee worked closely with the security infrastructure in sharing of information in their fight against extremist ideology.

The Dialogue Committee agreed that their primary sources for the dialogue are the Holy Quran and the Sunnah. The Judge noted that generally those affected by radical or extremist ideology were actually influenced by 'leaders' who argued without any proper justification from the Quran and Sunnah. The dialogue was conducted in the prison.

As a preamble to the dialogue, the detainees would be informed of the visit by the Committee, its purpose and objectives. Participants of the dialogue had to be sincere and be open to counter arguments with accurate justifications

from the Quran and the Sunnah. The Dialogue Committee would reassure the detainees that "if the truth is with you, we will follow you; if the truth is with us, you will follow us".

Two questions would usually be addressed at the start of the dialogue. They are:

1. Is Yemen an Islamic state (daulah Islamiah)?
2. Does the system in Yemen follow the Islamic Shariah?

A common response from the detainees for the first question would be their assertions that Yemen was not an Islamic state for two reasons - that Yemen did not rule based on the Islamic shariah and its alliance to the West.

The Dialogue Committee would then provide the Yemeni Constitution and laws for further discussion to the questions raised. The detainees were then asked to identify sections of the constitution and laws which contradicted the Holy Qu'ran, Sunnah or Ijma' (consensus) which are Qat'i Tsuboot (definitive in text) and Qat'i Dalalah (definitive in meaning)¹ based on their assertions that Yemeni's system had not followed the Islamic Shariah.

Judge Al-Hitar reiterated that Islam is enshrined in the constitution as the official religion of Yemen. The laws are all based on the concept of justice. After discussing and counter-arguing the topics which were perceived to contradict Islamic laws, the detainees would usually admit and accept that the country's constitution was built on an Islamic foundation and that there was nothing in the Yemeni laws that were against what was revealed by God.

Judge Al-Hitar shared that Yemenis are not restricted by any specific school of thoughts. They take views and schools of thoughts as they deem suitable with this era that are not conflicting with definitive scriptures which contain specific meanings.

1 There are two types of rulings in the Sharia: Qat'i (definitive) and Dzanni (speculative). While Muslims believe that al-Quran is Qat'i Tsuboot (definitive in text), there are verses in it which are Qat'i Dalalah (definitive in meaning) – clear, specific, contains only one meaning and admits no other interpretations; and also Dzanni Dalalah (speculative in meaning) – more open for different interpretations.

Judge Al-Hitar stated that the concept of being an ally to western countries had no bearing on whether a country was more or less Islamic. In fact, he stressed that the Dialogue Committee would elaborate on examples of good relationships that Prophet Muhammad had with the non-Muslims. The country's alliance with other countries is transparent and each comes with responsibilities that are bound by treaties which were agreed by all parties involved.

At the dialogue, the detainees were asked to show evidence from the Quran, Sunnah and Ijma' that the country had deviated from the teachings of Islam. Prior to the dialogue, they had insisted that Yemen did not follow the Shariah as the leader of the country was not called a Khalifah or vicegerent and that the leadership of the country was chosen by prominent members of the community (Ahlu al-Hill wal Aqd).

In addressing the second issue of "the leader was not chosen by prominent members of the community", the Dialogue Committee asked for their clarification. The detainees defined prominent members as "the distinguished and influential individuals within the community who hold respectable positions in education, politics, economy or society." The Committee further explained that the country's decision to allow citizens of the country who are 18 years of age and above to be given equal rights and opportunity to vote was actually following the Shariah.

After the dialogue, with evidence presented to them by the Dialogue Committee, the detainees would accept Yemen's position as an Islamic country. And that there was no provision in the Quran and Sunnah and other religious sources that obligates Muslims to address their leader as Khalifah. The detainees concluded that Muslims are free to choose whether a leader of a country takes up the title of president, sultan or king.

The discussion and examples given during the dialogue helped the detainees to understand the issues better. The detainees were able to correct their misperceptions and accept the arguments put forth by the Dialogue Committee. They conceded that the political system in Yemen does follow the Shariah and that President Ali Abdullah Saleh is their legitimate leader and obeying him is obligatory.

Judge Al-Hitar discussed the benefits of the dialogue from two different levels – internal and external. At the internal level, the dialogue had provided the detainees, the hope to lead a peaceful life if they renounced violence as required by Islam. The detainees had lost all sense of hope and were actually ready to kill or be killed in the pursuit of their political agenda. The dialogue provided a useful platform for clarification as the detainees had misconstrued the true message of Islam and this had led to misunderstandings and deterioration of relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims, especially in western countries.

Through the dialogue, bloody confrontations between the extremists and the country's security forces were averted. The Committee had useful information for the security forces to dismantle terrorist operations and their illegal prosecutions. The positive impact of the dialogue lasted for 3 years from 2003 to 2005. The dialogue was a top priority for the country. It provided the necessary security and stability. During that time there was no terrorist operation in Yemen. But because of a readjustment in the policy for dialogue after 2005, Yemen succumbed to the threat of terrorism. Finally at the internal level, the three years of dialogue had resulted in the release of the largest possible number of individuals in detention who were successfully rehabilitated. But those who were convicted of criminal acts were still incarcerated and handled by the Judiciary.

