

Tackling Muslim Radicalization: Lessons from Scotland

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REPORT

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Executive Summary

THE 9/11 ATTACK upon the United States awakened Washington to the danger of violent Muslim radicalization on its soil. In the long term, the only way to defeat radical Islamists is to reduce the motivation for Muslims to radicalize in the first place. This report explains the cutting-edge solution currently operating in Scotland.

Research into how Muslims become radicalized reveals that the crucial stage in this process occurs when young Muslims begin to believe that Islam justifies violence against innocent civilians and close their minds to other viewpoints. Such a belief must be cut off at the roots by challenging any interpretation that teaches Muslims that Islam condones violence against innocent civilians and replacing it with mainstream Islamic teachings. The SOLAS foundation in Scotland is currently engaged in this undertaking.

The clearest sign that a formal Islamic education prevents radicalization is the tiny percentage of violent Islamists – approximately 10% – who have actually been exposed to it. None of the perpetrators of the 9/11 attack, as well as those who carried out the 7/7 attack on London, had any kind of formal religious education from established and widely recognized educational establishments. The term is not intended to imply that there is one mainstream school of Islamic thought, for this is not the case. For instance, mainstream Wahhabi thought differs from mainstream Sufi thought. Within the context of this article, mainstream is used to distinguish these established, traditional schools of thought from younger, less authoritative teachings, some of which condone violence. For radical Islamists, mainstream Islamic scholarship and ethics are a very real threat, perhaps the biggest threat.

The SOLAS program discusses controversial issues in order to explain them, based upon scriptural Islamic sources, and to undermine any confusion that may have arisen about them. It also develops initiatives and programs that cater to different Muslim groups. For example, it addresses commonly held misperceptions within the community on issues that are most frequently exploited by radicals: jihad, citizenship and civic involvement, anti-Semitism, religious extremism, and others. By presenting mainstream Islamic

teachings on these issues clearly and conclusively, aberrant views can be corrected and the motivation to radicalize undermined.

SOLAS seeks to prevent the production of radical Islamists; it does not dissuade those radicals committed to vigilante justice and terrorism. In other words, its degree of success will be represented by the quiet changing of minds; the gradual dwindling of traffic to radical websites; and, ultimately, fewer homegrown attacks being attempted, which means that fewer will have to be foiled.

The experience of SOLAS provides important lessons on how its program can be replicated elsewhere. This report distills some of those lessons, such as the need to find educators who have impeccable Islamic and secular educational credentials, who are knowledgeable or qualified in secular national law, and who are credible in the eyes of the young people they teach. Since radical narratives commonly regard the government as a “contaminated brand,” its explicit involvement can discredit any educational program with which it is involved or even associated.

The Background of “Radical” Islam

INTRODUCTION

The 9/11 attack awakened the United States to the danger of violent Muslim radicalism on its own soil. In the years that followed, traditional approaches to preventing repeat attacks have focused on preventing future strikes. Such approaches are inadequate, however, because they prevent the immediate danger but do not address the problem’s long-term causes. This report is premised on the proposition that the only long-term way to defeat such radicals is to reduce, or actually extinguish, the motivation for young Muslims to radicalize in the first place.

This report, therefore, explains the cutting-edge solution being employed in Scotland. By educating young Muslims in authentic Islam, the SOLAS Foundation enables them to recognize any radical interpretations that they may come upon in the future by means of several cheap, simple, and government-free methods. The successes achieved so far can be replicated elsewhere.

RADICALIZED MUSLIMS: CAUSES

The dangers posed by radicalization are clear. Less well publicized are the results of the numerous academic studies on how it occurs. Yet some good evidence is available. For example Marc Sageman, a former CIA operations officer, has conducted the largest survey of radical Muslims to date in order to locate the causes for radicalization. In a groundbreaking study, he analyzed over 500 profiles and concluded that this phenomenon normally occurs in four distinct stages:

- 1] It is sparked when the individual reacts with moral outrage to stories of Muslims suffering around the world;
- 2] for some, that spark is inflamed by an interpretation that explains such suffering in the context of consistent policies in Western countries that are viewed as hostile to Muslims around the world;
- 3] the ensuing resentment is fuelled by negative personal experiences in Western countries (e.g., discrimination, inequality, or just an inability to get on despite good qualifications); and
- 4] the individual joins a terrorist network that becomes like a second family, albeit one closed to the outside world. This situation stokes the radical worldview and prepares the initiate for action and, in some cases, martyrdom.

