Counter- and Alternative-Narratives for a Comprehensive Strategy to Effectively Combat ISIS Propaganda
(Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre (KLCC), 27 October 2015)

Alexander Wain

Professor Alex P. Schmid began with a concise definition of extremism: an “intolerant, authoritarian ideological position whose adherents view politics not as a peaceful competition between parties... but as a zero-sum struggle, utilising... criminal and violent tactics.” Extremism, he said, was ultimately the product of radicalisation, itself a political polarisation accompanied by the rejection of any and all dialogue with those who hold opposing views. Using these generalities as a framework, Schmid proceeded with his analysis of ISIS and its propaganda machine.

While labelling ISIS an extremist organisation rooted in Salafist Jihadism, Schmid described its ability to use a narrative of restored honour and heroic deeds to recruit large numbers of idealistic young Muslims in search of a brighter future. Importantly, Schmid argued that ISIS has been unwittingly helped in this task by the Western media. In particular, Schmid described a vicious cycle inherent to the ISIS-journalist relationship: ISIS perpetrates terrorist acts designed to meet the journalist’s (financial) need for blood on the front page and, in return, gains widespread exposure and legitimacy. This symbiotic relationship, Schmid said, constituting a marriage of convenience, presents profound difficulties for anybody wishing to counter ISIS and its ideology by means of keeping it out of the public eye. Nevertheless, and within this specific context, Schmid proposed several strategies for combating ISIS. Centring himself on the need to limit ISIS’s ability to disseminate their ideology, Schmid first suggested (and perhaps rather contentiously) government censorship of the public media in order to end this destructive ISIS-journalist relationship. Secondly, and closely tied to this, he suggested responsible media self-censorship (inclusive of social media).
Ultimately, he reasoned that in the long term ISIS can only be defeated by a Muslim-led counter-narrative that both invalidates and degrades ISIS ideology. Although several attempts have been made to construct such a narrative, Schmid felt they have all failed. In particular, he highlighted a failure to make counter-narratives dynamic and exciting. ISIS frequently produce inspirational, Hollywood-style recruitment videos; counter-narratives tend towards dry theological discourse that neither excite nor motivate. In future, therefore, counter-narratives need to empower. Whatever form they take, however, Schmid emphasised that, unless the counter/alternative-narratives are seen to be credible, legitimate, clear, and infused with the prospect of success, they cannot be expected to succeed.

Training on Regulatory and Compliance Framework in Islamic Finance Under IFSA 2013
(IAIS Malaysia, 12-13 October 2015)

Apnizan Abdullah

The introduction of the Islamic Financial Services Act (IFSA) in June 2013 undoubtedly altered the Islamic banking and finance landscape of Malaysia. The enactment of IFSA 2013 has nevertheless proven a timely response to current market needs, which have achieved a remarkable level of maturity. As an important new addition to Malaysia's regulatory infrastructure, therefore, an understanding of the act's salient features and the changes it introduces are crucial. Hence, a training session entitled, “Regulatory and Compliance Framework in Islamic Finance under IFSA 2013,” was conducted on 12-13 October 2015 by IAIS. It aimed at exposing participants to the current regulatory regime for Islamic finance in Malaysia, with special reference to IFSA 2013. In addition, the programme also sought to equip participants with a proper understanding of both local and international compliance structures for the Islamic financial market, as well as the issues and challenges which have arisen from the current Islamic financial system.

Participants were from a range of sectors, including Islamic banking and financial institutions, Takaful operators, higher education institutions, research institutes and regulators. The topics covered were extensive, inter alia:

- The historical development of Islamic banking and finance
- An overview of international Islamic finance regulatory frameworks
- An overview of the historical and regulatory aspects of Islamic banking and finance in Malaysia
- The relevant acts governing Islamic financial institutions in Malaysia