At the external level, the dialogue had portrayed Yemen as a civilized and modern country. It gave an alternative means to combat terrorism effectively. The cost- effective dialogue had enabled the country to win the hearts and minds of the extremists. Although the Dialogue Committee is no longer active in Yemen, it had provided the world an example of how dialogues can be used to rehabilitate extremists and terrorists. According to Judge Al-Hitar, Yemen could claim credit for paving the way in promoting the culture of dialogue to fight extremism and terrorism. This was evident when countries like Saudi Arabia, Libya and Mauritania sought consultations about the dialogue. Even the former U.S. Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld sent its director to Yemen several times to learn about the Dialogue Committee. The Dialogue Committee had in fact successfully convinced those affected that Al-Qaeda's ideology had indeed deviated from the Quran and Sunnah.

The Dialogue Committee faced many challenges. According to Judge Al-Hitar, one of the main obstacles faced by the Committee in its third year was that it came under intense pressure that led to its end from some parties and individuals who were against the Committee since its inception.

The Judge himself faced several assassination attempts but is still determined to carry out his responsibility to serve the cause of Islam. Although there were strong opposition and criticism from the security forces at the initial stage, they eventually agreed with the Dialogue Committee when presented with the positive results. The political parties and individuals who were against it were not convinced.

Judge Al-Hitar however reiterated that the programme had received a new lease of life when they started a similar programme to counter the Houthi ideology since the beginning of 2010. He reaffirmed that his Committee looked forward to reviving the dialogue to those who are affected by the Al-Qaeda ideology.

In conclusion, Judge Al-Hitar mentioned his readiness to receive detainees from Guantanamo Bay. The Committee is confident that they will be able to rehabilitate the detainees. They have also prepared an integrated programme to facilitate the rehabilitation process. Judge Al Hitar himself will supervise the programme. He has formed three committees to look into human development; those affected by Al-Qaeda ideology and those affected by the Houthi ideology.



(From left) Judge Hamoud Abdulhameed Al-Hittar, Minister for Endowment and Guidance; Sheikh Hussein Al-Haddar, Representative of Ministry of Endowment and Guidance, Yemen; and Sheikh Hassan Al-Sheikh, Deputy Minister for Endowment and Guidance and Head of Religious Affairs



ICPVTR Delegation at the Ministry for Endowment and Guidance

SESSION 2

Meeting with General (Dr.) Ali Hassan Al-Sharafi, Head of Police Academy



General (Dr.) Ali Hassan Al-Sharafi, Head of Police Academy

General Ali Hassan Al-Sharafi, Head of the Police Academy of Yemen welcomed the ICPVTR delegation. The General proceeded with introducing the academy as a learning institute that was established under the purview of the Ministry of Interior. Its main purpose is to conduct studies and training for student officers in the police sciences. The Academy also provides consultations to the Ministry of Interior.

The General further explained that there are three schools within the academy:

1. School for Police Training—a four-year degree program for post-secondary students leading to a rank of lieutenant upon completion;
2. School of Higher Learning – students officers will obtain their Masters degree after two years of study;
3. School of Training for officers—where officers undergo specialized training. The course duration in this school is dependent on the course type. The duration can last from two weeks to four months.

The Centre for Security Studies and Research which also operates within the academy conducts research and studies not only on terrorism but also on criminal-related issues at local and international levels. The General added that findings from the researches are distributed to government bodies and agencies. As an

example, the Academy is closely connected with the General Office for Counter Terrorism (GOCT) of the Ministry of Interior. The sharing of information is done regularly between these two agencies.

The General said that the academy is also responsible for conducting counter terrorism training courses with specialization in dismantling terrorist organizations and activities. These include uncovering the terrorist plans and dealing with explosives and devices employed by them. Foreign experts from the E.U. and U.S. are sometimes invited by the Academy to plan and implement structured training courses on counter-terrorism for the student officers. The Academy trains student officers in police work, legislation, investigative sciences, management sciences and criminology.

According to the General, the Academy is constantly looking for expertise to assist and complement them in equipping their student officers with the latest knowledge and skills in countering terrorism. The knowledge gained from their in-house training has thus far benefitted officers who are then attached to the different security agencies and organizations in the country. As an illustration, recent incidents involving terrorist activities in Yemen have led to the formation of Special Forces in counter terrorism which are embedded in the military and other security agencies. The Special Forces are responsible in the training of officers in field operations. The case for combating terrorism in Yemen is strengthened by a law passed in its parliament against terrorism.

The General further explained that the Academy is always at hand to give information and briefings on current incidents and their preventive measures to government officials and agencies. The Academy reviews its course materials regularly to suit the current needs of the country.

SESSION 3

Meeting with Sheikh Hassan Al-Sheikh, Deputy Minister for Endowment and Guidance at Saleh Mosque



Sheikh Hassan Al-Sheikh, Deputy Minister for Endowment and Guidance and Head of Religious Affairs

Sheikh Hassan Al-Sheikh, Deputy Minister for Endowment and Guidance and Head of Religious Affairs at Saleh Mosque, opened the meeting by highlighting to the delegation that Saleh Mosque was built with the objective of spreading the message of religious moderation. He explained that the mosque's mission was to promote religious tolerance and advocate peaceful co-existence among people of different religions, thereby portraying Islam as a religion of peace and tolerance that condemns violence. Sheikh Hassan told the delegation that he often uses Prophet Muhammad's tolerant and respectful stance towards the Jews of Medina to illustrate his point of religious harmony.