The crucial stage is reached when a young Muslim begins to believe that Islam justifies vigilante justice and closes his/her mind to other viewpoints. To prevent such a situation, this radical ideology must be cut off at the roots by challenging radical interpretations of Islam, such as those that explain Muslim suffering in terms of a Manichaeian war between Islam and the West or teach that Islam condones violence against civilians. If this is to be done successfully, young Muslims must be engaged directly and be exposed to other viewpoints.

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THE LACK OF ISLAMIC EDUCATION

The clearest sign that a formal mainstream Islamic education prevents violence is the tiny percentage of violent Islamists who have actually received it. Reza Aslan, a research associate at the University of Southern California's Center on Public Diplomacy in Santa Monica, argues that almost 90% of violent Islamists have had no religious education at all. For example, none of those who carried out the 9/11 or the 7/7 attacks had received such an education. Even al-Qaeda's leadership lacks religious credibility. Osama Bin Laden never attended a religious seminary and has no formal religious training. Most of its leaders have backgrounds in medicine, engineering, or business.¹ Osama Bin Laden has no formal religious training and never attended a seminary. He dropped out of a university in Jeddah, where he was studying economics and management. Ayman Zawahiri is a qualified medical doctor. Abu Musab al-Suri, "one of Al Qaeda's leading military thinkers," studied mechanical engineering but did not complete his degree. Eventually, he established his own import-export business. Abd al-Qadir b. Abd al-Aziz, one of "the most influential Egyptian Islamist theorists," also lacks a formal religious education. Of the 9/11 hijackers, Bin Laden declared that they did not belong to any traditional school of Islamic law. The point is clear: if radical Islamists were educated as Muslim scholars, they would have known that what they advocate contravenes Islamic ethics and norms. These radical Islamists do not subscribe to traditional Islam; rather, they reject and undermine traditional authority because it is the very force that would deny them their *modus operandi*.

In Britain, radicalization has been exacerbated by a lack of mainstream Islamic education for young Muslims.

In some areas this gap has been filled by radical preachers, unqualified in Islamic law and theology and normally from outside of Europe, who have replaced traditional pietistic Islam with an ignorant, "pamphlet-based" Islam that emphasizes politics. Quintan Wiktorowicz, author of *Radical Islam Rising: Muslim Extremism in the West* (2005) notes that the most susceptible young people are those who are not in a position to objectively evaluate whether a credible understanding of Islam is being provided or not. Most of them are, in fact, religious novices exploring their faith in depth for the first time.

Thus, the best way to prevent radicalization and the terrorism it allows is simply to educate our young people in mainstream Islamic teachings so that they will be able to recognize and, after placing such radical narratives, dubious theology, or ignorant preaching in their proper contexts, reject them. For radical Islamists, mainstream Islamic scholarship and ethics are a very real – perhaps the largest – threat.

RADICAL ISLAM IN THE US

The shootings at Fort Hood, the arrests of five young men in Pakistan, and last summer's arrests of terrorism suspects in North Carolina mark a troubling increase in terrorism-related activity by Muslim Americans.

A 2010 report, "Anti-Terror Lessons of Muslim American Communities,"² conducted by scholars at Duke University and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, provides one of the most thorough analyses yet of the extent of Muslim American radicalization and terrorism. It finds that although the number of radicalized individuals remains small, keeping it that way requires a defined strategy.

1. Source: Malik, Aftab Ahmed. "Generation Jihad: Why British Muslims are drawn to Radical Islam." PhD Thesis. Department of Political Science and International Studies, University of Birmingham, 2009.

2. The "Anti-Terror Lessons of Muslim American Communities" report was co-authored by Jonathan Schanzer, associate professor at Duke University's Sanford School of Public Policy; Charles Kurzman, professor of sociology at University of North Carolina's College of Arts and Sciences; and Ebrahim Moosa, associate professor of religion at Duke University. It summarizes two years of research conducted within Muslim American communities in Seattle, Houston, Buffalo, and Raleigh-Durham. It was funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of Justice.

Among its recommendations are that policymakers reinforce the anti-radicalization activities currently underway in such communities and emphasize community building and internal self-policing. David Schanzer and fellow researchers came to these conclusions after analyzing interviews with more than 120 Muslim Americans, as well as websites and publications belonging to Muslim American organizations, data on prosecutions of Muslim Americans for terrorism-related offenses, and existing studies of Muslim American communities.