Sheikh Hassan told the delegation that the Religious Dialogue Committee was initiated in 2002 to rehabilitate suspected militant Islamists held in Yemen's prisons. The project, which aimed to alter the detainees' radical, militant understanding of Islam to a moderate and peaceful understanding, was discontinued in 2005. The project was carried out not only in prisons in Sana'a but also in other governorates such as Hadramaut, Aden, Ta'iz and Ibb. In the beginning, the Dialogue Committee only consisted of four clerics, namely, Judge Hamoud Al-Hitar, Sheikh Hassan Al-Sheikh and two other clerics. Many other religious scholars declined joining the Committee for fear of confronting the fundamentalists and endangering their lives. But as news of the Committee's success spread, the four founding clerics were joined by other fellow religious scholars. Altogether, a total of 58 clerics had volunteered to participate in the Dialogue Committee.

Some of the 400 detainees who took part in the dialogue project had been convicted of terrorism-related crimes while others were still on trial for terrorism or suspected of being involved with militant Islamist groups. The dialogue sessions between the clerics and detainees were usually held two to three times a week. Sheikh Hassan mentioned that detainees who were committed to the dialogue sessions and subsequently renounced violence and showed signs of disengaging themselves from violence and terrorism had their prison sentences reduced. He added that upon their release, most of the detainees returned to their previous jobs. Those who did not manage to find employment received financial assistance from the government. However, he acknowledged that despite the dialogue project's success, there were still some recidivists among the detainees who were released.

When a delegate asked whether the religious clerics in Yemen used a manual during their dialogue sessions, Sheikh Hassan replied that the clerics were religious scholars well-versed in their respective fields. Hence, there was no need for a manual. The dialogues touched on intellectual and religious issues. For instance, when the detainees were asked about the attack on USS Cole, they rationalized the attack by convincing themselves that the people on board the ship were enemies even if they came in peace or were permitted to enter Yemen by the authorities. This justification also applied to whoever came from a country the detainees considered as enemies. On their part, the religious clerics sought to counter the detainees' misguided understanding by explaining that those who went to Yemen legally should not be harmed, just as Prophet Muhammad prohibited the assault and killing of messengers.

The strategy of the Dialogue Committee was to engage the detainees in a discussion about their misguided actions in an attempt to alter the detainees' religious misunderstandings. The detainees were also questioned on what they had to gain from killing innocent people. Eventually, most of the detainees admitted their wrongdoings and realized that they had tainted Yemen's international reputation, dishonored international charters and violated the country's laws.

Public education programs were also mounted to promote religious moderation and tolerance among the people of Yemen. These were done through various channels such as Friday sermons, religious classes, lectures and seminars in universities and television programmes. These proved to be effective platforms for the authorities to provide intellectual and religious programmes which not only discuss religious issues but also address the issues of extremist ideologies. Saleh Mosque, for instance, has a yearly plan for various community engagement activities and programs to be held in the mosque. The plan (which includes Friday sermons), prepared by Sheikh Hassan himself, is submitted to President Saleh for his approval in the beginning of the year. Meanwhile, the schedules and plans for the estimated 70,000

mosques in Yemen are managed by the Ministry of Endowment and Guidance. Unlike the religious dialogues that were since discontinued, these community engagement programmes are currently still in place.

About his role and involvement in the Yemeni dialogue program, Sheikh Hassan explained that he was a rapporteur of the Committee for Religious Dialogue and also one of its four founding members. He added that there were four factors that led to the success of the dialogue:

1. the leadership's trust in the committee and the government
2. good interaction between Intelligence and detainees
3. the detainees' eager search for truth and
4. the dialogists' equal treatment towards the detainees that led to open and honest discussions between both parties.

Reflecting on lessons learned from the dialogue and future directions for counter-terrorism efforts, Sheikh Hassan emphasised the need for different agencies to collaborate towards formulating a more coordinated and effective plan for countering distorted militant ideologies through religious dialogues. He also mentioned that the United States has to stop using the killing of terrorists as a pretext to attack Muslim lands because for every one terrorist pursued, ten civilians are being killed. This would only aggravate the people's resentment towards the U.S. and make matters worse. He advised that international Islamic issues have to be resolved with justice and impartiality and further implied that unfair actions in Palestine will only fuel Al-Qaeda's cause.

In conclusion, Sheikh Hassan suggested that global views about Muslims must change so that impressionable youths will have positive views about Muslims and Islam. He believes that if international laws are implemented in every country and in fairness to all religions, people will eventually renounce violence. He reiterated that Islam is a religion that respects all religions and political systems. As such, deviated practices are not exemplary of Islam.

SESSION 4

Meeting with Professor Abdul Salam Al-Jawfi, Minister for Education



Professor Abdul Salam Al-Jawfi, Minister for Education

Professor Abdul Salam Al-Jawfi gave the delegation a brief overview of the education system in Yemen. He mentioned that his ministry is overseeing a total of 5.6 million students and 265 000 teachers. In the course of the interview, he candidly admitted that there are Yemeni students who are sympathetic to the terrorist cause and especially to the Palestine, Iraq and Afghanistan causes. However, he believes that education can help to alleviate this problem as it encourages people to think and behave rationally and resolve their problems through peaceful means.

Professor Al-Jawfi pointed out that the Education Law was enacted in 1992, two years after the reunification of Yemen. He explained that the law clearly states that there should be only one education system and all educational institutions will be under the purview of the Ministry of Education. However, the government

faces many difficulties implementing this law due to resistance from some Islamic political parties.

In 1997, the General People's Congress (GPC) became the ruling political party in Yemen. After the Education Law was gradually introduced in 2000 and in June 2001, Yemen fully integrated all its different education systems into one single system.

Before the integration, there were two streams of education in Yemen, namely, general education and religious education which were under the purview of the Ministry of Education. In addition, religious education complemented general education and was recognised by the government. Professor Al-Jawfi commented that the grading systems also differed from one education system to the other. He also shared that communist and socialist materials were used in some schools in the southern part of Yemen.

According to Professor Al-Jawfi, efforts to unify the different education systems began in late 2000, and it was only fully merged in June 2001. The students in Yemen now study the same subjects and are taught the same ideology using the same methodology and outreach. He reiterated that they were fortunate to have refined the education system earlier as such an effort would not have been successful if the government had tried to implement it after the September 11 attacks in the United States.

Despite the government's efforts to promote formal education, other forms of education, like religious teaching, still take place in private homes, mosques and non-governmental organisations (NGO). Professor Al-Jawfi expressed his worry about the hidden curriculum being disseminated by teachers in school. Although the current curriculum is generally moderate, he is concerned that some teachers who adhere to a distorted ideology may surface controversial issues and ideas during class discussions which will negatively influence the students.

At the governmental level, the Ministry of Education tries to curtail the spread of deviant teaching by continuous supervision and monitoring of schools. Professor Al-Jawfi added that the curriculum is revised from time to time to ensure that religious teaching does not deviate from true Islamic teachings. He further

informed the delegation that the selection of headmasters is a stringent one.

When asked about the practicality of creating a subject in school that specifically promotes religious moderation, tolerance and peaceful co-existence, Professor Al-Jawfi opined that the greater issue is not the subject per se, but rather training teachers to believe in these attributes. This way, the correct messages can be disseminated during lessons and class discussions by the teachers. He believes that teachers are more important than any textbooks. Furthermore, he added, it was not practical to create a subject for every emergent political issue.

In conclusion, Professor Al-Jawfi emphasised the importance of sharing best practices and ideas about deradicalization.



SESSION 5
**Meeting with Dr. Abu Bakr Al-Qirbi,
Minister for Foreign Affairs**



Professor Rohan Gunaratna, Head, ICPVTR and Dr. Abu Bakr Al-Qirbi, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Yemen

Dr. Abu Bakr Al-Qirbi, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Yemen extended a very warm welcome to the ICPVTR delegation.

Dr. Al-Qirbi noted that his last visit to Singapore had stimulated interest in Singapore on Yemen. He emphasised that there were opportunities available to enhance the relationship between the two countries. Dr. Al-Qirbi emphasized the importance of staying united in combating the threat of terrorism, extremism and radicalization. Dr. Al-Qirbi expressed deep regret that since 11 September 2001, instead of approaching the threat of terrorism in a comprehensive manner, the focus was primarily on issues centred around the military and security instead. He added that strong political agenda and political will were needed to combat terrorism. Dr. Al-Qirbi agreed that communities are an important element in enhancing the governments' success in fighting

terrorism. He further added that terrorist groups can be defeated if governments take the right approach to fight them. He emphasized that foreign influence and agendas should not interfere in the government's work against terrorism.

Dr. Al-Qirbi noted that in Yemen moderation in Islam has been a part of Yemen's culture. He pointed to the fact that in Yemen, two religious sects - Sunni and Shia survived for centuries without any conflict. He highlighted that Yemeni Al-Qaeda leaders were not radicalized in Yemen or even in the neighbouring countries but elsewhere around the world.

The global approach in fighting terrorism in the last decade according to Dr. Al-Qirbi has not been fruitful as the eradication of a number of Al-Qaeda leaders thus far, has only garnered sympathy from people and motivated them to join the group. Dr. Al-Qirbi felt that there were two problems that hindered the continuation of the religious dialogue in Yemen. Firstly, the success of the dialogue was solely confined to the prisons. Dr. Al-Qirbi added that the dialogue would have achieved greater success if it was carried out outside the prison atmosphere. Second, problems arose when plans were underway to institutionalise the dialogue. This meant that the dialogue would not only deal with detainees in prisons but also look at the issues of education and communities, hence demanding the recruitment of experts in various fields.

There were insufficient funds and lack of financial support from the U.S. - which was initially interested in the matter. Dr. Al-Qirbi believed that with further external funding, the engagement in the prisons could recommence.

In conclusion, Dr. Al-Qirbi added that at times many in the West do not look upon the introduction of Islam to Southeast Asia in an objective manner. He opined that compared to both Middle-Eastern and Southeast Asian cultures, the West was not as moderate as they had claimed.



ICPVTR delegation and Dr. Abu Bakr Al-Qirbi, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Yemen



SESSION 6

Meeting with Ambassador Mohammed Muthar Al-Ashabi, Head of Asia and Australia Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs



Ambassador Mohammed Muthar Al-Ashabi, Head of Asia and Australia Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Ambassador Al-Ashabi, Head of Asia and Australia Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Yemen welcomed the Singapore delegation to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He affirmed that Asia and Yemen are strong partners and have an excellent political relationship. He believed that as Yemen and Asia have common and mutual interests, and that there are a lot of opportunities that both sides could work on to forge a stronger relationship. Ambassador Al-Ashabi added that Yemen is looking for possibilities for cooperation. Ambassador Al-Ashabi noted that while Yemen's cooperation with Singapore is good politically,