ISLAMIC RADICALISM: PREVENTION

The tactic of undermining radicalization's intellectual conditions has already succeeded in those countries that have tried it properly. Egypt and Saudi Arabia, which have used these tactics for many years, have deradicalized imprisoned radicals by drawing attention to credible Muslim (and sometimes ex-Islamist) authorities who have renounced violence.

For example, Dr. Sayyid Imam al-Sharif is a respected Islamist thinker whose works have influenced leading al-Qaeda figures. But in 2007 he published *Rationalizing Jihad in Egypt and the World*, in which he renounced terrorism in the strongest terms possible. In an interview with the Egyptian press, he argued that his book posed an acute problem for al-Qaeda because none of its members or leaders are qualified, from a Shari'ah perspective, to respond. Many Muslim governmental and religious figures, understanding al-Sharif's authority among the Islamists, understood the potential value of his personal deradicalization story; not surprisingly, it quickly became front-page news in many Islamic countries. Many Muslim scholars sided with al-Sharif, and al-Qaeda was stung into writing a two-hundred-page response. Western governments could repeat this success by drawing attention to authorities who are credible to potential radicals.

The next issue is how to apply these insights in a western context. Scotland's cutting-edge experience in this regard, as well as how its insights can be applied elsewhere, will be addressed in the following section.

CHAPTER 2:

The SOLAS Program

OBJECTIVES

The SOLAS Foundation has pioneered programs of what it calls authentic Islamic education specifically designed to enable young Muslims to identify any radical interpretations of Islam that they may encounter in the future. Welcoming the discussion of controversial issues, it grounds its own teachings in scriptural Islamic sources in order to undermine any possible confusion. It also puts the history of Islamic thought in its proper context, provides appropriate and realistic religious advice, and ensures that all its teachers can translate Arabic texts into English that is understandable to their students, regardless of the latter's level of Islamic knowledge.

SOLAS develop tailored initiatives and programs to meet the needs of different groups within the community. For example, the "i-Syllabus" is a foundational course devised for a wide range of people, the "University Initiative" targets the student community, and plans are underway to develop materials in ethical economics, social exclusion, the environment, and other areas as well. In the future, a course directed toward gang culture will also be added.

One reason why young Muslims become attracted to radicalism is the lack of high profile and positive Muslim role models in society. The SOLAS Foundation's program seeks to provide such role models and build leadership capacity within the community. Young people are particularly responsive to peer pressure, and educating a new generation of leaders who can transmit mainstream ethical Islam in both their words and deeds will be invaluable in countering radical narratives.

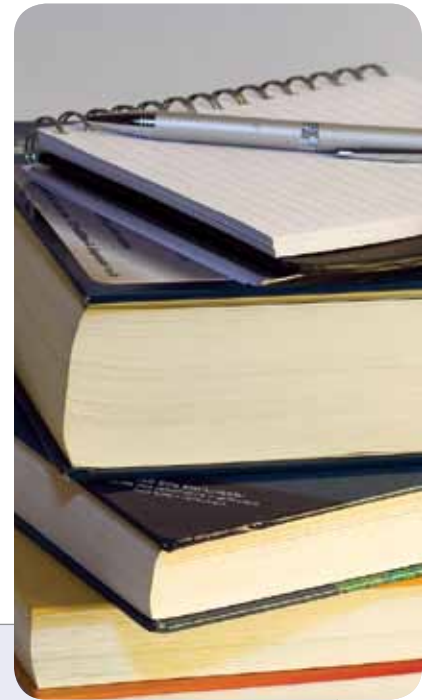
Crucially, SOLAS is run by teachers who are credible to young people. Its leading scholars, Shaykh Amer Jamil and Shaykh Ruzwan Mohammed, were born and educated in Scotland and then travelled and studied in the Muslim world with some of its leading theologians. This combination of both scholarship and personal experience makes them uniquely qualified to relate to young people, teach Islamic scholarship authoritatively, and explain how it fits into the modern Scottish (and larger Western) context.

Outcomes

THE CURRICULUM

The courses selected are designed to give students a sound grounding in “authentic Islam”. They cover the contemporary relevance of classical theology, the rules of worship, spirituality, the philosophy of law, and case studies of applying Islamic teachings to areas of contemporary issues and realities. One of the main sources misinterpreted by radicals is the Prophet’s life, and so putting it in its proper context is essential. This is in keeping with addressing the issues that are most frequently exploited by radicals, such as jihad (the martial tradition in Islamic law), citizenship and civic involvement, anti-Semitism, religious extremism, and so on.

Here are two examples of how SOLAS clears up dangerous misperceptions. The following account comes from a SOLAS teacher.