Yemen is seeking to build a better relationship economically especially given that Singapore is a centre for financial opportunities and investment. Besides Singapore, Yemen is also trying to attract other foreign investors to Yemen. Ambassador Al-Ashabi acknowledged that although security concerns have been raised, he felt that every country is subjected to various challenges and Yemen is by far no exception. As such, this should not be a reason to pass off the opportunity to invest in Yemen. Giving an overview of Yemen's relations with other Asian countries, Ambassador Al-Ashabi asserted that Yemen's relation with China is excellent, while its relations with Malaysia and Indonesia are growing progressively. In addition, he noted that Yemen was trying to strengthen their growing relationship with Turkey. Yemen also has good relations with South Korea. Ambassador Al-Ashabi added that Yemen did have an embassy in North Korea in the past, but the diplomatic mission in North Korea was closed because of the pressure by the international community. Nevertheless, Ambassador Al-Ashabi noted that diplomatic ties between the two countries are still maintained albeit no mission or representation exists there. As Asia increasingly becomes the epicentre of economic power, Asian countries

are also interested in reaching out to other parts of the world such as the Middle East, Africa and Central Asia. Therefore, Singapore is in good stead in their efforts to build a strong partnership with the Middle East. Besides Asia, Yemen is also looking to strengthen its relations with the West.

In response to whether there are any government agencies or departments that look into the affairs of foreign students, Ambassador Al-Ashabi noted that there were no official agencies that look into this matter except the embassies of respective countries. Furthermore, foreign students who come to Sana'a to study Arabic and/or Islamic studies should face no difficulties. Ambassador Al-Ashabi noted that there were religious schools outside Sana'a, for instance Hadramaut, which teach Salafism. It was difficult for the government to continuously keep the schools under their purview as the schools did not come under the ambit government's supervision. He added that in any case, such schools and institutions are unpopular among the people. Ambassador Al-Ashabi assured that schools in Yemen in general denounce and reject Al-Qaeda and its ideology. He advised

that if there are potential students who would like to come to Yemen to study, they could write a letter to the Asian Department stating their intent. Their applications would then be passed directly to the learning institutions and the Ministry of Higher Education for visa arrangements. Ambassador Al-Ashabi also noted that while he does not have the statistics for Singaporean students, there are approximately 400 Malaysians and more than 200 Indonesians presently studying in Yemen. Ambassador Al-Ashabi added that the Iman University in Yemen is a private university which is not recognized by Yemeni government for its Salafi teachings. He added that the Yemeni government did not have any statistics of foreign students studying in the Iman University.

In conclusion, Ambassador Al-Ashabi hoped to build a stronger cooperation with Singapore. He added that the economic problems in Yemen created a spiral of more problems which require immediate attention. Ambassador Al-Ashabi hoped to encourage further investment in Sana'a and Aden which he assured were safe areas for potential foreign investment.

SESSION 7

Meeting with Judge Hamoud Abdulhameed Al-Hitar, Minister for Endowment and Guidance



ICPVTR Delegation and Judge Hamoud Abdulhameed Al-Hitar, Minister for Endowment and Guidance of Yemen

Judge Al-Hitar began the meeting by commending the rehabilitation programme in Singapore. He added that he had been avidly following the news on Singapore. Judge Al-Hitar explained that in the aftermath of the attacks on 11 September 2001, the first rehabilitation programmes established were in three countries, namely, Yemen, Saudi Arabia and Singapore.

Judge Al-Hitar explained that the dialogue process in Yemen involved 2 parts – the theoretical and the practical. At the previous meeting with the ICPVTR delegation, Judge Al-Hitar had spoken about the theoretical aspect of the dialogue. The practical side of the programme is the re-integration of the detainees into mainstream society. After completion of the dialogue sessions with the clerics, the detainees were then divided into two categories. The first category comprised individuals who were being charged. They were handed to the judiciary and the Dialogue Committee had no dealings with them. The second category comprised individuals who did not have any charges against them. For

the latter category, the Dialogue Committee would provide suggestions and support for their release but the security apparatus did not always agree with the Committee's proposal of who should be released.

The process for release, as Judge Al-Hitar noted was done via a systematic step-by-step process. Upon the release of a detainee, an individual needed to present him or herself as the detainee's guarantor. If the detainee had a job prior to his arrest and subsequent detention, assistance would be provided to enable the detainee to resume his previous employment. In the event that the detainee was unemployed formerly, the detainee would be provided with assistance to find new employment. Alternatively, the detainee would be given some money. Judge Al-Hitar noted that there were instances wherein some detainees did not need a job or money from the government.

According to Judge Al-Hitar, those who were affected by Al-Qaeda ideology were divided into three classes: 1) the rich, at the top of this group is Osama bin Laden 2) middle class, and 3) the poor.

Judge Al-Hitar added that the help offered to the detainees to enable them to be reintegrated into society were based on their respective societal status. The assistance provided covered a wide range of issues including, assistance to find a spouse in the event that the detainee was not married and wished to be; assisting to solve the problems the detainees had with their wives and families, assisting the detainees with the troubles they faced in schools and universities. The release of the detainees is based on the results of the dialogue and whether they did any kind of work in prison.

Detainees who were released would be further supervised by two divisions: 1) the Dialogue Committee 2) The security agencies who were placed in charge of the detainees.

Judge Al-Hitar expounded on the nature of the dialogue. He discussed situations that make defensive jihad permissible. Judge Al-Hitar highlighted that the first situation wherein jihad is permissible is in the event that an enemy attacks a land. The people will have the right to defend their land. Judge Al-Hitar added that the sanction to defend the land is present in all Abrahamic religions – Islam, Judaism and Christianity. He noted that there was no doubt that every person of the land has the right to defend their home against enemies.

The second situation wherein jihad is permissible is when the leader of a country mobilises his people to wage jihad, either physically or financially. Judge Al-Hitar added that this ruling is found in the passages of the Quran. He added that two caveats needed to be carefully studied simultaneously. First, victory needed to be certain. If victory is uncertain, they are prohibited to fight as this would be tantamount to committing suicide. Second, adequate lessons needed to be learnt from past wars, even if these wars did not involve Muslims.

Speaking on the process of selecting the right people for the task of rehabilitation, Judge Al-Hitar noted that the individuals who conducted the dialogue needed to be equipped with several skills. These skill sets included, the art of dialogue, the topic of the dialogue, the art of interacting with others and the ability to deliver information succinctly and accurately. Judge Al-Hitar added that the following additional qualities were also required for the individuals. The individuals must not be aggressive, they should listen more than talk, as this would enable them to discover the problems and issues bothering the detainees.

Judge Al-Hitar clarified that the dialogue sessions were conducted for not more than 500 individuals. He noted that the terrorists arrested did not major in Islamic studies in universities. They were educated in secular institutions. The subjects taught at these secular institutions included physics, medicine and others. Judge Al-Hitar emphasised that a person who has studied and understood Islam would not fall into extremism. Judge Al-Hitar added that topics discussed by the dialogists included jihad and bai'ah amongst others.

On the release of detainees, Judge Al-Hitar explained that while the dialogue sessions were meant for all, only those who were neither charged nor accused were released. In the event, that detainees were charged and sentenced, these detainees will be considered for early release if they displayed good conduct whilst in prison. Sentences for such detainees could be decreased by one quarter of their total sentence. Under the Yemeni law, this was called 'legal release'.

If a detainee responded well to the dialogue and he is sincere in correcting his ways, the judge could grant him amnesty. Judge Al-Hitar added that in order to ensure that the families of the detainees are still taken care of in the event a sentence is ascribed to both husband and wife, both will not be imprisoned at the same time. The husband will be imprisoned first for a period of time and then released so that he could take care of his children while the wife would then go to prison to serve her time.

Judge Al-Hitar noted that the Dialogue Committee had requested for the release of the detainees after the first round of dialogue was completed. The request by the Dialogue Committee was denied by the security agencies. It was after this incident that Judge Al-Hitar urged the President to support the Dialogue Committee. The support of the President would be essential to the eventual success of the efforts to conduct dialogue in Yemen.

Judge Al-Hitar noted that the dialogue programme in Yemen had seen a 98% success rate. Out of the 420 detainees, 364 were released while the rest (56) were handed over to the judiciary. Furthermore, there were no violence and terrorist attacks in Yemen from 2003 to 2005.

In conclusion, Judge Al-Hitar reiterated that Yemen had pioneered the efforts for a dialogue programme. He highlighted that there had not been any other dialogue efforts with Al-Qaeda when the programme had started in Yemen.

Yemen later shared their experience with Saudi Arabia who did not have any programme for detainees then. He added that while the Saudi programme received continued support from leaders in Saudi Arabia, the dialogue in Yemen only received support from the leadership at the initial stage. He concluded that the reasons the dialogue did not continue in Yemen were because of certain obstacles: the programme was not famous; there was no clear guidance from the government and this was exacerbated by a shortage of funds.



SESSION 8

Meeting with General Fadhil Abdul Majid Ahmed, Representative for Training and Development Sector, Ministry of Interior



General Fadhil Abdul Majid Ahmed, Representative for Training and Development Sector, Ministry of Interior

General Fadhil Abdul Majid Ahmed, Representative for Training and Development Sector of the Ministry of Interior extended a welcome to the delegation from ICPVTR and noted that he was indeed pleased to receive the delegation at the Ministry of Interior. General Fadhil highlighted that the relationship between Yemen and Singapore has been very strong historically.

General Fadhil noted that the Yemenis who are both Arabs and Muslims feel constantly targeted by the West. He added that the people of Yemen feel that they have only been doing their religious duty of spreading the message of Islam through peace and not wars. General Fadhil admitted that Yemen still continues to struggle with the scourge of terrorism. Nevertheless he firmly asserted that Yemen was against terrorism and rejected violence, just as acts of violence were rejected in Islam and in the tribal traditions. Given the current climate of distrust, both he and the people working in the training and development sector believed that developing countries have to continue to

engage in further communication and build on understanding.

General Fadhil added that there was a subject on counter-terrorism that was being taught in the training programs for police officers especially given that their primary role was to defend the frontlines of Yemen. As such he acknowledged that the police officers needed to be equipped with knowledge on issues of terrorism. General Fadhil noted that the Training and Development Sector of the Ministry of Interior conducts annual training and development courses for approximately 12,500 personnel. Of the 12,500 trained, 7,000 are police officers.

General Fadhil noted that the rehabilitation of terrorists and those who are accused of terrorism is handled by the Prison Authority which comes under the auspices of the Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Endowment and Guidance. The Training and Development Sector was responsible for the training and development of police, security and military officers. Although the Sector holds seminars or courses related to counter-terrorism, these courses come under the supervision of the general office for counter-terrorism that sends Yemeni officers to countries like France, U.K. and U.S. for counter-terrorism training. General Fadhil then cited the statistics and backgrounds of individuals undergoing the training and development programme in the Ministry of Interior. Emphasising the high calibre of the Yemeni officers undergoing training in the programmes organized, General Fadhil added that in 2010 alone, there were 3 candidates who were pursuing their doctoral degrees overseas, another 10 were pursuing the Masters degrees, 5 undergraduates and 14 officers were attending local and military universities and colleges respectively.