“It is one of the main contentions of the Foundation’s work that any vacuum of authoritative religious teaching will lead to extremist views being tolerated within the Muslim population. We fill the gap in educational provision so that those who are active in the community are better equipped to discuss and debate how a Muslim is required to practice his/her faith in a western context. We find that young people, particularly between their mid-teens and mid-twenties, are constantly questioning their nationality, religion, and culture and asking themselves where each figures in terms of priority.

“We have also had requests from the students to address the topic of suicide bombing. As one student put it: ‘I am confused about this topic, for I have heard prominent individuals speak in favor of it even though I know most scholars do not allow it.’ This led us to dedicate one lesson to this topic. This is an example of how SOLAS does not just teach, but serves as a forum for addressing any potentially dangerous confusion in the students’ minds.

“One individual was toying with the idea of joining the police force but felt that it was problematic from what he perceived to be an Islamic viewpoint. He said that it would involve helping a non-Muslim government to implement laws that are not those of God. The issue here was clearly one of misunderstanding Islamic law. Islamic culture and civilization have had law enforcement agencies of different descriptions without having to have a specifically ‘Islamic’ code of conduct. There is, of course, nothing in Islamic law that prohibits a Muslim from joining a law enforcement agency to ensure the security and the safety of his/her fellow citizens and to uphold the rule of law. By setting this individual right on this point, the student was able to see that there was no conflict between Islamic and secular mores.

“By systematically breaking down the issue into its component parts, the teacher was able to argue from first principles why Islamic law does not condone suicide attacks of any kind. It is important to note that this sort of presentation in such depth would not have been possible unless the necessary ground rules in Islamic law and theology had already been covered.”

As a rule, the SOLAS curriculum enables students to recognize distortions in religious teachings and gives them the training to engage with individuals holding such views. By presenting mainstream Islamic teachings clearly and conclusively, aberrant views can be seen for what they are and misconceptions can be alleviated.

An important aspect of this is addressing those Islamic texts or thinkers who are frequently misappropriated. This requires teachers who, in their capacity as true scholars, can sift through volumes of classical and contemporary scholarly works and then summarize what Muslim scholars have said on a particular issue up until the present day. Radical viewpoints can only be countered by presenting a body of scholarship, the credentials of which are beyond question.

As a result of this approach, students come to realize that they cannot understand the Islamic viewpoint just by studying or hearing the literal meanings of religious texts, as so many radicals claim. Once they realize that they must also assess the scholarly commentary in order to arrive at the correct meanings, a great deal of the radical narrative's power will be undercut.

One SOLAS teachers explains how the course undermines the terrorist organizations' definition of jihad:

"The concept of 'jihad' is not simply the right of a state or nation to self defense in the face of aggression, but rather an offensive type of military confrontation which can and was undertaken by Muslims in the past in order to expand Muslim lands." - Quote from a jihadist

People who hold this conviction seek to prove that Islam is, by its very nature, a faith that spread through the force of arms against countries that resisted its attempt to spread. This viewpoint, which is historically incorrect, can be rebutted only by presenting an overview of Islamic history and the role played by religious teachings and the theory of jihad in Islam's spread. This only underlines the need for extended and in-depth educational initiatives that adequately address such misperceptions and explain the true meaning of those concepts, like jihad, that those who would promote terrorism have hijacked.

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INTAKE

Most terrorists are between their mid-teens and mid-twenties, and those who happen to be Muslim are no exception. This is related to the fact that the period of youthful identity formation is one when some (often socially isolated) individuals are most vulnerable to the attractions of networks that offer both social solidarity and a clear narrative to explain what is going on in the world. These conditions can cause a “cognitive opening,” a questioning of previously accepted norms that might result in their rejection. Thus, this age group has the greatest need for organizations that, like SOLAS, can provide student-age Muslims with regular and sustained access to respected and qualified theological authorities.

Given this, SOLAS promotes itself on university campuses and in further education colleges (equivalent to the level of education directly after US high school). There are a limited number of locations in which institutional contact with this demographic in a sympathetic environment is actionable. University campuses are one such location. SOLAS also uses social networking to attract students. SOLAS’ intake breaks down as shown in Figure 1.

EFFECTS

It is important to be clear that in terms of national security, the outcomes of a project like SOLAS will be difficult to measure. Since SOLAS’ goal is prevention, not de-radicalization, success will be represented by the quiet changing of minds; the gradual dwindling of traffic to radical websites; and, ultimately, the decrease of homegrown attacks being attempted, which means that fewer will have to be foiled.