On the subject of terrorist financing, General Fadhil assured that Yemen had specialised courses for their officers on the subject of terrorist financing. These specialized courses were conducted under the supervision of the French authorities. Knowledge on the methods of terrorist financing would assist in extrapolating indicators of a potential terrorist attack. General Fadhil added that in June 2010, the Ministry of Finance organized a conference on anti-money laundering and terrorist financing. Participants at that conference included officials from other Yemeni ministries and even personnel from the banking sector.

General Fadhil affirmed that the U.S. invasion of Iraq had destabilized the security situation in Yemen. He admitted that the U.S. invasion had affected Yemeni youth who have had a strong and deep Arab identity which was further strengthened through their participation in the war. General Fadhil added that the youth of Yemen nevertheless understand that it is their duty to protect the interest and well-being of the country. General Fadhil listed several factors that he opined would create an environment that would mitigate terrorism:

1. the issue of Palestine needed to be solved;
2. the situation in Iraq has to be revaluated;
3. financial support needed to be given to Yemen; and
4. there was a need for security cooperation both regionally and internationally.

General Fadhil added that, for a robust domestic strategy for fighting terrorism to take flight, poverty and unemployment in Yemen needed to be eradicated first.

General Fadhil attested that cooperation between the various security and intelligence agencies did exist within Yemen. He noted that the dialogue programme for the terrorist detainees was planned not only by the Ministry of Endowment but was alongside other concerned ministries in Yemen. For instance the cooperation was extended between ministries as there was a realization that the planning of a rehabilitation programme for terrorist detainees was one that required expertise across various domains. In recognition of the requirement for specialized skills in particular knowledge of how to counter terrorist ideology, expertise and assistance from the Ministry of Endowment was thus sought.



ICPVTR Delegation at Training and Development Sector Office, Ministry of Interior

About The International Centre For Political Violence And Terrorism Research (ICPVTR)

The International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research (ICPVTR) is a specialist centre within the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS) at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. The Centre seeks to integrate academic theory with practical knowledge, which is essential for a complete and comprehensive understanding of threats from politically motivated groups. Its research staff comprises functional and regional analysts from South Asia, Southeast Asia, Northeast Asia, Oceania, Africa, Europe, North America and the Middle East. The research staff is drawn from academia and government agencies and also includes Muslim religious scholars. The centre seeks to maintain its unique cultural and linguistic diversity. More than fifty percent of ICPVTR staff is Muslim.

Mission

ICPVTR conducts research, training and outreach programmes aimed at reducing the threat of politically motivated violence and at mitigating its effects on the international system.

Core Objectives

- To conduct sustained research and analyses of terrorist, guerrilla, militia, and extremist political groups and Their support bases. To this end, the Centre collects and analyses literature seeking to politicize, radicalize and mobilize the public into supporting extremism and participating in violence.
- To identify the strengths and weaknesses of international, state and societal responses in managing the threat of political violence.

- To provide high-quality instruction and training for officials and future leaders engaged in combating terrorism and other forms of political violence.
- To advise governments and inform societies affected by political violence on how best to manage the current and evolving threat.

Core Projects

A. Database

The ICPVTR terrorism database – the Global Pathfinder – is a one-stop repository for information on current and emerging threats. The database consists of profiles of terrorists and terrorist groups, significant incidents, as well as profiles of training camps and individuals and institutions involved in terrorist financing. It also hosts primary and secondary documents including original documents collected from Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Bosnia, Kashmir, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines amongst others. Our special collection includes more than 250 videos recovered from Al-Qaeda training camps in Afghanistan, videos and training manuals from various conflict zones and over 400 jihadi websites.

B. Capacity Building

In addition to teaching courses at the Masters level, ICPVTR threat specialists conduct various levels of specialized courses for Singaporean and foreign law enforcement personnel from agencies like the military and police forces. The ICPVTR capacity building programme is geared towards providing world-class education and training for serving and future leaders in counter-terrorism.