The effect of such programs on the student participants are, however, more perceptible and measurable. The proper understanding of Islam undercuts young peoples’ potential susceptibility to radical narratives that could lead them violence or terrorism. Many students of the Scottish program report a deeper appreciation for proper Islamic scholarship’s ability to keep them on a true ethical path.

Other initiatives that have sprung from the program’s initial success include creating a network to work with young offenders; accessing prime-time Muslim radio programming to inform listeners of the importance of mainstream Islam; talking with mosque teachers about the need to modernize their teaching materials and techniques; and working with individuals, charities, and businesses to develop a correct interpretation of Islamic laws with regard to personal matters as well as business transactions and charity work.

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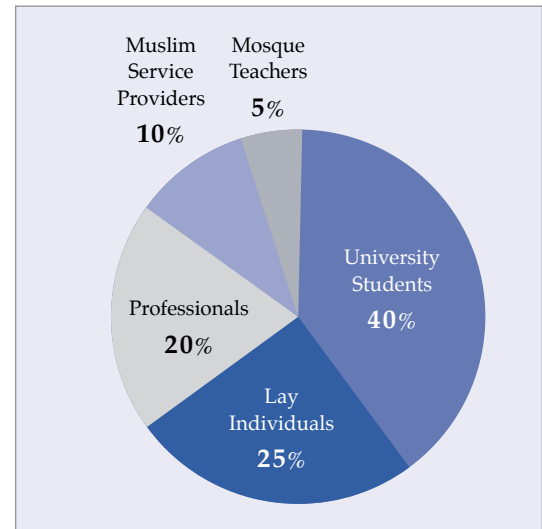


Figure 1: Breakdown of SOLAS Intake

“MANY PEOPLE WHO
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**Azeem Ibrahim,
Strategic Advisor to
the SOLAS Foundation,
explains his personal
experience of how young
Muslims in a community
can become radicalized.**

“In the early nineties, I was a teenager growing up in the Muslim community in Glasgow. My life was busy: going to the mosque after school every day and on weekends, effectively studying at two schools at the same time – regular school and Islamic school. This was around the time of Yugoslavia’s breakup and the eruption of the Bosnian civil war. That grainy war reportage would influence the shifting dynamics of personal identity for many young Muslims for many years to come.

Bosnia is home to 1.5 million Muslims. Most are white in appearance, regard themselves as essentially European, and are religious moderates in a culture that comfortably encompasses both Sunni Islam and drinking traditional plum brandy. In 1992 their nascent republic was set upon by Serb forces, and soon the UN was hearing accounts of Bosnian Muslims being rounded up, sent to camps, and beaten with metal rods and wooden clubs; of men being castrated and women being raped and mutilated. Bill Clinton tried to persuade Europe to lift the embargo that prevented the Bosnian Muslims from arming themselves to fight back, but to no avail. In his autobiography, he writes that some European leaders were motivated by a simple desire not to have a Muslim state in Europe.

I remember the feeling of helplessness in the local Glasgow Muslim community at the time and the debates in the mosque. Many people who attended the mosque, particularly the older generation, argued that this was clear evidence of the West’s racism and Islamophobia, of a European war on Muslims and Islam. They pointed to the 8,000 or so Muslims killed when Dutch UN troops helped Muslims onto buses in Srebrenica, only for them to be taken away and massacred by Serb soldiers. They asked whether the West would have maintained an embargo which hampered self-defense if those killed had been Christians or Jews? If they stand back and let this happen to European Muslims who look like them, the argument went, then if there were ever an ethnic conflict here in Britain what chance would Muslims like us have, given our different skin color?

I didn’t believe in that conclusion then, and I don’t believe in it now. But I do remember that like the rest of us who heard these arguments from the mouths of our elders in the community, I had no ready counterargument with which to prove them wrong.

When I finished my Highers (Scottish school exams for sixteen- to seventeen-year-olds) in the summer of 1993, determined to find something positive to do I volunteered with a charity, Direct Aid Edinburgh. Together, five of us spent

a week in Edinburgh learning how to use two mobile bakeries and then took them to refugee camps in Bosnia, where we baked 10,000 loaves of bread a day for the refugees.

But my lasting impression of that time was of those at the mosque who argued that that kind of charity work was a waste of time. The only effective way to stop the killing of fellow Muslims, they said, was to take up arms as so many had done in Afghanistan against the Soviets. It was clear to me that European foreign policy gave plenty of rhetorical ammunition to those who propagated a radical worldview. Political passions in anyone are formed when the evidence of your eyes and ears is explained by an overarching narrative. And in the Muslim community at the time, there was simply no alternative narrative with which a young Muslim like me could interpret the pictures appearing nightly on our television screens. All too often, I watched arguments being won by the idea of a Manichaeian struggle between Islam and the West.