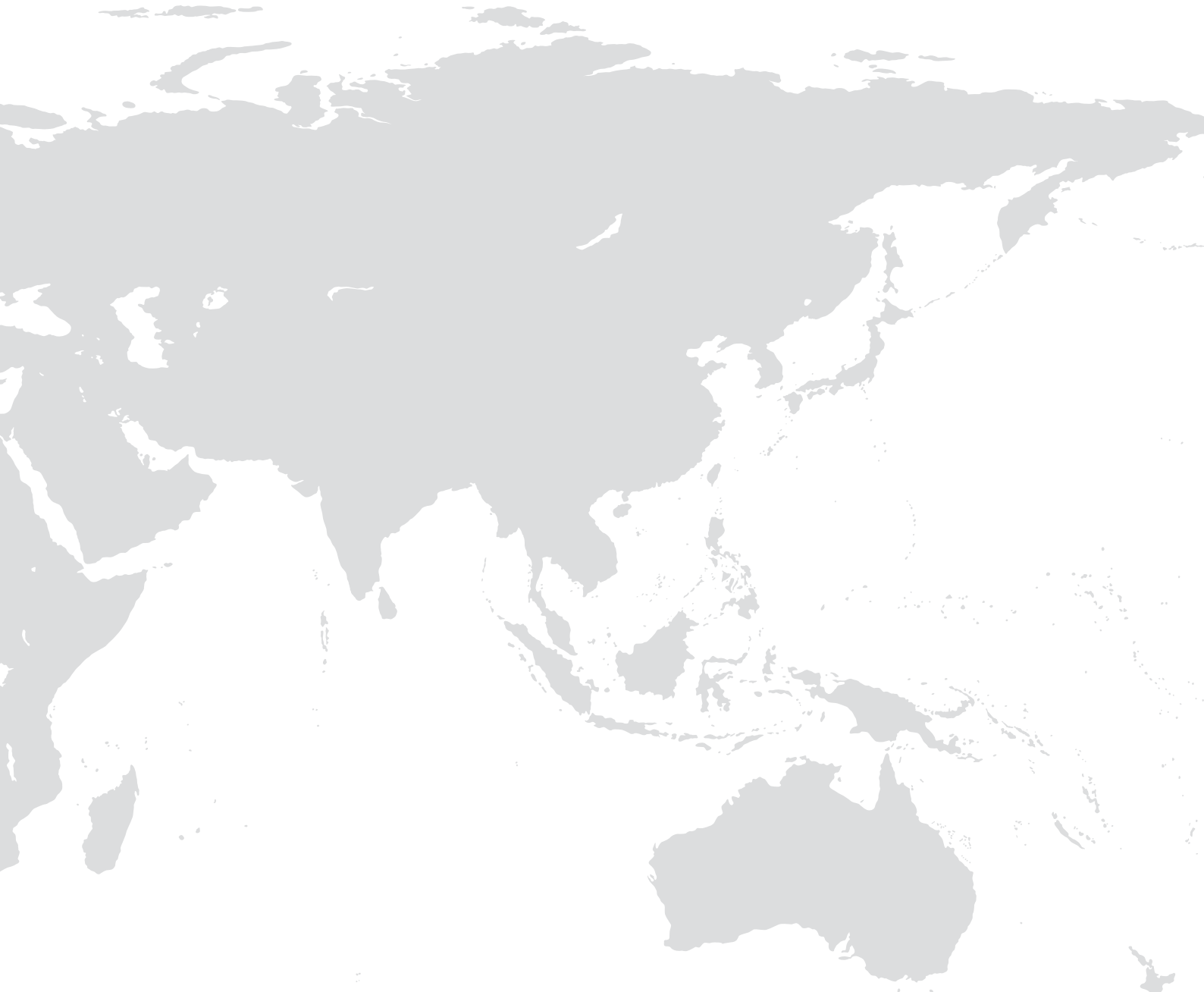
C. Strategic Counter-Terrorism Projects

ICPVTR's strategic counter-terrorism projects include ideological, legislative, educational, financial, media, informatics and developmental initiatives. These strategic projects seek to create an environment hostile to terrorist groups and unfriendly to their supporters and sympathizers.

ICPVTR seeks to build a norm and an ethic against politically motivated violence, especially terrorism. As terrorists and extremists emerge

from the community in which they live, the ICPVTR popularized the "Communities Defeat Terrorism" in Singapore. Our staff actively participates in the work of the Religious Rehabilitation Group (RRG), which is engaged in counselling and rehabilitation of Jemaah Islamiyah detainees in Singapore.

For more information on ICPVTR, visit [**www.pvtr.org**](http://www.pvtr.org)



About The S. Rajaratnam School Of International Studies (RSIS)

The **S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS)** was officially inaugurated on 1 January 2007. Before that, it was known as the Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies (IDSS), which was established ten years earlier on 30 July 1996. Like its predecessor, **RSIS** was established as an autonomous entity within Nanyang Technological University (NTU). RSIS' aim is to be a leading research institution and professional graduate school in the Asia-Pacific. To accomplish this mission, **RSIS** will:

- Provide a rigorous professional graduate education in international affairs with a strong practical and area emphasis
- Conduct policy-relevant research in national security, defence and strategic studies, international political economy, diplomacy and international relations
- Collaborate with like-minded schools of international affairs to form a global network of excellence

Graduate Education in International Affairs

RSIS offers an exacting graduate education in international affairs, taught by an international faculty of leading thinkers and practitioners. The teaching programme consists of the Master of Science (M.Sc.) degrees in Strategic Studies, International Relations, International Political Economy and Asian Studies. Through partnerships with the University of Warwick and NTU's Nanyang Business School, RSIS also offers the NTU-Warwick Double Masters Programme as well as The Nanyang MBA (International Studies). Teaching at RSIS is distinguished by its focus on the Asia-Pacific region, the professional practice of international affairs and the cultivation of academic depth. Over 180 students, the

majority from abroad, are enrolled with the School. A small and select Ph.D. programme caters to students whose interests match those of specific faculty members.

Research

Research at **RSIS** is conducted by five constituent Institutes and Centres: the Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies (IDSS), the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research (ICPVTR), the Centre of Excellence for National Security (CENS), the Centre for Non-Traditional Security (NTS) Studies, and the Temasek Foundation Centre for Trade & Negotiations (TFCTN). The focus of research is on issues relating to the security and stability of the Asia-Pacific region and their implications for Singapore and other countries in the region. The School has three endowed professorships that bring distinguished scholars and practitioners to teach and do research at the School. They are the S. Rajaratnam Professorship in Strategic Studies, the Ngee Ann Kongsi Professorship in International Relations, and the NTUC Professorship in International Economic Relations.

International Collaboration

Collaboration with other professional schools of international affairs to form a global network of excellence is an RSIS priority. RSIS maintains links with other like-minded schools so as to enrich its research and teaching activities as well as adopt the best practices of successful schools.

For more information about RSIS, visit <http://www.rsis.edu.sg>.







S. RAJARATNAM SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

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