FUTURE PLANS

SOLAS plans in the future to assemble a Council of Advisors that will consist of some of the world's leading Islamic scholars. Its members will be tasked with adding to the knowledge base of our in-house scholars and offer guidance when required. In addition, in the near future SOLAS will launch a peer-reviewed journal as a platform for academics to present research that bolsters mainstream Muslim education and to undertake cutting-edge research.

The following is a representative summary of anonymized quotes from the SOLAS Foundation's "i-Syllabus" assessment forms (2009-10).

"The information has changed the way I practice my religion, and I feel much more confident now. I think it is the best thing I have done. I am so glad I did it."

"It's a great way to learn all the topics involved in Islam and ask as many questions as you like. I have achieved something I am proud of."

"The greatest benefit is that I now think I am a better Muslim."

"I am recommending this course already. It clears up a lot of misconceptions and makes you appreciate the variety of the schools of thought."

"A mind-blowing, brilliant experience. You don't want to stop. You come to class tired after dealing with the whole day, children, household duties. But once you sit in class it completely uplifts you. You can feel the barakah of learning sacred knowledge."

"[The greatest benefit has been] clarity on many misunderstandings and hearsay from people who speak in the name of religion without any sound knowledge."

"Our teachers have a very good understanding with the students, for they are from the same generation ... almost!"

"IT WAS CLEAR TO ME THAT EUROPEAN FOREIGN POLICY GAVE PLENTY OF RHETORICAL AMMUNITION TO THOSE WHO PROPAGATED A RADICAL WORLDVIEW."



"The course was very good at explaining the reasoning behind the knowledge, for example, all the proofs behind fiqh rulings etc..., which allowed you to think and understand instead of just being told."

"I feel I can answer questions based on facts and evidences from the Qur'an and Sunnah and fiqh rulings, rather than blindly following what religion is according to cultural Islam."

"[The greatest benefit has been] meeting and gaining access to the amazing scholars, Shaykh Ruzwan and Shaykh Amir. It is good to know that I can refer to scholars of such high caliber. They understand the needs of the community and the times we are living in..."

"There is a vast amount of information available on Islam nowadays, but you don't know where to start. You question the authenticity. The sheer fear of going astray by embarking on such a journey holds you back. I choose to enroll in the 'i-Syllabus,' as it claimed to represent Islam in its true form, backed with authentic references throughout."

"The course has been a real eye opener! It has presented Islam in its true form, dispelling all the misconceptions surrounding us. The shaykhs not only know their stuff, they know how to deliver hard-hitting messages to the audience. You not only see, but you also feel the difference."

"I can say with full conviction and firm belief that even if we absorbed and acted upon a mere 10% of what has been given to us through the 'i-Syllabus,' Glasgow would be a different place"

"It has been a moving and life-changing experience."

"It provides not only the essentials that all Muslims need to know, but it also makes this information relevant to today's situations and discusses and clarifies many contemporary issues facing us today."

"Authentic material... concise notes that I will treasure for the rest of my life."

Successful Transfer

This section distills some of the lessons learned from the foundation's experience, and from other programs around the country, that should inform any attempt to recreate the project's success elsewhere.

LESSONS

Getting the right teachers is crucial.

The success of any program like SOLAS relies on the quality of its teachers. It is essential to find teachers with a rare set of skills and experience. They must:

- **Possess impeccable credentials.** The success of SOLAS relies on the authority with which it can explain Islamic jurisprudence and traditions. This means finding scholars who have the right experience and education to be credible.
- **Be knowledgeable or qualified in secular national law.** Often confusion arises in the community because authorities on Islamic law do not understand secular law well enough to relate the demands of one to the other in a realistic manner. To clarify misperceptions about where the two are thought to clash, educators must be able to speak authoritatively about both legal systems.
- **Be credible in the eyes of young people.** Muslims are often divided. As a result, disconnects and misunderstandings can arise due to different generations; cultural, national, and linguistic backgrounds; and cultures within Islam. This makes it hard to find teachers who can relate to their students successfully. A teacher and his/her students must come from backgrounds that are similar enough to allow mutual understanding.
- **Possess personal credibility.** This type of credibility also comes from the teachers and their students having similar social backgrounds and experiences – perhaps even to the point of the teachers having been attracted to radical narratives at some point in their youth – so that they can understand radicalism's potential attraction and credibly oppose it.

Both of SOLAS' scholars were born in Scotland and educated at Scottish universities, before studying with leading Islamic theologians in the Muslim world at the highest seats of learning. Given this shared background, they can relate to the students as both educators and role models.

- **Organizational credibility.** Obviously, this is a crucial factor. Part of the SOLAS model's appeal is that the government has no role in it. In the United Kingdom, state-sponsored anti-radicalization programs have failed precisely because of this factor. One lesson learned is that the government is a "tainted" brand in this respect and, therefore, can damage or even destroy those anti-radicalization programs that are viewed as being too connected with it. Policymakers and government officials do not always understand how radical narratives portray them; it is far past time that they learn.

A Parliamentary Committee set up in the United Kingdom to assess the success of one such government project concluded that it may be having the opposite effect because most Muslims regard its programs as a way to covertly police the community. It argued that its methods leave many feeling "alienated and stigmatized." At the same time, however, it claimed that many of the successful community cohesion projects that are seeing some success in their fight against radicalism feel "tainted" by their use of government money, which reduces their credibility and arms their critics. Thus the lesson for any pilot is clear: it must be, and be seen to be, independent of the government.

- **Mosque-based programs are inadequate.** In Scotland, Islamic education has traditionally been provided by mosques. It has become quite clear, however, that such educational programs tend to lack the specific knowledge and cultural empathy needed to counter radical narratives, as well as the street-based knowledge that would enable its organizers to make contact with potential radicals before they radicalize. For the SOLAS Foundation's success to be replicated elsewhere, organizations should be independent of both the government and existing places of worship.



Conclusion

All of the academic research on how best to counter violent radicalism among young Muslims points to the importance of education in minimizing their potential radicalization.

Independent Islamic education groups have traditionally been underutilized as one tool to improve homeland security in the United States. The SOLAS Foundation, however, shows that such groups can play an important role in clarifying those misperceptions that turn young Muslims toward terrorism. They can educate a new generation of Islamic role models, strengthen communal ties, and reduce the motivation to radicalize. In the long run, this approach is the only way to keep the world safe from the threat of radical Islamists.

Shaykh Amer Jamil

SECULAR QUALIFICATIONS

Shaykh Amer was born and brought up in Glasgow, Scotland. After graduating from Strathclyde University with an LL.B. (Bachelor of Laws), he spent ten years studying Arabic and the traditional Islamic sciences. During this time he obtained a B.A. (Hons.) in Islamic studies from the University of Wales and then furthered his knowledge by studying for six years with renowned scholars in Syria and Yemen.

RELIGIOUS QUALIFICATIONS

Shaykh Amer has studied with distinguished scholars from several schools of thought. His balanced studies in both the secular and religious arenas enable him to combine sound scholarship with a profound understanding of society.

In Syria he attended Abu Noor University, which was set up by Shaykh Ahmed Kuftharo (d. 2004), who served as the renowned Grand Mufti of Syria for forty years and was famous for his interfaith work. He also undertook private studies with credible scholars from this university and from al-Fath Islamic Law Institute, which is headed by Shaykh Abd al-Fattah al-Bizm, the current mufti of Damascus. He earned an *ijazah* (traditional teaching license) in Arabic, jurisprudence, principles of law, Qur'anic exegesis, sufism, the life of the Prophet Muhammad, the Prophet's character, beliefs and doctrine, legal maxims, family law, the science of Hadith methodology, and inheritance law.

In Yemen, he studied inner purification, the science of religious dialogue, and family law at the Dar al-Mustafa Institute (Tarim) under the internationally respected scholars Habib Umar bin Hafiz and Habib Ali al-Jifri.

RECENT SCHOLARSHIP AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Shaykh Amer's field of interest is primarily family law, a subject he has studied in depth from the viewpoints of the Hanafi and Hanbali schools (Syria) and the Shafi'i and Maliki schools (Yemen). He is currently conducting doctoral research on how to deal with the challenges, complexities, and concerns of Muslim families living in

the UK as regards Muslim family law. His research will also provide practical solutions.

In addition, he is a family law advisor and consultant to a local Scottish law firm Hamilton Burns, and a family support consultant at Unity Family Services, Scotland's first and only family guidance and support charity aimed specially at the Muslim community. Among its activities are preventing domestic abuse and forced marriages, as well as solving family problems and advising social workers on how Muslims perceive a range of family issues.

A regular contributor to local radio programs, he offers advice on various community issues and is the author of "Reminder," a series of community leaflets focused on current issues that affect Muslims and the wider British society. Previous topics have included smoking and Islam (supported by the National Health Service), terrorism in Islam (prepared at the request of Strathclyde Police in response to the attempted terrorist attack on Glasgow Airport and posted on the Home Office's internal internet as a piece of good practice), domestic abuse (supported by Strathclyde Police), Muslim youth in Scotland (supported by the Scottish Islamic Foundation), DIY Islam, identity crisis, and understanding jihad. These last four topics deliberately address the key facets of the violent radical ideology propounded by al-Qaeda and other like-minded groups. This work will continue with further related topics from similar groups. www.the-reminder.co.uk

His 2007 booklet, "What Islam Really Says about Domestic Abuse," shattered the myth that Islam allows domestic abuse. With the full support of the Scottish government and Strathclyde Police, it was translated into five languages. Eight thousand copies were distributed to the police, women's groups, social workers, and other relevant agencies. It is also available at www.unityfamily.co.uk. Two years later he served as a cofounder of SOLAS www.solasfoundation.org.uk.

Shaykh Ruzwan Mohammed

SECULAR QUALIFICATIONS

Shaykh Ruzwan Mohammed, a Sunni theologian and scholar, graduated with degrees in geopolitics and Arabic from the University of Glasgow. He has since spent over a decade studying with many leading scholars and theologians in the Muslim world.

RELIGIOUS QUALIFICATIONS

Shaykh Ruzwan spent over three years studying with scholars in Turkey, where he completed a diploma in Turkish from the University of Ankara. He also attended lessons and kept the company of Shaykh Esad Cosan, the late hadith professor. In Yemen he studied Arabic language and literature in Sana'a. He then travelled to Hadramaut to study Maliki law under Shaykh Muhammed Amin al-Shinkiti at the Ribat (Tarim) and attended the classes of Habib Umar bin Hafidh at Dar al-Mustafa.

Enrolling in the six-year intensive course in traditional Islamic sciences and Arabic at the al-Fath Islamic Law Institute (Damascus), he graduated with a distinction of merit, attaining overall first position within the institute in his final year of study. His thesis, presented upon graduation, was a critical translation and study of Jalal al-Din al-Mahalli's commentary upon al-Juwayni's *Waraqat*. He also studied law, jurisprudence, Qur'anic studies, the science of prophetic narratives, logic, Arabic, poetry, literature, and other ancillary sciences. During these years, he also undertook private studies under the guidance of *Allamah* 'Ala al-Din Pehlavi al-Kurdi, the main student of the late *Allamah* Shems ud-Din Yuksel of Istanbul, and other leading scholars.

He holds several teaching *ijazahs* from Muhammed Abd al-Baith al-Kattanni, Shaykh Abu Humayd Ahmed Ramadan, His Eminence (the late) *Allamah* Muhammed Dib ibn Ahmed al-Kalas, His Eminence Shaykh Abd al-Fattah al-Bizm (current Mufti of Damascus), and many other shaykhs. In addition, upon the recommendation of al-Fath's teaching staff, he was granted a general and specific teaching *ijazah* in the Islamic sciences by the resident shaykh of the Umayyad Mosque, His Eminence *al-Muqri'* al-Shaykh 'Abd al-Razzaq ibn Hassan al-Halabi al-Hanafi. He also has the authority

to relate the major hadith collections as well as the works listed in the shaykh's codex of authorized works.

RECENT SCHOLARSHIP AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Shaykh Ruzwan is currently engaged in postgraduate research on the effect of both textual hermeneutics and the environment on Islamic legal ethics, as well as a study and translation of a jurisprudential text by the Spanish Muslim philosopher Ibn Rushd (Averroes).

In addition, he advises independent Muslim educational organizations in the United Kingdom and is actively involved in interfaith work. Most notably, he accompanied David Lunan, the then Head and Moderator of the Church of Scotland, on a trip to Israel and Palestine, where they met Israeli cabinet ministers, members of the Palestinian legislature, and religious leaders of both sides to explore avenues toward peace. He is a regular contributor to local and national radio programs and national Scottish newspapers and magazines.

In the summer of 2009, he cofounded SOLAS and serves as the author and content developer of its "i-Syllabus" project, which seeks to meet the learning needs of Muslims and service providers by offering a complete contextual Islamic learning experience and providing an appropriate background and context for Islamic teachings as they relate to the contemporary world.



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